



An tÚdarás Rialála Limistéir Mhuiri
Maritime Area Regulatory Authority

Minutes of the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) Board Meeting

Date	13 July 2026
Venue	MS Teams
Time	09.30 – 11.30
Chair	Mark Mellett Vice Admiral DSM (Rtd), Phd (MM)
Board Members Present	Mr. Patrick Gibbons (PG) Ms. Niamh Kenny (NK) Dr. James Massey (JM) Mr. Brendan McGrath (BMCG) Ms. Karen Banks (KB) Mr. Philip Daly (PD) Mr. Paul O'Neill (PON)
In attendance	MARA Executive – Ms. Laura Brien (CEO), Dr. Áine Louw (AL) (Secretariat), Ms. Aisling Murray (AM), Mr Frank Ronan (FR), Ms. Dera McLoughlin (DMcL) Mazars.

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed board members.
Quorum in place.

2. Declarations of Interest

None declared.

3. Presentation of ICT Business Case

Laura Brien CEO of MARA informed the Board that a decision is being sought on the approval of the MARA Digital Systems Development preliminary business case to be sent to DCEE for approval. The business case sets out the high-level actions MARA proposes to implement over a 3–5-year period to digitalise MARA's workflows and processes.

Frank Ronan, Director of Corporate Affairs, provided the Board with an overview of the business case and the steps in the process for approval. It was confirmed to the Board that actual commitments to enter into contracts and commit funds will come to the Board and DCEE for Gate 3 approval, for each individual component of the procurement.

Dera McLoughlin from Forvis Mazars provided the Board with an overview of the Business Case, the options available for systems, costs, risks and lessons learned from similar work that has been done in the public sector. The context of digital systems in MARA at present was outlined.

The Board asked questions and sought clarity on points related to the business case.

It was confirmed that costs associated with GIS are excluded from the business case as they are already accounted for in MARA's recurring budget request via the estimates process. Due to the constraints of the market at present the opportunity for 'off the shelf' products are limited but will be explored and this will largely dictate the price. MARA executive confirmed that the public procurement process will be followed for each software/licence, including assessment of what

packages are available via the OGCIO, and that the award of contracts will be brought to the Board for approval.

The Board requested that the executive engages with other regulators and/or public bodies who have digitised their systems to avail of any lessons learned in the process.

Board also discussed the efficiency benefits from the digitalisation work. The Executive explained that the human resource efficiencies arising because of the digitisation is challenging to predict currently. While efficiencies are expected, a significant resource requirement will be needed to implement the systems. Clarification was provided on how digitalisation will bring efficiencies to the decision-making process and that staff levels may not change but the staff structure will. The executive has discussed the potential disruption to staff from needing staff to help spec and test the systems and have reassured the Board that measures will be in place to minimise this. The Board and executive were aligned in the need to ensure good governance, budget oversight and overall project management.

The Board enquired as to the future proofing of the licence/software sought and if they will include AI. The executive advised the Board that this would be part of the spec drawn up in the procurement stage and that the majority of the software/license on the market would be managed by the provider, including updates, AI etc ensuring that the systems are futureproofed. Any inclusion of AI components will have to be cognisant of principles of the EU AI Act and will be assessed at the specification stage for each component.

The Board raised concerns in relation to the approval being sought from DCEE. The executive reassured the Board that MARA is seeking approval from DCEE for the overall project (Gate 1 approval) and that further approval will need to be sought for each component of the project. Submitting a business case as best/worst case scenario is standard practice and going to the market to tender for suppliers will inform the final cost of project. The Gate 3 option of approval allows for such circumstances. The executive confirmed that a comprehensive assessment was completed to determine the ICT architecture and that is outlined in the presentations to the Board.

The Board highlighted the need to ensure that any system would allow for the growing responsibilities of MARA such as MPA considerations and the Planning Register. The executive reassured the Board that the architecture is designed to embrace new responsibilities and capable of interfacing with other systems, and that as new functions/systems are required, these will be designed in phases.

The Chair highlighted that both the Board and the Executive need to be cognisant of the lessons learned from other Public Bodies who have procured and implemented an ICT plan such as this.

Action: The executive is to provide the Board with regular updates on the status on the project.

At its meeting 13 July 2026 the Board approved for MARA Digital Systems Development business case to be sent to DCEE for approval.

The Chair and members of the Board also expressed their thanks to outgoing members of the Board and thanked them for their active and constructive contributions to the Board during their term.