

Meeting Minutes

EU Just Transition Fund 2021-2027

5th Programme Monitoring Committee Meeting

Date: Friday 22nd November 2024

Location: Radisson Blu Hotel, Athlone, Co. Westmeath

Present

Anna Shakespeare, Aoife O'Grady, Bernie Roe, Cara Farrell, Cassandra Hinchy, Celene Sheehy, Chris Hoban, Ciara Carberry, Clare Bannon, Janet McKiernan, Kai Stryczynski, Karen Somers, Laura Woods, Laure Antoniotti, Pat O' Neill, Patrick Barrett, Peter Clifford, Rory Michael O'Sullivan, Ruairí Smyth, Ruth Buggie, Shane Tiernan, Terry Connolly, Peter Stevenson, Ben Graham, Barry Guckian, Noel Sheehan, and John Byrne.

Apologies

Sarah Morgan, Midlands Regional Transition Team, Anne Cusack, Midlands REP, Paul Madden, Midlands REP, Kattalin Deppner-Quittner, European Investment Bank, Jerry Mac Evilly-Friends of the Earth, Orla Carroll, Fáilte Ireland, Edel Meenan, Common Agricultural Policy Strategic plan, DAFM, Stephanie Gantzer-Houzel, European Commission

Agenda

Time	Item	For
09:30	1. Arrivals and Registration (Tea/Coffee and Refreshments)	
10:00	2. Welcome and Opening Remarks <i>Clare Bannon – A/Director EMRA, PMC Chair</i>	
	3. Welcome from the European Commission <i>DG REGIO, EU Commission</i>	
	4. Tour de table	
10:10	5. Adoption of the Agenda	Adoption
	6. Adoption of the Minutes of PMC 4, June 2024	Adoption
10:15	7. Programme Update	Presentation/Discussion
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Progress in Implementation• Issues and Challenges• Progress towards Country Specific Recommendations• Communications and Visibility• Status of Enabling Conditions	



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Co-funded by
the European Union



Tionól Réigiúnach an
Oirthir agus Lár Tíre
Eastern and Midland
Regional Assembly

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative Capacity Building • Budget <i>Bernie Roe & Terry Connolly, EMRA</i>	
11:00	8. Update on Action 3.3 Community EV Chargers <i>Aoife O'Grady, ZEVI</i>	Presentation/Discussion
11:30	9. Update on Action 1.3 Bioeconomy Demonstration Initiative <i>Patrick Barrett, DAFM</i>	Presentation/Discussion
12:00	Coffee Break	
12:10	10. Update on Operations of Strategic Importance <i>Bernie Roe, EMRA</i>	Information
12:25	11. Update on Evaluation Plan <i>Laure Antoniotti, EMRA</i>	Presentation/Discussion
12:40	12. Mid-Term Review Process <i>Terry Connolly, EMRA</i>	Information
12:55	13. Any Other Business	Discussion
13:00	14. Date of Next Meeting	Information
13:00	15. Meeting Ends	
	Lunch	

Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Programme Monitoring Committee meeting was chaired by Clare Bannon, Acting Director, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. The Chair extended thanks to all who attended the fifth PMC meeting and welcomed all attendees to the meeting, in particular the European Commission representative Kai Stryczynski.

The Chair mentioned the Early Preventative Systems Audit which the fund had recently undergone, noting it was a very useful exercise. The Chair extended thanks to Fáilte Ireland, Pobal and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Marine for their assistance in the Audit. The Chair also noted the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly's work feeding into discussions on cohesion policy and the Future of EU Cohesion event in Dublin Castle, extending a particular thanks to EU Just Transition Fund Beneficiary Peatlands for Prosperity for their stand at the event.

The Chair reminded those present of the conflict-of-interest section in the code of conduct for committee members and that a list of the committee members is published online.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Co-funded by
the European Union



Tionól Réigiúnach an
Oirthir agus Lár Tíre
Eastern and Midland
Regional Assembly

Members who have left the PMC and their new replacements

Organisation	Outgoing PMC Rep	Incoming PMC Rep
MRTT	Cllr Turlough McGovern	Cllr Tony McCormack
MRTT	Cllr Robert McDermott	Cllr Mark Casey
ZEVI	Patricia Waller	Robert Swan
NYC	-	Clive Davis
West REP	Helena Deane	Ian Brannigan
CCMA	John Mulholland	Shane Tiernan
EMRA Cathaoirleach	Kate Feeney	Catherine Fitzgerlad
DOJE	Dae Hanley	TBC
NPWS	Suzanne Nally	Ciara Carberry

Welcome from the EU Commission

Kai Stryczynski from the EU Commission expressed his pleasure at being present, noting it was his first visit to the Midlands. He acknowledged that Stephanie Gantzer-Houzel was unable to attend but sent her regards. Emphasising the commencement of the projects, he indicated that payment claims could begin, enabling the Commission to start disbursing funds to Ireland. Additionally, he mentioned that the Commission would begin designing the next program before the following summer, with the goal of optimising the use of cohesion funds.

Tour de table

There then followed a round of introductions during which Peter Clifford, Research Ireland, noted the establishment of Research Ireland, formerly Science Foundation Ireland and the Research Council of Ireland following a merger.

Adoption of the Agenda

- Proposed by Peter Clifford, Research Ireland.
- Seconded by Ruth Buggie, Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland.

The agenda was **ADOPTED**

Adoption of PMC 4 Minutes

- Proposed by Karen Somers, Department of the Environment, Climate, & Communications (DECC).
- Seconded by Cassandra Hinchy, Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform.

The minutes were **ADOPTED**.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Co-funded by
the European Union



Tionól Réigiúnach an
Oirthir agus Lár Tíre
Eastern and Midland
Regional Assembly

Programme Update

Bernie Roe, Secretary for EU JTF PMC & Terry Connolly, Administrative Officer (EUJTF)

Bernie Roe & Terry Connolly presented a programme update. Bernie acknowledged the significant work by Intermediate Bodies and PMC members and alternated presenting with Terry, covering the topics of Annual Performance Report, Progress in Implementation, Progress on Milestones and Targets, Issues and Challenges, Country Specific Recommendations, Communications and Visibility, Status of Enabling Conditions, Budget and Administrative Capacity Building, (see attached slides).

Clare Bannon, Acting Director, EMRA and chair then opened to the floor for discussion.

Kai Stryczynski, DG Regio, EU Commission

Kai mentioned that due to the specific structure of the Irish system, there can be many months between the stages of a claim which sometimes presents challenges for the Commission, particularly when negotiating on future plans for cohesion policy. He noted that if the Managing Authority requests information quickly from delivery partners it is because queries from the Commission require a response.

Ciara Carberry, NPWS

The EUJTF started late into the programming period, causing delays in spending. Ciara asked about steps to address these issues.

- *The Chair* – Regular meetings with each IB to discuss challenges. That is why we need to know issues and ask for spend profiles etc. If there is a problem we try to put a plan of action in place. Timelines, although challenging, remain the same.
- *Ciara Carberry* expressed concern about the time taken between programme adoption and Implementation Plan approval. This was due to issues external to NPWS and project was due to be 42-month project that is now being compressed.
- *The Chair* – Programme was only approved 2 years ago. Ireland and all other member states are regularly advising the Commission of these challenges however the spend profile remains the same. Acknowledged challenge of it but invited NPWS to continue to meet with EMRA to ensure the timely progress of the action.
- *Bernie Roe* –Last year, nine detailed implementation plans were developed and approved. In 2024, significant progress was made, and the managing authority acknowledges the NPWS's commitment to delivering action 2.1.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Co-funded by
the European Union



Tionól Réigiúnach an
Oirthir agus Lár Tíre
Eastern and Midland
Regional Assembly

Update on Action 3.3 Community EV Chargers

The Chair noted that at the previous PMC meeting, it was agreed that ZEVI would update the implementation plan, moving from beneficiary to Intermediate Body, and that it is nearly ready.

Aoife O'Grady, ZEVI presentation, slides attached.

- Aoife noted John O'Grady as the project manager and reminded the Monitoring Committee of challenge not being able to procure chargers for non-public land. ZEVI engaged with local authorities in EUJTF area and there is progress now.

The chair then opened to the floor for discussion.

Shane Tiernan, CCMA

With the best of intentions, it can be very difficult to determine ownership because of incorrectly disposed of land. Need to be cautious of the 40 sites on non-local authority land. Financial viability is an important test because it would be terrible to have progressed to a point only to discover that an entity wouldn't want to proceed. The one local authority that is cautious is likely concerned with the complexity involved. Getting way leaves can be slow and challenging, but it is a good programme and a great project.

Peter Clifford, Research Ireland

It is comprehensive given complexity of the scheme. Can you tell us more about how the contract terms with non-local authority will ensure longevity?

- *Aoife O'Grady*— running a similar system to sports club scheme which eventually leads to a contract between club and Charge Point Operator for duration. Installation cannot begin until we see sight of a lease agreement. You almost start at the end point getting agreement between landowner and Charge Point Operator for terms over 15 years. The agreement would include maintenance and operation. Regulations coming through on standards from national and EU law will regulate any Charge Point Operator in how they maintain their sites.
- ZEVI have set out universal design guidelines. Any charging infrastructure investment using exchequer funds must follow these guidelines, so they are a condition of funding.

Pat O'Neill, Irish Business & Employers Conference (IBEC)

How will you be confident that they will be functional when people arrive to them? Pat noted the experience of driving up to a charger only to find it not in operation.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Co-funded by
the European Union



Tionól Réigiúnach an
Oirthir agus Lár Tíre
Eastern and Midland
Regional Assembly

- *Aoife O'Grady* – on other schemes some charge points have been installed and are awaiting connection. The charge points are medium threshold charge points up to 200-300kw, there is a 5–6-month installation timeline for these. If we have a list of the sites with connection applications in already, we should be able to sign the applications in March – April to have most sites connected by early 2026.

The Chair – Next steps, the Managing Authority will seek to finalise the revised Implementation plan which will be circulated to PMC members for adoption by written procedure. Thanks to Aoife and John.

Update on Action 1.3 Bioeconomy Demonstration Initiative

The Chair introduced *Patrick Barrett, DAFM* and congratulated him and the DAFM team on the recent launches and the information day on Wednesday at Mount Lucas.

Patrick Barrett, DAFM presented to the PMC, slides attached.

- Thanked EMRA and DECC Teams for supports given and the invite to present at the PMC.
- Noted that significant investment for research at government level – this plan will harness that for economic activity. Given the perception of agriculture's contributions to Green House Gas emissions, the territory can become a leader for adapting and changing this.
- The European Union has this week launched a new fund for this sector that these projects are ideally suited to tie into.
- The climate action office brought stakeholders to the facilities to show the potential of these facilities.

The Chair then opened to the floor for discussion.

The Chair

It is great to see the Priority 1 benefits but also links for education and to sow the seeds for future generations.

Ciara Carberry

What is the connection between the peatlands and algae at Mount Lucas and the bioeconomy?

- *Patrick Barrett* – like paludiculture and sphagnum farm, there is sustainable development potential within peatlands for aquaculture. The water sites that sustainably circulate and clean water can produce food such as fish. It harnesses the ability of peatlands to recirculate water and harvest local microalgae, 81 local species, that can be grown and harvested with no inputs, zero waste outputs. A basis for sustainable economic



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Co-funded by
the European Union



Tionól Réigiúnach an
Oirthir agus Lár Tíre
Eastern and Midland
Regional Assembly

opportunities. Ireland has invested in the science; the biology is well understood globally and there is space for food and feed to move into this.

- *Bernie Roe* – Acknowledged Patrick's experience and expertise. Thanked him for his passion, commitment, and she acknowledged the extent of background and supporting administration work he has done.
- *Patrick Barrett* – We all face challenges in the programme in moving wheels and engaging with the challenges tying this into government estimates, vote processes, State aid, and the Early Preventative Systems Audit. There are massive undertakings. This is a message we would like to bring to EU system. We need to get a second call launched. Just Transition is not a 6-year process it is decades. Scope to work on these processes we have just started but we need help to get this done.

Coffee Break

Update on Operations of Strategic Importance

Bernie Roe, EMRA, Information

- Discussed criteria, operations and the next steps, as well as the emblematic operations of the EU JTF.
- Two actions from 1.2 and one from priority 2 designated in accordance with designation procedure.
- High profile projects that the PMC will be kept informed on.

Update on Evaluation Plan

Laure Antoniotti, Administrative Officer (EU and Corporate) EMRA presented, slides attached.

The Chair thanked Helena Stromberg, Senior Staff Officer (EUJTF) for work developing the plan and introduced Laure who presented on it.

- Evaluation plan which is up for adoption today
- A minor amendment will be made at the beginning of the document to specify that the Plan was first presented to the PMC in November 2023 as per regulation.
- Peter Clifford, Research Ireland has agreed to sit on the working group, and that it will include representatives from all Intermediate bodies. The first meeting is to be arranged shortly.

The Chair then opened to the floor for discussion.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Co-funded by
the European Union



Tionól Réigiúnach an
Oirthir agus Lár Tíre
Eastern and Midland
Regional Assembly

Peter Clifford, Research Ireland

Peter commended the work on the evaluation and noted that the quality of an evaluation is dependent on the quality of its terms of reference. He noted that there was no update on budget for the evaluation.

- *Laure Antoniotti* – We don't have a figure yet. This will be brought to the group to get a steer, as our initial estimate was significantly under.

Adoption of the Evaluation Plan

- Proposed by Peter Clifford, Research Ireland.
- Seconded by Karen Somers, Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

The Evaluation Plan was **ADOPTED**

Mid-Term Review Process

Terry Connolly, Administrative Officer (EUJTF), EMRA.

- Article 18 states that the Mid Term review must be completed by March 2025. This will impact the date of the next PMC Meeting
- Introduction of article (slides). Terms of reference from evaluation group may be a factor in 18.1 (e)
- Progress towards national climate targets could lead to an increased allocation, so that will be closely monitored by EMRA
- Flexibility amount and deadline. There will be a PMC early next year. It is not new money but fixing allocation of the amount within the fund.

The Chair then opened to the floor for discussion.

Kai Stryczynski, DG Regio, EU Commission

Firstly, Kai Mentioned that DG Regio would not be pushing for any major change. The Member State approaches the Commission with any changes necessary. He did note that this may change with a new commissioner starting hopefully, on the 1st of December.

He mentioned that a concise document would be preferred and requested information on how the Mid Term Review will be planned and if the review will be done internally or will it be outsourced.

- *Terry Connolly* – We intend on drafting it ourselves but getting and refining input we will have policy and planning at different levels so advantage will be taken of expertise where it lies. Others will help us refine what we are writing in the document, and we will make use of our collaborative partnerships



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Co-funded by
the European Union



Tionól Réigiúnach an
Oirthir agus Lár Tíre
Eastern and Midland
Regional Assembly

- *Bernie Roe* – Terry has done a body of work on this for the Annual Review Meeting. We may engage with experts such as: DECC and DPENDPR, IHREC, RAs, Planning Team within EMRA, other MAs, IBs and beneficiaries. The areas of input for these bodies in relation to the letters within Article 18 (1) are as follows:
 - ABG – DECC/ DPENDPR
 - C – IHREC
 - D – Socioeconomic state – Been involved in regional development monitor that is a piece of work of the Regional Assembly and hopefully an economist within EMRA by then
 - E – Work with other Managing authorities and hoping to pick up tips from them as they have experience
 - G – Engage directly with Intermediate bodies and beneficiaries

Any Other Business

Terry Connolly, Administrative Officer (EUJTF), EMRA.

Orla Carroll, Fáilte Ireland requested we raise that Fáilte Ireland will not now require grantees to pursue sustainability accreditation (stated in implementation plan) as clarity required under Green Claims Directive means that Fáilte have corporately paused the development of their accreditation programme, however measurement of carbon footprint will remain a condition of funding and all successfully awarded projects will have met the sustainability and biodiversity criteria in their application form.

Terry Connolly, Administrative Officer (EUJTF), EMRA.

Terry noted that the Just Transition Peers exchange call opens in the new year and members may wish to keep an eye on it in case it is of interest to them or their stakeholders.

Clare Bannon, Chair

EMRA as Managing Authority are preparing their corporate plan. As key stakeholders in one of the functions of the assembly, EMRA kindly requests PMC Members complete a survey to inform the plan. Laure will circulate the link to the questionnaire after the PMC meeting.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Co-funded by
the European Union



Tionól Réigiúnach an
Oirthir agus Lár Tíre
Eastern and Midland
Regional Assembly

Patrick Barrett, DAFM

Has there been any consideration to highlight the other strands of the Just Transition Mechanism? stating this could be relevant to both the private and public sector.

- Bernie Roe – Helena Stromberg regularly references synergies and collaboration; we will take that onboard and organise a session.
- Patrick Barrett – Noting from the different projects that have been funded, there is a potential to link in as a story of examples on the ground and the projects could work with other ones. Potential for cross fertilisation. Matchmaking activities.
- Terry Connolly – Biomethane project from Tipperary is a good piece for collaboration. It demonstrates desire to link up.

Date of Next Meeting

The chair announced the next meeting will potentially take place in 1st week of March with the date to be finalised closer to the time.

Meeting Ends



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Co-funded by
the European Union



Tionól Réigiúnach an
Oirthir agus Lár Tíre
Eastern and Midland
Regional Assembly