

Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly
Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre

MINUTES for MEETING

**OF THE EASTERN AND MIDLAND
REGIONAL ASSEMBLY**

HELD ON

Friday, 11th July 2025

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF EASTERN AND MIDLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY HELD ON THE 11TH OF JULY 2025.

Cllr Mike Bray	Cllr Feljin Jose
Cllr Danny Byrne	Cllr Rachel Kerley
Cllr Mick Cahill	Cllr Dermot Lacey
Cllr Fiona Connelly	Cllr Micheal MacDonncha
Cllr Avril Cronin	Cllr Aoibheann Mahon
Cllr Kevin Duffy	Cllr Pádraig Mc Evoy
Cllr JP Durkan	Cllr Justin Moylan
Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley	Cllr Garry Murtagh
Cllr Neil Feighery	Cllr Sean O'Brien
Cllr Catherine Fitzgerald	Cllr Oisín O'Connor
Cllr Eddie Fitzpatrick	Cllr Tom O'Leary
Cllr Declan Flanagan	Cllr Gerry O'Neill
Cllr Joe Fox	Cllr Robert Power
Cllr Niall Gaffney	Cllr Paul Ross
Cllr Patsy Glennon	Cllr Joanna Tuffy
Cllr David Healy	Cllr Barry Saul
Cllr Deirdre Heney	Cllr Jacqueline Sheehy

Apologies received from: Cllr Emma Blain, Cllr Tony Murphy, Cllr D Gilroy and Cllr Aengus O Rourke

In Attendance:

Ms Clare Bannon, EMRA
Ms Bernie Roe, EMRA
Ms Anne-Marie Wood Wolfe, EMRA
Ms Laure Antoniotti, EMRA
Dr Owen Douglas, EMRA
Ms Teresa O Reilly, EMRA
Ms Geraldine Kenny, EMRA
Mr Ross Higgins, EMRA
Ms Cara Farrell, EMRA
Ms Sarah Campbell, EMRA

Kieran Kehoe CE Meath CoCo

Visitors: Mr Barry Kenny and Mr Steven Matthews, Iarnród Éireann

ITEM 1

Election of An Cathaoirleach

The outgoing Cathaoirleach, Cllr C Fitzgerald thanked the Members and the staff of the Assembly on her year as Cathaoirleach and invited nominations for the Cathaoirleach of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly for the forthcoming year to July 2026.

Cllr F Jose proposed Cllr D Healy, this was seconded by Cllr D Heney.

Cllr D Healy was elected An Cathaoirleach for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly with no other nominations received.

This was AGREED.

ITEM 2

Election of Leás Chathaoirleach

An Cathaoirleach, Cllr D Healy opened the floor for nominations for Leás Chathaoirleach.

Cllr R Power proposed Cllr P Glennon, this was seconded by Cllr P Mc Evoy. Cllr P Glennon was elected as Leás-Chathaoirleach for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly with no other nominations received.

This was AGREED.

ITEM 3

Adoption of Minutes of meeting held on the 13th of June 2025.

Minutes of the meeting of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly held on the 13th of June 2025 were proposed by Cllr D Lacey and seconded by Cllr P Mc Evoy.

The minutes were APPROVED.

ITEM 4

Presentation of “Iarnród Éireann in EMRA Region: building a sustainable future”

Ms C Bannon introduced Mr Barry Kenny, Head of Corporate Communications, Iarnród Éireann. He gave the Members a presentation on Iarnród Éireann in the EMRA Region. Topics covered the

network and services including current passenger numbers, passenger journeys the demand curve pre and post Covid, Eastern and Midland routes, Dart + programme, Wicklow Capacity Enhancement Project, Navan line, Woodbrook Dart Station, major national investments, the Rail Freight 2040 Strategy, Regional cities and Rosslare Europort, Capital Investments CAPEX Plan 2025 – 2030, the National Planning Framework, Dart + West, All Island Strategic Rail Review, AISRR Outcomes, Key customer enhancements, Network interventions and Dublin Cross City Connectivity.

A discussion followed with contributions from Cllr O'Connor, Cllr N Feighery, Cllr D Heney, Cllr D Lacey, Cllr D MacDonncha, Cllr JP Durkan, Cllr P Ross, Cllr J Fox, Cllr F Jose, Cllr M Cahill, Cllr J Moylan, Cllr P McEvoy, Cllr R Power, Cllr J Tuffy, Cllr M Bray, Cllr P Glennon, Cllr G O'Neill, Cllr D Healy and Mr B Kenny.

ITEM 5

Planning items

Mr O Douglas gave the Members an outline of the following:

i. EMRA submission on the National Development Plan Review

A discussion followed with contributions from Cllr A Cronin, Cllr P McEvoy, Cllr M Bray, Cllr J Fox, and Cllr Healy.

This was NOTED.

ii. EMRA submission on the Accelerating Infrastructure - Public Consultation Paper on Infrastructure Delivery

A discussion followed with contributions from P McEvoy.

This was NOTED.

iii. EMRA submission on the Marine Planning Policy Statement

Cllr P McEvoy, on behalf of Cllr Healy, Cllr Jose, Cllr O'Connor circulated amendments to the submission prior to the meeting:

In section 3.1, insertion of the following text: *EMRA considers that alignment of the MPPS with National Sectoral Adaptation Plans and the National Adaptation Framework as essential for a*

coordinated, climate-resilient approach to marine planning policy in Ireland. The principles outlined in the MPPS (Section 5) should prioritise the integration of climate change adaptation into coastal and marine planning, following an Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) approach.

ICZM provides a strategic framework for embedding adaptive measures in local decision making. This must be underpinned by appropriately scaled climate hazard/ vulnerability mapping to ensure an evidence-based resilience planning approach is implemented. The Regional Assembly views the Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs) as essential tools for delivering climate-resilient marine development at the local level.

EMRA also supports a proactive assessment of a range of climate-related coastal risks, such as sea level rise, acidification, erosion, coastal eutrophication, and saltwater intrusion. Adaptation/ resilience measures/ mitigation pathways should seek to benefit biodiversity following a nature-based solutions approach wherever possible (and this may include measures such as appropriate 'managed coastal retreat').

In this regard, EMRA recognises the need for, and encourages the development of, a national policy framework on 'managed coastal retreat', to identify high-risk areas where phased relocation of people/ vulnerable communities or infrastructure may be required due to persistent erosion and inundation risks. Local authorities should be supported in preparing site-specific coastal adaptation strategies, where managed coastal retreat is considered a viable long-term resilience measure. Recognising the increasing threat to local communities, strategic infrastructure, and the need to protect key ecosystems/ ecologically sensitive areas, EMRA calls for targeted research and investment in coastal protection measures, which considers the risks (identified above) and with a particular emphasis on nature-based solutions/ mitigation. This would inform the selection of suitable measures in the DMAPs and ensure they are developed within a transparent and inclusive process.

EMRA recommends that a dedicated Coastal Climate Risk Section is included within the MPPS to identify vulnerable areas of the country—such as Dublin Bay, East Wicklow, and parts of Louth in the EMRA Region—and which is based on the latest climate hazard and flood risk mapping.

In section 3.2, insertion of the following text: Alongside energy and digital infrastructure, environmental security must be achieved. The Assembly supports an approach which embeds coastal hazard mapping and flood risk assessments into marine infrastructure planning. This will align with the National Adaptation Framework and support a resilient and secure coastal economy. Protection of ports and cables should also factor in long-term climate projections, particularly where coastal retreat in high-risk zones could compromise the viability of infrastructure.

In section 3.3, insertion of the following text: *To ensure continued ‘prosperity’, a close alignment with ‘stewardship’ must be achieved. The Eighth Environment Action Programme implements the European Green Deal until 2030 and is guided by a long-term vision to 2050 of achieving wellbeing for all, while staying within the planetary boundaries¹. While the MPPS demonstrates partial alignment with the planetary boundaries framework by promoting climate-resilient marine development, nature-based solutions, and ICZM, supporting boundaries related to climate change, biosphere integrity, and land-system change, this should be enhanced, with specific reference to ocean acidification, nutrient pollution, and marine chemical contamination, which are critical to maintaining safe ecological thresholds.*

Ecosystem-based management principles should be embedded within marine economic planning, marine spatial planning and project appraisal to ensure that development, such as port expansion or aquaculture, respects ecological carrying capacities and does not adversely compromise marine biodiversity and ecosystem function. This aligns with RSES RPO 6.22.

The MPPS should align with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and seek the expansion of Marine Protected Areas, where necessary to meet ‘Good’ Environmental Status targets.

Protection and restoration of marine ecosystem including seagrass beds, salt marshes, and coastal wetland habitats, assists with carbon sequestration, climate resilience and adaptation and will be essential to contribute to Ireland’s obligations under the Nature Restoration Law and the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030.

Accordingly, DMAPs will need to incorporate spatial buffers or exclusion zones around critical ‘Blue Carbon’ habitats and be informed by robust ecological, water quality assessments, etc. Such measures would significantly strengthen the MPPS’s contribution to planetary boundary stewardship while supporting sustainable, climate-smart marine development and ultimately support Ireland’s prosperity.

Insertion of the following note: *EPA (2024) State of the Environment Report 2024. Website: <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/assessment/state-of-the-environment/irelands-state-of-the-environment-report-2024.php>.*

The Planetary Boundaries Framework refers to nine key Earth system processes which allow a safe operating space for humanity without destabilising the Earth’s environment/ causing irreversible damage.

Insertion of a new section 3.4: *3.4 Governance of Marine Planning*

The MPPS should identify the steps necessary to enhance the awareness and understanding among relevant stakeholders including other Government Departments, State Agencies, Local Government, developers and the general public regarding Marine Planning Governance. The role of different Departments and Agencies, their structure and allocated responsibilities/powers for marine planning and related consent processes should be clarified. There is a particular need to ensure clarity around enforcement roles and powers.

Adequate resourcing of the bodies engaged in marine planning and environmental governance, including MARA, NPWS, An Coimisiún Pleanála and Local Authorities is essential to avoid delays in consent processes. Guidance for project applicants is required, and adequate information must be available/ provided early in the application process. To reduce the need for the consenting process/ reduce workloads, the new Planning and Development Regulations should identify appropriate 'exempted development' relating to small-scale non-intrusive activities in the coastal area.

In section 4.0, insertion of the following recommendation: To enhance the overall MPPS, the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment are requested to ensure that the MPPS, DMAPS and ICZM is informed by the National Climate Adaptation Framework, adaptation plans and the EU Environmental Action Programme with an evidence-based ecosystem services approach to management of the coastal zone/ marine environment, identifying areas in need of protection (i.e. communities, infrastructure and ecosystems) and providing greater clarity to the governance of the marine planning

The EMRA submission on the Marine Planning Policy Statement with amendments was proposed by Cllr P McEvoy and seconded by Cllr D Healy.

This was **AGREED and APPROVED.**

ITEM 6

Programme of Works – Q2 update

Ms C Bannon gave the Members an update on the Programme of Works – Q2 which was circulated to the Members prior to the meeting.

Highlights from Quarter 2 included EMRA Members study visit to Brussels in June meeting representatives of the European Commission, the Irish Permanent Representation and MEPs to discuss the future of European policies; a training workshop in relation to the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Accelerator and the Regional Development Monitor; the publication by the Assembly of

“The 15-Minute City – An Implementation Pathway for Delivering Vibrant Urban Neighbourhoods in the Dublin Region”; the announcement of 33 new selected projects under the EU JTF programme and the launch of a second call under the bioeconomy action; an EUI/URBACT information session organised in the Customs House in May presenting an open URBACT call for Transfer Networks, a webinar on soft innovation held in May as part of the ORIGINN project. The IREO continued to support the Irish delegation to the Committee of the Regions in their activities in commission and plenary sessions and also hosted three study visits from the three Regional Assemblies.

A discussion followed with contributions from Cllr P Mc Evoy, Cllr O O'Connor, and Ms C Bannon.

ITEM 7

Nomination to the Association of Irish Regions (AIR)

EMRA has five positions on the Association of Irish Regions and 2 alternates. The Cathaoirleach Cllr D Healy, Leas Cathaoirleach Cllr P Glennon and the former Cathaoirleach Cllr C Fitzgerald are appointed to AIR. Members proposed that Cllr D Lacey and Cllr P Ross keep their seats for the upcoming year. Cllr O O'Connor proposed Cllr D Heney, Cllr P McEvoy and Cllr A Cronin as alternate Members. Ms C Bannon will confirm with AIR how many alternates can be nominated and revert back to the Members.

ITEM 8

Correspondence

i. Response letter from the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

Ms C Bannon advised Members a response was received to the letter sent to Barry Ward TD : an invitation for Members of the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly to attend a future meeting of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs.

ITEM 9

Any other business

- i. ENCORE** – Ms C Bannon advised the Members we have three places for EMRA Members to attend the conference. It was proposed by Cllr D Healy that the group leaders would confirm the names of Members that would attend, this was seconded by Cllr P McEvoy.

This was AGREED.

ii. Local democratic task force questionnaire – closing date 22nd

Ms C Bannon informed the Members that the Assembly has been invited to respond to the consultation launched by the Local Democracy Taskforce. As the deadline for submission is August 22nd, the submission protocol will be used.

A discussion followed with contribution from Cllr J Fox, Cllr P Mc Evoy, Cllr D Healy, Cllr D Lacey and Ms C Bannon.

iii. EUJTF project funding time period

Cllr P Ross asked for confirmation on the time frame for the funding. Ms C Bannon outlined the criteria and the time frame for projects under the EUJTF programme.

ITEM 10

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly will be held on **Friday the 12th of September 2025 at 11.00am**

Signed:



Cllr David Healy
Cathaoirleach EMRA



Ms. Clare Bannon
EMRA

Date:

12/09/2025.