

Meeting Minutes

EU Just Transition Fund 2021-2027

2nd Programme Monitoring Committee Meeting

Date: Wednesday 31st May 2023

Location: The Abbeyleix Manor Hotel, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois

Present

Laure Antoniotti ,Akriti Brady , Anna Shakespeare, Bernard Harris, Bernard O'Shea, Bernie Roe, Bertie Maltby, Brendan Mooney, Celene Sheehy, Dae Hanley, David Kelly, Dervila Twamley, Geraldine O'Sullivan, Helena Stromberg, Jacqui McNabb, Jim Conway, John Mulholland, Johnny Sheehan, Louise Casey, Michael Brougham, Michelle Kearney, Miia Jouppi, Muireann Ni Cheannabháin , Orla Carroll, Paddy Mathews, Pat O'Neill, Patricia Waller, Patrick Barrett, Rob Power, Rory O'Sullivan, Ross Higgins, Ruth Buggie, Sarah Morgan, Sean O'Reilly, Sonya Kavanagh, Susan Glennon, Suzanne Nally, Terry Connolly.

Apologies

Eamon Murphy, Geraldine Behan, Gina McIntyre, Kattalin Deppner-Quittner, Mary Colhoun, Michelle McKeon-Bennett, Paddy Kavanagh, Robert McDermott, Ruth McGrath, Turlough McGovern.

Agenda

Time	Item	For
09:30	Arrivals and Registration (Tea/Coffee)	
10:00	Welcome and Opening Remarks <i>Jim Conway - Director EMRA, Chair</i>	
10:05	Tour de table	
10:10	Adoption of the Agenda	Adoption
10:15	Adoption of the Minutes of PMC 1	Adoption
10:20	Implementation Plan, including Methodology and Selection Criteria, for Action 3.3, Community Charging Points <i>ZEVI/Pobal, Patricia Waller</i>	Discussion
10:30	Approval of Methodology and Selection Criteria, for Action 3.3	Adoption
10:35	Written Procedure <i>EMRA, Bernie Roe, Secretary</i>	Information
10:40	Update on Action 1.1, Regenerative Tourism Schemes	Information

	<i>Fáilte Ireland, Paddy Mathews</i>	
10:50	Update on Action 1.2, LECP/REP Schemes <i>Pobal, Anna Shakespeare</i>	Information
11:00	Update on Action 2.3, Network of Trails <i>Fáilte Ireland, Paddy Mathews</i>	Information
11:10	Break	
11:30	Presentation on Action 1.3, Bioeconomy <i>DAFM, Patrick Barrett</i>	Discussion
11:45	Presentation on Action 2.1, Degraded Peatland Restoration <i>NPWS, Suzanne Nally</i>	Discussion
12:00	Presentation on Action 2.2, Midlands Carbon Capture Study <i>DAFM, Michelle Kearney</i>	Discussion
12:15	Presentation on Action 3.1 and 3.2, Decarbonisation of Local Transport <i>DoT/NTA, Akriti Brady</i>	Discussion
12:30	Communications Update + Video <i>EMRA, Helena Stromberg</i>	Information
12:40	Any Other Business	Discussion
12:45	Date of Next Meeting	Noting
12:50	Meeting Ends	
12:55	Lunch	
13:40	Guided Tour of Abbeyleix Bog Project	
15:10	Tour Ends	

Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Programme Monitoring Committee meeting was chaired by Jim Conway, Director, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. The Chair extended thanks to all who attended the programme launch and the first PMC and welcomed all attendees to the meeting, in particular the European Commission representative Mii Jouppi. 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 would be published online.

There then followed a round table of introductions by each attendee.

Adoption of the Agenda

The agenda was **ADOPTED** unanimously.

Adoption of the Minutes

There were two points of clarification relating to the minutes which were circulated in advance. Minutes were proposed by David Kelly, and seconded by Dervila Twamley. The minutes were **ADOPTED**.

Comments from EU Commission on Selection Criteria

Miia Jouppi emphasized that the PMC's role extends beyond mere box-ticking and presents an opportunity to add value as partners. She highlighted the importance of transparency regarding the actions and their implementation. Miia expressed the possibility of aligning the selection criteria with the interests and perspectives of the PMC members and their organisation, emphasising that the consultation process is intended for active participation rather than mere approval.

Implementation Plan, including Methodology and Selection Criteria, for Action 3.3, Community Charging Points

Patricia Waller from Zero Emission Vehicles Ireland, presented on the topic, outlining the eligibility criteria for five types of eligible community facilities, which were determined through consultation with local authorities and partners. Applications will open at the end of June and selection will be in October with works to commence in 2024 and complete in 2025.

Regarding the duration of agreements for final recipients, John Mulholland from CCMA raised concerns about the capacity of voluntary organizations to enter into 10-year agreements. Patricia clarified that the 10-year duration is based on the value of the charger. Collaboration with the Chief State Solicitor's Office is underway to ensure the necessary documentation is in place. Both the charge point operator and the site owner will need to sign an agreement that guarantees a specific level of community support. If issues arise, Zevi can step in to assist.

The question of revenue sharing with the community was raised by Mick Brougham from Enterprise Ireland. Patricia Waller explained that specific figures were not available at the moment, but the profit return is expected to be around 10-15% of the charger's value, which covers the charger itself. At this stage, an annual charge is placed on the operator, who then takes care of maintenance. The revenue share to the community center is projected to be between 25% and 30%. The objective is to ensure the project meets the needs of all stakeholders, with a focus on benefiting the community.

During the discussion, Jacqui McNabb queried what the viability factors for site selection were. Patricia Waller emphasized the importance of charger usage, proximity to a community, the relevance of having a fast charger, surrounding amenities, and activities that people can engage in during the approximate 40-minute charging time. Additionally, the presence of a national road for tourism purposes was taken into consideration. No specific weighting numbers were provided, as the goal is to encourage as many applications as possible.

David Kelly asked if the long-term viability of the project was considered, and Patricia Waller confirmed that it has been factored into the planning. The process will involve a single call for applications, and numbers are anticipated, given the oversubscription of the existing sports scheme.

Brendan Mooney asked about the procurement structure. Patricia advised that procurement will be conducted through a national procurement process divided into lots for the respective regions.

Finally, Miia Jouppi reminded the attendees to be mindful of the rules pertaining to revenue-generating projects, emphasizing the need for clarity in this regard.

Approval of Methodology and Selection Criteria, for Action 3.3

Following the presentation approval of the Methodology and Selection Criteria was proposed by David Kelly and seconded by Mick Brougham. The Methodology and Selection Criteria, for Action 3.3 were **Approved**.

Written Procedure

Bernie Roe, Secretary for EU JTF PMC and Assistant Director for EU and Corporate Affairs, EMRA informed the participants that the remaining Implementation Plans would be processed through the written procedure process. The rules governing the written procedure are defined in section 12 of the EU JTF PMC's rules of procedure:

The Committee can also reach decisions by way of written procedure to all members of the Monitoring Committee. In this instance the Managing Authority will circulate to members of the Committee with a proposal and request the decision of the members to be returned within a fixed time period. Proposals shall be deemed to have been agreed by the Committee in the absence of any written objections within that period.

Where written objections to a proposal are received from a member within the time period, the Managing Authority may discuss the objection with the member in order to achieve consensus and a member may withdraw their written objection to a proposal. Where an objection is not withdrawn the Chair shall determine whether:

- (a) the proposal should be amended and resubmitted to the Committee;*
- (b) the proposal should be withdrawn;*
- (c) the proposal may be deemed to be approved on the basis of positive responses from a majority of members.*

The Secretary shall advise the Committee of the outcome of the written procedure.

Exceptionally and for urgent reasons, the Chair may reduce the period of notice for decisions by written procedure.

Bernie Roe mentioned that if there were any additional questions, the Secretary would be available to provide answers. The chair advised there was a glossary of terms that would be circulated for reference.

Update on Action 1.1, Regenerative Tourism Schemes

Paddy Mathews, Head of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands in Fáilte Ireland presented on Action 1.1, regenerative tourism schemes. The strong link between Action 1.1 and Action 2.3 was emphasised.

The draft evaluation criteria were outlined.

Mick Brougham from Enterprise Ireland asked about SMEs applying for funding in the different bands up to two million euro and would it be available to Companies Limited by Guarantee (CLGs) to develop new attractions? Paddy advised that they had run drop-in clinics to refine the scope from the relevant stakeholders. There was extensive interest from many private businesses as well as community groups and there is a hope that many of them would apply.

Geraldine O'Sullivan from the Irish Farmer's Association suggested having the activators at the start. Paddy said that this was under consideration and that they hoped activators would be in place when the programme launches. Geraldine also asked if the projects would all run in parallel and for clarification on whether there will be a stronger focus on community SMEs. Paddy said that there would be a strong focus on community and job creation. She also commented on the tight timeframe warning that it may result in a swing from community to business. Paddy said the activator would have a role to ensure that applications are of good quality.

Update on Action 1.2, LECP/REP Schemes

Anna Shakespeare, Chief Executive Officer, Pobal provided an update on the development of action 1.2, including proposed selection criteria with details to follow in the Implementation Plan.

During the discussion, Sarah Morgan asked about the timing of workshops, to which Anna responded that they are scheduled for either Q2 or Q3.

Mick Brougham from Enterprise Ireland inquired about the eligibility requirements for applicants and the maximum grant rate. The MA clarified that the grant rate would depend on state aid regulations, which would vary depending on the entity delivering the project.

Update on Action 2.3, Network of Trails

Paddy Mathews, Head of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands in Fáilte Ireland presented on action 2.3 "network of trails" The deadline for project delivery is set for 2026. Miia Jouppi reminded PMC members that simply spending the funds is not sufficient for declaring to the Commission. The projects need to go through a certifying process, verified and certified by the Managing Authority (MA) and Member States (MS) before the claim is submitted.

Rob Power highlighted that a selection criterion is that trails are within the territory. Concerns were expressed about certain areas in Kildare that are not within the territory but could potentially provide benefits to the overall territory. The importance of considering these areas for inclusion was highlighted.

Miia further clarified that for schemes to be declared to the Commission the focus should be on ensuring that the projects are for the benefit of the territory, with clear connections in place.

Paddy Mathews acknowledged the importance of considering these factors and stated that they are working on the assumption of meeting the criteria. The Chair suggested setting up more online information sessions for PMC members.

Coffee Break

The meeting adjourned for the scheduled coffee break.

Presentation on Action 1.3, Bioeconomy

Patrick Barrett, Agricultural Inspector for Bioeconomy, Agriculture Knowledge & Innovation System & Agri-Digitalisation, in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine presented on action 1.3 “Bioeconomy innovation districts”

The Chair advised that the slides for this and all presentations would be circulated.

Presentation on Action 2.1, Degraded Peatland Restoration

Suzanne Nally, Principal Officer, National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) presented on action 2.1 and the restoration of degraded peatlands in Ireland.

John Mulholland from CCMA expressed concerns about the impact of the peat industry on waterways and the need to address the requirements under the Water Framework Directive. The EU JTF should not overlook the deposition of peat in riverbeds and the consequent impact on rivers and aquatic systems. The long-term goal should be to restore rivers to their pristine condition. Suzanne Nally explained that peatlands naturally function as filtration systems, and this aspect would be considered as part of the Scheme.

The issue of ongoing management after the Scheme was raised by the Irish Farmers’ Association (IFA) as well as the need to consider impact on adjoining land. They enquired about the presence of an exit strategy. NPWS responded that ongoing monitoring would be carried out by NPWS itself even after the project concludes. They have a vested interest in the benefits that the project will deliver and will implement hydro-ecological monitoring both before and after the restoration. The IFA requested clarity on how issues, should they arise, would be addressed.

Rob Power enquired about the landowners involved in the project. Suzanne Nally clarified that both public and private landowners would be involved.

Presentation on Action 2.2, Midlands Carbon Capture Study

Michelle Kearney, Principal Officer, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) presented on action 2.2 and its alignment with the objectives of the climate action plan. The action aims to conduct research and test various approaches to reduce CO₂ emissions.

DAFM confirmed their commitment to undertaking the necessary screening processes, recognising the potential challenges posed by various directives and the risk of potential delays in meeting the 2026 deadline.

The need to address the social and economic aspects of the action was raised by the IFA. They requested clarification on the carbon value required and its impact on employment within the sector and related industries. It is important to consider the multiplier effect and understanding how reduced production intensity would impact employment in the territory.

Patrick Barrett noted the potential synergy between Action 1.3 and the Carbon Capture Study, suggesting that they could complement each other effectively.

Presentation on Action 3.1 and 3.2, Decarbonisation of Local Transport

Akriti Brady from the Department of Transport and Bertie Maltby from the National Transport Authority (NTA) presented on Action 3.1 and 3.2, which focus on providing smart and sustainable mobility options for former peat communities. Action 3.1 involves decarbonizing rural public bus routes by installing electric charging infrastructure, purchasing electric buses, and providing driver training. Action 3.2 supports private bus operators in transitioning to electric vehicles through a conference, expert advice, consultancy services, and direct grant funding.

Communications Update + Video

Helena Stromberg, Communications Officer for EU Just Transition Fund, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly provided an update on communications activities related to the EU Just Transition Programme. The official launch event took place at the Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre in Longford, with the participation of six Ministers.

Media coverage generated by the event has an estimated equivalent media cost of €133,615 and reached an estimated 2.3 million people. Various materials were produced for attendees such as tote bags, notebooks, and pens, all purchased eco-consciously. A programme summary booklet was also produced and available to all attendees at the Launch event and to PMC members. A video highlighting the meaning of the Just Transition for local people was also created.

A supplement in the Sunday Independent newspaper was produced alongside other EU funding programmes showcasing 50 years of Ireland's engagement with the European Union, the EUJTF was prominent in this supplement.

Helena mentioned operations of strategic importance under the programme that demonstrate its story and contributions to cohesion policies. Two specific operations will be identified from successful projects following calls. These operations will be from action 1.2: economic and community actions and Priority 2: regeneration and transitioning of peat lands for new uses, linking with economic diversification.

Training sessions and guidance materials will be provided to support intermediary bodies and beneficiaries in their communication efforts.

Any Other Business

Miia Jouppi acknowledged impressive communications and the active participation of PMC members. The JTF Technical Assistance representative highlighted the recently opened calls for EU JTF territories, mentioning that Ireland had submitted several applications. However, many of these applications were from small groups and lacked well-defined proposals. It was emphasized that joint applications at the county level would increase the chances of success and enable the support of a broader range of good ideas.

Participants were reminded that a tour of the Abbeyleix Bog Project would take place after lunch.

Terry Connolly, EMRA mentioned that an ECORYS study has been commissioned by the European Commission regarding the application of the Partnership Principle. PMC members' contact details would be shared for the purpose of the study. If any members of the PMC do not want the details shared please contact Terry.

Lastly, it was announced that the present meeting marked Jim Conway's final PMC meeting as he would be retiring. He thanked the committee and his colleagues stating that it was a privilege to work with EMRA and on this Programme.

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be in November 2023 with the actual date to be finalized closer to the time..



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