

# Meeting Minutes

EU Just Transition Fund 2021-2027

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Programme Monitoring Committee Meeting

Date: Tuesday, 28<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Location: Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone, Co. Roscommon

### Present

Clare Bannon, Bernie Roe, Laure Antoniotti, Terence Connolly, Helena Stromberg, Rory Micheal O'Sullivan, Kiara Abbey, Elena Panteva, Akriti Brady, Anne Cusack, Claire Kelly, Michael Brougham, Noel Sheahan, Orla Carroll, Paddy Kavanagh, Paraic Rattigan, Pat O' Neill, Peter Stevenson, Ruairí Smyth, Ruth Buggie, Sarah Morgan, Sean O' Reilly, Susan Glennon, Peter Clifford, John Mulholland, Michelle Kearney, Celene Sheehy, and Johnny Sheehan.

### Apologies

Frank Maughan, Dervila Twamley, Anna Shakespeare, Helena Deane, Suzanne Nally, Ian Murphy, Dymrna Harney, Patricia Waller, Cllr Robert McDermott, and Siobhan Higgins.

### Agenda

Time	Item	For
09:30	Arrivals and Registration (Tea/Coffee & Muffins/Cupcakes in <b>Lecarrow Suite 2</b> )	
10:00	Welcome and Opening Remarks in <b>Lecarrow Suite 1</b>	
	Tour de table	
	Welcome by EMRA A/Director	
	Welcome from the Commission	
	Adoption of the Agenda	Adoption
	Adoption of the Minutes of PMC 2	Adoption
10:25	Update on Implementation of the EUJTF Programme EMRA	Information
10:45	Implementation Plan, including Methodology and Selection Criteria, for Action 3.2: Support to Private Bus Operators Department of Transport	Discussion
10:55	Adoption of Implementation Plan 3.2: Support to Private Bus Operators	Adoption
11:00	Break	
11:10	Presentation of the Draft Evaluation Plan EMRA	Discussion
11:25	EUJTF Budget and explanation of N+3 EMRA	Information
11:35	Update on Enabling Conditions EMRA Information	Information
11:40	Communications Update EMRA	Information
11:50	Any Other Business	Discussion



12:00	Short walk and talk: Regenerative Tourism in Yew Point at Hodson Bay	Discussion
12:30	Meeting Ends and Lunch commences	
	L'Escale Restaurant- 2 Choice Main Course with Tea/ Coffee	
14:00	End of Day	

### Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Programme Monitoring Committee meeting was chaired by Clare Bannon, Director, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. The Chair extended thanks to all who attended the second PMC meeting and welcomed all attendees to the meeting, in particular the European Commission representative Elena Panteva and the Audit Authority representative Celene Sheehy. The chair extended thanks to the departing members and noted the apologies for today's meeting. 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.

### Members who have left the PMC and their new replacements

Outgoing PMC Rep	Incoming PMC Rep
Maria Rigby	Edel Meenan
David Pasley	Shane Crowley (Alternate)
Gerry Doyle	Brendan Mooney
Geraldine Behan	Ann Cunningham
Bernard O'Shea	Noel Sheahan
Siobhan Roche	Dr. Peter Clifford
Jean O' Mahoney	Ian Murphy

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

### Welcome from the EU Commission

Elena Panteva, Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy, EU commission welcomed all attendees noting it's the third PMC meeting of the new EUJTF programme. Elena Panteva congratulated members and said to keep up the good work.

### Adoption of the Agenda

- Proposed by John Mulholland
- Seconded by Mick Brougham



The agenda was **ADOPTED**

### **Adoption of PMC 2 Minutes**

There were two points of clarification relating to the minutes which were circulated in advance. Minutes were proposed by John Mulholland and seconded by Ruairí Smyth.

The minutes were **ADOPTED**.

### **Secretary Comments**

Bernie Roe highlighted the milestones in the EU JTF journey so far including the launch at Corlea trackway and the second PMC meeting held in May where the selection criteria for the first Implementation Plan (the Zevi scheme) was approved. Although the PMC has not formally met in six months there has been a significant period of engagement with members through the written procedure process. This effort was acknowledged by the secretary, and members were thanked for their insights and contributions. We are now moving forward with eight of out the nine actions approved and the remaining one is on the agenda for adoption at today's session.

### **Presentation by Terence Connolly, Administrative Officer on the EU Just Transition Fund**

- TC briefly reminded the PMC of the purpose and priorities of the EU JTF and that there is one specific single objective.
- Breakdown of 3 priorities. P1 Jobs, P2 bogs and P3 wheels.
- A summary of progress on each of the 9 Actions.

A copy of the presentation slides is attached with the minutes.

### **Elena Panteva raised the issue of planning permissions and asked what steps would be taken to mitigate the delays,**

- TC advised that some of this has been incorporated into the concept note and the Ready to go process. If the applicant has not applied for planning, they are not going to be funded.
- The Part 8 planning process for local authorities is also a key feature here.
- Orla Carroll, Director of Product Development, Fáilte Ireland commented that Fáilte Ireland, as an intermediate body had to restrict their projects to those with planning which does pose a difficulty in delivery.
- John Mulholland, County and City Management Association (CCMA) pointed out that the Part 8 process enables local authorities in partnership with Fáilte Ireland to proceed. There is no appeal process under Part 8.



- Mick Brougham, Enterprise Ireland Regional Manager commented on JM's points. Some projects have planning permission for adapting buildings. They will need to do change of use which could delay things.

Elena Panteva queried **what percentage the EPPM system is at as she was aware that there had been issues. What percentage of data transfer is happening between Beneficiaries, Intermediate Bodies, Managing Authority, and the Commission?**

- The secretary said a system is only as good as the people who use it and there is a significant emphasis being placed on developing training that will be delivered in the new year.
- Terry Connolly replied that 80% is developed. 20% needs to be developed to integrate SharePoint and to create user manuals and training material.
- There will be a link to SFC also in the future. This API will be developed with the other MA's using EPPM.
- A real claim hasn't been run through the system yet, although we could use it tomorrow if required to do so.

EP asked **if it is electronic from Beneficiary, Intermediate Bodies, Managing Authority, & European Commission? What were the issues with SFC?**

- TC said that beneficiaries which are not public bodies, cannot use it, but Intermediate Bodies have access. When a beneficiary is not a public body, it must go through the IB's system.
- Ruairí Smyth, ESF+ (Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science) said that in their case EPPM is at Minimum Viable Product level, and it will continue to improve.

EP asked **if user manuals are not ready, how can people use it?**

TC made the below comments.

- A live system is gradually being updated. User manuals are still to be developed with the training materials.
- IBs were involved in User Acceptance Testing, but training is needed to bring them on board, as an essential part of a change management process.
- EPPM is a national Project Management IT system so the goal is for it to be used in all government departments. It has been adapted for EU fund use.

Paddy Kavanagh, Connect Trade Union, highlighted their concern that Priority 1 is to generate employment for peat communities, but is this quality employment?

- Comparing annual salaries for the sectors, there is an annual salary of €49,000 for Bord na Móna workers, €69,000 for power plant workers, while in tourism there is an average wage of €29,000. Parts of the midlands are the only areas in Ireland to decline in population. As part of a true just transition we need work to enable people to stay in the region.



- PK voiced the need for jobs with a good wage to be created. For example, the Andalusia coal mines attracted multinationals to create sustainable jobs. He asked if **anything has been put aside for multinationals, as in Andalusia?**

The Chair addressed PK's comments.

Multinational companies are excluded from the EU JTF fund. They have a competitive edge and to bear in mind that the amount of funding available is not an amount to attract big multinational interest. The EU fund is for developing the regions and diversifying the local economy.

Orla Carroll addressed PK's earlier comments.

- Orla made the point that there is 230,000 people currently employed in tourism and that the tourism sector has demonstrated its capacity to bring rejuvenation and new business to an area.
- There is re-training for Bord Na Mona staff to develop trails ensuring that staff stay in the organisation.
- Tourism enables people to become entrepreneurs.
- Jobs in tourism are quality jobs.
- John Mulholland, County and City Management Association (CCMA) pointed out that there has been very solid progress. A huge amount of work has been done and the public, and political expectation is that it will create jobs.
- JM asked also questioned **where is the avenue for SMEs and job creators?** Priority 1 jobs: Pobal is restricted by De Minimis and there might be a sense of disappointment that startups can't get above De Minimis.
- The message needs to be clearer, if they are being told to either go to Enterprise Ireland or the banks, they may feel they are closed out.
- There is also pent-up energy with younger people.

Mick Brougham, Enterprise Ireland Regional Manager commented on JM's points.

- A tight labour market may pull people into midlands to access staff.

Johnny Sheehan, The Wheel, requested that the EU JTF team include Community Enterprise SMEs and CPR (Common Provisions Regulation) in the glossary.

He mentioned the glossary is helpful and that there is real innovation there and a need to be clear about opportunities.

The Chair said we need to communicate better the restrictions on the fund.

EP mentioned that she really appreciated the discussion and said it demonstrates the commitment and engagement from all parties.



## **Implementation Plan, including Methodology and Selection Criteria, for Action 3.2, Support to Private Bus Operators**

- There was a presentation from Akriti Brady, Department of Transport, who joined remotely and apologised for not being in attendance in person. Akriti pointed out that Actions 3.1 and 3.2 are closely linked.
- The aim is to present sustainability options and provide support to private bus operators through consultancy.

A copy of the presentation slides is attached with the minutes.

### **Approval of Methodology and Selection Criteria, for Action 3.2**

Following the presentation, the members were asked to approve the methodology and selection criteria for action 3.2. This was proposed by John Mulholland and seconded by Michael Brougham.

The Methodology and Selection Criteria for Action 3.2 were **Approved**.

### **Break**

The meeting adjourned for the scheduled break.

### **Presentation of the Draft Evaluation Plan EMRA**

The draft evaluation criteria were outlined through a presentation from Helena Stromberg, Communications Officer for the EU Just Transition Fund, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.

A copy of the presentation slides is attached with the minutes.

**Mick Brougham queried in terms of clarity on dates, why is it so far out if spending finishes in 2026? Why is there such a long gap from 2029/2031?**

HS replied that those timelines are prescribed by the Regulations and that while the funding must be used by 2026, more time will be necessary to see the concrete impacts of the operations.

Peter Clifford from Science foundation of Ireland (SFI), suggested to look at evaluation in terms of scope and the existing theory of change should be referenced in the Evaluation Plan He also volunteered to participate in any steering group that may be formed and suggested that the that the budget of €250k is not enough.

- On the communication side, we need to look at how to communicate across funds and co-ordinate with other EU funds.

Orla Carroll agreed that the current proposed budget for evaluation was low and asked **if the funding was available to the managing authority or Intermediate bodies.**



The budget will be reviewed with DECC, it comes from Technical Assistance and is available to the Managing Authority for this purpose.

EP made the below comments.

- The Commission have provided some comments on the draft by email already
- Included knowledge and capacity building and ad hoc work.
- EP has advised we need to think about whether we would like to include data issues.
- EP commented that the ERDF MAs have already done this and advised EMRA to engage with them on this as it could be beneficial.

### **Update on EUJTF Budget and explanation of N+3**

Presentation from Rory Michael O'Sullivan, Staff Officer for EU Just Transition Fund, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. He introduced the topic of N+3, a significant factor in EU Funding.

- Please find a recorded version of the N+3 and the EU Just Transition Fund Budget Presentation and notes included with the minutes. <https://youtu.be/NHho1kMHi3E>

ROS thanked the PMC for their time and opened the floor for **questions**.

EP commented that N+3 is not only spent on the ground but verified and declared to the EU commission allowing various checks to be made. EP clarified that the declaration to the European Commission and checks need to have taken place before the deadline too.

Mick Brougham queried whether there is an additional 168 million, and if so, **where was it coming from?**

ROS clarified that it was the fund itself, not an additional sum.

Anne Cusack, Midlands REP questioned **if other countries are having difficulty reaching timelines. What happens to funds that are not spent? Does it get reallocated?**

- ROS clarified it is potential money, it needs to be spent and then drawn down by the state.
- TC replied that the NextGeneration EU part is a loan is taken out by the commission. It is the member states, through the Council, that must agree to extend the fund. The money stays with the commission if we do not spend.

EP gave an example for one member state who did not have money spent, they lost pre-financing.

MB questioned **does the PMC have to select the individual actions?**



- TC answered the selection of criteria is the role of the PMC. Selection of operations is the role of the MA but is delegated to the IBs in some instances.
- TC noted John Mulholland's excellent input into the timeline question during implementation plan review.

OC noted that from an IB perspective, they are nervous of the timelines and are working hard to achieve them stating that it is in their interest to achieve the required spend to avoid reputational damage.

### **Update on Enabling Conditions EMRA**

Presentation from Terry Connolly, Administration Officer for EU Just Transition Fund, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. A copy of the presentation slides is attached with the minutes.

### **EU JTF Communications Update**

Presentation from Helena Stromberg, Communications Officer for EU Just Transition Fund, Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly. A copy of the presentation slides is attached with the minutes.

### **Any Other Business**

Orla Carroll advised PMC members that one scheme is to be launched by Fáilte Ireland in early 2024 to work with the Universities in the territory to develop a training programme for the tourism activators, train students, interns, and fund post-doctoral research. The Implementation Plan for action 1.1 will be extended to include this scheme and sent back to the PMC for approval.

EP advised to check thoroughly for state aid and double funding areas. She queried Ireland's response to a high-level letter sent by the Commissioner on the future of cohesion policy. Laure Antoniotti, Administrative Officer, EMRA, responded to EP and will check if there is a reply from the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform to the said letter.

LA mentioned the future of cohesion policy.

- The European Commission has already started preparing for the next programming period 2028-2034. DPENDPR have set up a working group on future of policy and will launch a consultation in the coming weeks.
- PMC members' details have been shared for this consultation and members should expect to be contacted.

Pat O' Neill, Irish Business & Employers Confederation stated we can be ambitious about quality and about the numbers of jobs. We need to remain sustainable and keep communities intact.





The Chair called the meeting to a close. She thanked everyone for the discussion and invited them to join the tour of Yew Point before lunch.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

The chair announced the next meeting will provisionally be on Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2024 with the date to be finalised closer to the time.

DRAFT



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