

ENVIRONMENTAL WORKING GROUP MEETING

4TH MARCH 2008

AGREED MINUTES

ATTENDEEES: Lucinda Blakiston-Houston, Chair, (Interreg IV)
Brian Murphy, Vice-Chair, (C & E)
Hubert Nicholl, Local Government, (Interreg IV)
James Daly, BMW Regional Assembly, (Peace III)
Dr Alexandra McGarel, CNCC
John Anderson, CNCC (C & E and Peace III)
Dr David Erwin, CNCC
Sarah Reid, SEUPB
Ann-Marie Brooks, DEL
Dan Kennedy, DOE
Bernard McClure, DOE
Jim Sutherland, OFMDFM
Damian Fitzpatrick, DETI
Gerard Colgan, NISRA
Lynsey Moore, DFP
Anne Baker, DFP (Secretariat)

1. Minutes and Matters arising

The Chair advised that no comments had been received on the draft minutes from the meeting on 5th December. The vice chair gave an update on the Action points. A table is attached at annex A. In discussing points arising from the previous meeting he emphasised the importance in addressing the issues raised which are to be included in the group's Work Plan.

2. Feedback from Monitoring Committees

The Chair requested that members give feedback from Monitoring Committee meetings held between each Working Group meeting. Only one Monitoring Committee meeting had been held since the December meeting – the C & E meeting on 31st January. She advised that at that meeting the Terms of Reference (TOR) was presented for approval where it met with some concerns regarding the wording on climate change.

The DFP representative highlighted that the SEA report recommended monitoring possible impacts on the climate and therefore a sentence added to

the 'Roles and responsibilities' section of the TOR along the lines of 'Ensure the SEA reports are complied with and carry out analyses on Environmental Reports' should suffice. The Secretariat agreed to amend the TOR and circulate it to members for agreement before presenting it to the next C&E Monitoring Committee in April.

Action: Secretariat

The Chair agreed this and also added that SEA compliance should be a standing Agenda item for EWG meetings.

Action: Secretariat

The SEUPB representative advised that the Monitoring & Evaluation Working Group under the Peace III Programme would also be monitoring impacts and any relevant information will be shared with the EWG.

The Chair stressed that the sharing of information from other Monitoring Committees and Working Groups was vital to ensure complementarity and prevent duplication of work.

3. Work Plan and Budget

The Chair advised that she and the vice-chair had had a meeting with DFP to discuss the budget. The DFP representative tabled an indicative budget broken down by activity and year. She advised that the budget is flexible in that money can be reallocated to another year as necessary. It was emphasised that the budget is for the C & E Programmes and that if any research is commissioned to cover all 4 Programmes, then the costs would be apportioned to all Programmes.

The Chair asked for clarification on who would be attending networking events as previous experience has proved that some Government representatives attending network events did not have the capacity to report back to the EWG and connections were lost. The DFP representative advised that the budget was for non-Government members of the EWG to attend events (Government reps would be covered by Departmental Budgets) therefore there should be no problem in EWG members attending events and reporting back to the rest of the group.

No further comments were raised on the budget therefore the Chair noted it as accepted.

The Chair asked if there were any N+2 issues. The vice chair explained that N+2 meant that EU money had to be spent within a timeframe and to ensure that there was no lose of money, funds were moved from one measure / priority to another which led to a change in the direction of spending.

The DFP representative advised that the Priorities under the Competitiveness Programme were different this time and more information has been made

available earlier in the Programmes so there should not be the same problems that arose in the previous programmes. She also advised that progress reports would be presented to Monitoring Committees which will provide details on N+2 targets and achievements which can be monitored.

The OFMDFM representative questioned the size of projects and the timeframe for gathering information and disseminating it. The Chair advised that the previous EWG had undertaken one major research project on the use and implementation of DPA (approx £30k) which showed how DPA could be used to influence the direction of the Programmes. The findings were included in their final report which recommended DPA be used in all 2007-13 Structural Funds Programmes.

The OFMDFM representative advised that there was other research being undertaken which could be useful to the EWG. The Chair stressed that if members had knowledge of items which may be of interest to the group, and which fall under the remit of the Programmes, then they should bring them to the attention of the EWG. The DFP representative advised that members can ask for agenda items to be included or presentations, etc can be accommodated as a means of sharing best practice.

4. Implementation of cross-cutting themes.

4.1 DPA

The Chair advised that the DPA guidance had been issued to the Managing Authorities and presented to the C & E Monitoring Committee. She advised that it was hoped, under the Competitiveness Programme, to encourage a move from Path A to Path D. The DFP representative advised that Path A may not always be neutral, in that complying with general environmental regulations may have a positive environmental impact. If projects were scoring 'neutral' then it is the responsibility of the Managing Authorities/Selection Panels to include conditions in the Letter of Offer.

The DEL representative tabled a copy of a draft Letter of Offer containing conditions for applicants to agree to. As DEL are already at an advanced stage in the selection process they invited comments from the EWG on paragraph 7.10 'Environmental Impact'.

The DFP representative stated that having organisations providing their environmental policy was a positive step and would allow DEL to monitor progress.

The Chair asked if the DPA score could be changed after applicants had submitted their environmental policies, as evidence in the policy might lead to the allocation of a more favourable Path.

The NISRA representative could see no problem in changing the Path. The population of the Database could be carried out on receipt of the environmental policy.

A CNCC representative asked if the wording in the Letter of Offer could be amended to include reference to enhancing the environment.

Action: DEL

4.2 Retained knowledge in Managing Authorities/Implementing Bodies

The Chair noted that that it was important to have consistent Departmental contacts that are easily accessible to be able to give advice on monitoring. The DFP representative advised that management checks would ensure that environmental policies were being adhered to and the working group could request a review of DPA scores. Any problems realised at this early stage could be addressed.

The Chair proposed to draw up a Work Plan for the EWG for the next meeting.

Action: Chair

The OFMDFM representative advised that they are involved with the Sustainable Development Commission within NI and are keen to become involved in this area of assessment work. Training courses will be offered to Managing Authorities in the near future.

A CNCC representative asked if a document outlining the most frequently occurring issues could be developed. The NISRA representative advised that he was tasked with preparing such a document which would be Programme specific. It is envisaged it would detail indicative activities and mitigating factors which are relevant to each area of activity for each Programme.

The Chair noted that although guidance would be beneficial it was still important to have a point of contact in Departments.

The Chair requested a meeting with the OFMDFM representative to discuss sustainable development for the Programmes.

Action: OFMDFM/Chair

5. AOB

The DEL representative invited members to attend a meeting on 10th March at the Dunadry Hotel at 10.00am which would be attended by project applicants. The purpose of the meeting is to go through a Letter of Offer.

The NISRA representative suggested that if an Ex-ante was going to be carried out on DPA then a baseline for comparison would be needed and the Managing Authorities should be approached as soon as possible.

Action: NISRA

6. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on 14th May 2008. If members have ideas regarding a presentation from a project to share best practice at any of the meetings, please inform the secretariat.

TABLE OF ACTION POINTS

Issue	Action	Responsibility
Feedback from Monitoring Committees	TOR to be amended and circulated to EWG for approval	Secretariat
	SEA compliance to be a standing Agenda item	Secretariat
Implementation of cross-cutting themes	Wording in the ESF Letter of Offer to be amended to include reference to enhancing the environment	DEL
	Work Plan to be drawn up for next meeting	Chair
	Chair & OFMDFM to arrange meeting	Chair/OFMDFM rep
AOB	Managing Authorities to be approached re ex-ante of DPA	NISRA