



## ***EPA OPENING STATEMENT***

**Prepared for**

**OIREACHTAS JOINT COMMITTEE**

**ON COMMUNICATIONS, CLIMATE ACTION AND  
ENVIRONMENT**

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2018**

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***Deputy Director General  
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**Delegation**

**Ms Mary Gurrie, Programme Manager, EPA**

**Dr Michael Henry, Senior Inspector, EPA**

## **Introduction**

Firstly, I would like to thank you Chairperson, for inviting the EPA to discuss the recent RTÉ Investigates programme on illegal dumping. I am joined by Mary Gurrie, Programme Manager and Dr Mick Henry, Senior Inspector. At the end of this statement, we would be happy to answer any questions that Committee member may have.

The waste industry has seen dramatic change in how it is organised and operated in recent years, including a shift to the sector being almost exclusively operated by the private sector. The waste industry in Ireland is regulated by a wide range of bodies including the EPA, the Local Authorities and the National Transfrontier Shipment of Waste Office.

The EPA is responsible for the licensing and enforcement of 190 large scale waste management facilities. Local Authorities are responsible for 640 waste facility permits and 2,000 waste collection permits (issued by the National Waste Collection Permit Office (NWCPO) based in Offaly County Council). The import and export of waste is regulated by the National Transfrontier Shipment of Waste Office (NTFSO) based in Dublin City Council.

The EPA's most recent State of the Environment Report (2016) recognised that litter and fly-tipping remains a significant issue in Ireland. Given the potential financial gains involved, illegal dumping will always pose an opportunity for the small number of rogue operators willing to flout the law.

## **Local Authority Enforcement Performance**

In 2014, an EPA report on the performance of local authorities indicated that overall national performance by local authorities for waste enforcement was 'Below Target', with one third of local authorities failing to meet their target for inspections. This along with other factors prompted the establishment in 2015 of the three Waste Enforcement Regional Lead Authorities (WERLAs). The WERLAs, consisting of Cork County Council for the Southern region, Dublin City Council for the Eastern and Midlands Region, and Leitrim and Donegal County Councils combined for the Connacht/Ulster Region, now have responsibility for coordinating local authority waste enforcement actions within their respective regions.

The work of the WERLAs is supported by the National Waste Enforcement Steering Committee which includes representatives from a wide range of regulatory authorities including the EPA, the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation (An Garda Síochána), Revenue and the Department of Social Protection. National waste enforcement priorities are agreed by the committee and drive consistency at a central level. Addressing illegal dumping and unauthorised waste sites are National Waste Enforcement priorities for 2018.

Since the Local Authority performance framework was introduced by the EPA we have seen an improvement in the planning and implementation of inspection plans by Local Authorities. However, in order to address the national waste enforcement priorities, further improvement is required, including a greater level of targeted inspections to tackle illegal waste.

### **EPA Enforcement**

Strong and effective regulation of the waste industry by the EPA has resulted in significant and substantial improvements in how waste is managed, recovered and disposed of in Ireland. For example:

- The number of operational landfills has reduced from 125 in 1996 to just 5 fully-engineered landfills operating in 2018.
- In order to achieve compliance, it was necessary for the EPA to prosecute more than half of the 79 licensed landfills in this period.
- Waste transfer stations have been required to install the necessary infrastructure to manage and control emissions from their activities, and to process waste such that waste can be recycled and recovered in accordance with the waste hierarchy.
- Complaints about EPA licensed waste transfer stations have reduced by 70% since 2012.
- The EPA required the industry to change management practices to reduce the fire risk at waste transfer stations when fires at these facilities emerged as a significant issue.
- The EPA has secured €168 million in financial provision for EPA licensed waste facilities. This will ensure that the cost of clean-up in the event of incidents or site closure will not fall to the taxpayer.

These improvements have been achieved through extensive and targeted enforcement by the EPA. Since 2014 we have conducted almost 2000 visits to EPA waste licensed facilities including site inspections, odour assessments and monitoring visits. In the five-year period between 2009 and 2013 the waste sector accounted for 40% of legal cases taken by EPA despite holding only 15% of licences issued.

Our enforcement was further enhanced in 2016 by the introduction of the National Priority Sites for Enforcement system which targets compliance at industrial and waste facilities. This system, developed by the EPA, is publicly available and ensures greater transparency to our enforcement approach. Points are allocated to each site based on compliance data such as complaints, incidents and non-compliances over the previous six months. Waste sites dominated the list initially, however, since the list was publicly published a year ago only 3 waste sites have been on the list. This demonstrates the improvements made in the sector and the effective use of EPA powers in driving compliance.

EPA enforcement has led to demonstrable progress and improved levels of compliance in the waste industry, however further improvements and on-going vigilance is required.

Regrettably, it is the EPA's experience that only the threat of prosecutions or suspension is driving compliance for some operators, rather than a voluntary or willing approach.

### **Complaints from the Public**

Information and complaints from the public are a valuable source of information to the EPA which assist us in identifying and halting illegal activity and we encourage the public to contact us directly or through our See It Say It app. The EPA runs a 24 hour National Environmental Complaints Line (NECL) and developed an innovative app (See It? Say It!) to allow the public to easily report environmental incidents such as illegal dumping. In 2017, almost 5000 complaints were received via the NECL and See It Say It app.

### **To conclude**

We have overseen much change in the waste industry and prevented serious harm to the environment through robust and proactive action. The poor compliance record of some

facilities has required significant time and energy to ensure proper practice. Using our risk based approach the EPA has used all our powers to enforce compliance when required. Our concern always is to protect human health and the environment by ensuring that waste is collected, managed, recovered or disposed of properly. As Ireland has changed so too has the EPA in a constantly evolving and maturing space. We will continue to drive compliance and to seek improvement on behalf of all citizens.

**END**