



Agency Board Meeting

25 May 2021

Board Report Number: SEPA 14/21

Chief Executive's Report

Summary:	This report provides updates for the Board on some of the key work happening in the organisation.
Risks:	n/a
Resource and Staffing Implications:	Section 1.1 outlines how many staff have been onboarded, and 1.11 gives an update on the Flexible Deployment project.
Equalities:	n/a
Environmental and Carbon Impact:	The articles in this report in sections 2 and 3 demonstrate the ways we are continuing to protect and improve the environment.
Purpose and audience of the report:	Provide an update to Agency Board
Report Author:	Terry A'Hearn, Chief Executive Kelly Mathewson, Senior Business Consultant Craig Ballantyne, Junior Business Consultant

1. Organisation

1.1 Supporting Staff

1.1.1 Communication (Fiona Martin)

We have continued to update our staff through our regular information sessions with Strategic Leaders, all managers and all staff. Topics covered include recovery progress and the development of workstreams and specific projects. Feedback on these sessions has been positive and the decision to continue these until the end of June has been reached. The key areas of the briefings are also communicated to staff through our Business Continuity Messaging Service so that staff who may not have been able to attend a briefing are kept informed. Our Frequently Asked Questions are regularly updated to reflect the themes from sessions and issues raised by staff.

1.1.2 Access to Systems (David Pirie)

A key priority identified after the cyber-attack was to restore access to the functionality provided through the Microsoft 365 package (Outlook, Word, Teams, Excel, PowerPoint etc). This work has been progressing well and is almost complete. An on-boarding process has been developed for all staff to cover the password policy, essential training, system do's and don'ts, and information to keep our data and people safe. As of 19 May, 1,143 members of staff have completed this on-boarding process. The small number of staff who haven't been onboarded are either about to receive a SEPA lap top or are on long-term leave (e.g. maternity leave).

We have continued to keep everyone informed of progress via the aforementioned information sessions. The feedback on the rollout of access to the Microsoft 365 package and laptops has been positive with the majority of staff advising the laptops improve functionality and are helping them to progress priority areas of work.

1.1.3 Employee Assistance Programme (Fiona Martin)

Information on our Employee Assistance Programme services from Validium, along with other resources to support staff wellbeing, are promoted during the staff sessions and in staff messages. The latest report from Validium indicates that the number of support and information documents downloaded from their website by our staff in the January to March period was significantly increased compared to the same period last year. However, this has not translated into increased telephone contacts which have dropped compared to last year. The main reasons identified by Validium for any contacts are personal issues relating to coronavirus, mental health, and family/parenting issues and concerns.

1.1.4 Training events (Fiona Martin)

Starting in May, through to August, we will be running a number of external training events to help support staff with developing personal resilience. This is training that was also delivered to our staff pre-COVID and received excellent reviews. Following the roll out of Microsoft 365 and onboarding of staff, we are now in a position to offer the same training through a series of tailored events delivered in a live virtual format utilising Microsoft Teams. Managers have been asked to identify those who will most benefit from the initial training events. The first of these will take place on 18 and 25 May.

1.2 Future of Work (Fiona Martin)

Work is underway to design the first of a series of 'Future of Work (Workspaces)' surveys. This focus on beginning to understand staff workspace preference. A cross-portfolio staff user group is in place to help test ideas.

The first survey is focussed on understanding what has worked and not worked for staff in terms of workspaces during the pandemic; identifying SEPA work style profiles which reflect the style of work the organisation needs staff to adopt for particular jobs or tasks; and staff's initial thoughts on workspaces preferences. The team is also focussed on consolidating a clear understanding of our current position (estate, net zero etc) and what other organisations are doing. This will be used to inform Agency Management Team and Board decision-making.

1.3 Safe & Compliant Buildings (Fiona Martin)

We have confirmed with staff that, in line with Scottish Government advice, working from home will remain the default for the majority of our staff until at least the end of June, at which time it will be reviewed. Our Angus Smith Building is COVID-secure with priority essential services operating there when authorised. The laboratories in our Aberdeen office are being made COVID-secure specifically to support the bathing water season and an expansion of our work on wastewater COVID testing. All our buildings are being statutorily maintained and safe exceptional access to collect kit, equipment or undertake short term activities in support of priority essential services, field work and our recovery is in place.

1.4 Keeping our staff safe (Fiona Martin)

Critical COVID guidance to keep staff safe while working in the field, laboratories, COVID-secure buildings and at home is in place and accessible by staff. Managers are assessing the training and competency of their staff before staff are deployed. First Aid training courses have been held and swift water training is scheduled in June and July. The cross-portfolio approach to this work is ensuring that we are building solid Health and Safety culture foundations with shared ownership and responsibility for Health and Safety across the organisation.

We have established a cross-portfolio senior leadership group and delivery team to recover key Health and Safety guidance, policies and risk assessments and identify and schedule related training to keep our staff safe while undertaking priority essential services. A significant number of key policies, guidance and risk assessments have been recovered.

1.5 Flexible Deployment (Jo Green)

We have implemented a flexible deployment project that enables those parts of the business with spare capacity to make a significant contribution to those projects that need additional resources. This approach has now successfully deployed resources to twelve priority projects and further projects are in the pipeline. This process is proving to be quick and simple, while also providing new opportunities for our staff and ensuring that their talents and experience are employed where they are needed most.

1.6 Agresso Project

Financial Services (Stuart McGregor)

Significant progress has been made in rebuilding core finance services.

All prioritised Finance staff have received SEPA laptops and been given access to their mailboxes. Most staff have undertaken their Angus Smith Building COVID familiarisation tour. This allows them to work in a COVID safe environment on the core elements of the Agresso system which have been built and put into a live environment.

We are currently working with colleagues across the business and from email boxes to identify unpaid supplier invoices and process them as soon as possible.

We plan to issue briefings on how staff can make requisitions and book hire cars etc, and colleagues have volunteered assistance through the flexible working project to make bookings through supplier portals for staff.

Payroll (Stuart McGregor and Fiona Martin)

Progress with the rebuild of the Agresso system has continued with core payroll data being updated for the current financial year. We have established the necessary data to run payroll. The Agresso payroll system has been built and been tested and the core payroll system will go live in May.

1.7 Processing of Regulatory Fees (Stuart McGregor)

Work is also underway to carry out our standard annual recovery of costs via fee charging. A formal project board is being set up to oversee this work. We've undertaken some manual invoicing and put in place temporary arrangements to issue Special Waste Consignment Note numbers and collect payments. The online web-based payment system for customers is being developed and should be available by the end of May. We are also developing data and systems to allow a billing run in August and September. The billing run accounts for £36m of our income and requires input from all parts of the organisation, in particular on the setting up and maintenance of good quality data to allow bills to be sent to the correct person for the right activities.

1.8 2021-2022 Operating Budget (Stuart McGregor)

Now the staff payroll data exercise has been completed, we will be working on the detailed 2021-2022 operating budget working closely with staff across the business. This will be presented at the June Strategy Board meeting. Since the cyberattack, the Chief Officer Finance and the Head of Finance have, outside Board meetings, briefed the Board Audit Committee Chair on financial status and will continue to do so over the next few months.

1.9 2020-2021 Annual Accounts (Stuart McGregor)

We have started working on 2020-2021 annual accounts and, with our colleagues in Business Planning and Communications, we will be preparing the annual report for 2020-2021 in the next few months.

1.10 Procurement (Stuart McGregor)

Critical supplier contracts, and utility bills have been paid. From the start of May we have been able to issue supplier orders and make supplier payments using our new financial system. We are working to identify any unpaid supplier invoices.

1.11 EU Exit (Jo Green)

We are currently carrying out an internal debriefing and lessons learned exercise on our work on EU Exit. We went through various phases of preparation over several years, reflecting the changing timescales for the UK leaving the EU and uncertainty over what the practical real-world impacts would be. This culminated in the end of the transition period at the end of December 2020.

Our preparations and scenario planning meant that we were in a stronger position to respond when the pandemic hit last year. Also, when the cyber-attack hit, the network of staff that had been established on EU Exit were able to continue to operate to monitor developments and stand ready to respond. The arrangements we developed for EU Exit are also helping to inform our work on the operational and resilience aspect of preparations for COP26.

1.12 Scottish Government (Jo Green)

We are currently working closely with colleagues in the Scottish Government to provide regular updates on building back our services and the current and planned status. This work is helping to ensure shared awareness of key issues and how they are being managed while also ensuring that our work to deliver our environmental priorities continues.

1.13 Sustainable Growth Agreements (Jo Green)

We are working on a range of Sustainable Growth Agreements with businesses and organisations which we aim to sign and launch over the coming months in the lead up to COP26 in Glasgow in November. The first Agreements are planned for launch in June.

1.14 One Health Breakthrough Partnership (David Pirie)

SEPA is a member of the One Health Breakthrough Partnership (OHBP), a cross-sector multi-agency group that is providing leadership in the field of sustainable healthcare with reference to water and pharmaceuticals stewardship (see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-51007527>). The partnership (which includes NHS Highland) has worked with Caithness General Hospital in Wick to help it become the first hospital in the world to receive Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) certification in recognition of its work on reducing the levels of pharmaceuticals in wastewater arising from the site (see <https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/News/Pages/CaithnessGeneralHospitalsecuresaworldfirstrforpioneeringenvironmentalwork.aspx>). This case study has been published on the AWS website and the OHBP is contributing to the further development of the AWS certification scheme (see <https://a4ws.org/resources/aws-standard-implementation-and-certification->

[case-studies/](#)). Furthermore, the partnership is now working with other hospitals in Scotland to help them improve aspects of their water and pharmaceuticals stewardship.

2. Regulation

2.1 Mossmorran Update (Ian Buchanan)

In early April, the Fife Ethylene Plant was shut down for a major investment and maintenance programme. ExxonMobil Chemical Limited proactively communicated with the local communities surrounding the plant. We had engaged with both companies on the run up to the shut down and we monitored it. There was some minor flaring associated with the shut-down but it did not result in a significant impact on the surrounding communities. This investment and maintenance programme is expected to improve operational reliability and reduce the frequency of flaring. The works being carried out include the installation of a new elevated flare tip, which is designed to reduce both noise and vibration. This is a significant milestone in the improvements we require to reduce the impact of flaring on local communities.

2.2 Bathing Waters (David Pirie)

In the year of Scotland's Coasts and Waters, the expectation is for increased staycations and for the trend in wild or open water swimming to grow in the 2021 Bathing Season.

This makes our preparations to monitor, report and carry out compliance activity around bathing waters even more important this year. This will include attention being focussed on improving water quality at the former bathing water at Fisherrow Sands.

The 2021 bathing season is due to commence on 1 June this year and will be a normal length season compared to last year's reduced period caused by the impacts of COVID.

We are currently preparing to ensure that we are fully compliant with our duties as outlined in regulations, and we aim to provide water quality classification by the end of the season.

A particular priority this season is Ayr (South beach) and avoiding deterioration at other locations. Engagement is being undertaken with key stakeholders, including local authorities and the livestock sector. Substantial investments have been made by farmers in their slurry storage systems in recent years and good practices will need to be maintained to reduce pollution risks over the summer months.

Progress of the planned improvement actions by our regulated operators are mostly all delivered and ready to deliver operational benefit. We have established monthly meetings with Scottish Water. With the reduction in COVID restrictions on our field activities, our pre-season checks and regulatory environmental protection work are well underway. Our current priority is to re-establish communication with our bathing water signage, this is required for our statutory public information system.

2.3 Waste Crime (Ian Buchanan)

Specialist enforcement staff have been involved in several multi agency partnership initiatives. These include:

- Enforcement officers taking part in a multi-agency led Operation, alongside Police Scotland, British Transport Police & Trading Standards. We conducted visits to 16 metal sites over three days covering three local authority areas. We were checking for signs of pollution, stockpiling of waste (e.g. tyres) and Duty of Care checks. One site was found to be unauthorised and this will be followed up, as well as compliance advice and guidance provided to the other sites which are licensed by us.
- We have responded to reports of trailers filled with waste being abandoned in Central Scotland, we are liaising with the local authority and Police to progress examination of evidence found.
- We have been liaising with Police, Fire Service & Local Authority to use a multi-agency approach to tackle an illegal operator who is carrying out persistent unlicensed burning of waste in the North of Scotland.

2.4 Sites of Community Impact (Ian Buchanan)

Over the last year we have developed a more planned, targeted and cross organisational approach to tackling sites which impact on communities largely through noise or odour. This has enabled better sharing of best practice, greater focus and greater use of other influences. The plans for these sites have recently been refreshed and their implementation will be a priority over the period ahead.

During the past year, this approach has been used at several sites in the Falkirk, Alloa, Stirling and Perth (FASP) Environmental Performance team area. This has resulted in a significant drop in the number of complaints at several sites. In one instance, the site officer recently received an email from a resident to thank him for his efforts on site, commenting that there has been 'an amazing improvement' and asking that we pass on his thanks to the site for the work they've done.

2.5 Tarbolton Landfill (Ian Buchanan)

We would not usually take on nor manage abandoned sites, but we have agreed with the Scottish Government that we will in this specific case, with funding provided by the Scottish Government, initiate the first phase of environmental works at Tarbolton landfill on a time-limited basis. The first phase, part of a longer effort to remediate and restore the site, will focus on the priority action of addressing the management of leachate (waste water) from the site. The work, will be conducted by contractors later this year. This will reduce the risk and impact on nearby watercourses as well as reduce the odours experienced by the community.

In addition to this important step, we will continue to engage with Scottish Government, South Ayrshire Council and NHS Ayrshire and Arran to identify arrangements for the medium to long term management, restoration and aftercare of the site.

2.6 Permitting (Ian Buchanan)

We have made some excellent progress in the last few weeks. A more agile way of working has been implemented with groups of staff from across the agency quickly supporting permit determinations. Permits from the backlog (received before the cyber attack) are being issued as are time critical urgent applications where possible. Some groups are now at the stage of accepting new applications.

The groups are also tasked with reviewing existing policies and procedures with a view of streamlining the determination process to deliver organisational efficiencies. The following permitting groups are now up and running:

Cell	determining backlog applications	Accepting new apps
Aquaculture	Yes	All applications.
CAR Engineering	Yes	All applications.
Water Resources	Yes	All applications.
Point Source	Yes	Urgent applications only at this time.
WML	Yes	All applications.
WMX	Yes	All applications.
PPC B	Yes	All applications.
PPC A Intensive Agriculture	Yes	Liaison with the sector over the submission of applications is underway.
PPC A	Yes	Urgent applications only at this time.

In addition to the above we have an interim online system that issues existing small sewage discharges (septic tanks) and Waste Carrier licences.

A new advertising hub was launched to allow us to consult on applications under CAR and PPC and have begun [advertising aquaculture applications](#) with others to follow soon. This is more straightforward than previous arrangements.

2.7 Regulatory Information and Data (Ian Buchanan)

We have created web-based Geographical Information System (GIS) applications that harvest published data from SEPA's website and partners in order to provide access to:

- basic authorisation data; and
- basic environmental data.

In addition the Environmental data app provides access to data on sampling sites, classification data and protected area definitions. This is a real step forward being easier to use and available remotely.

2.8 Strategic & Regulatory Initiatives (Ian Buchanan)

The VIBES Scottish Environment Business Awards will be launched in May 2021. Despite the challenges of COVID and the cyber-attack, partners were kept on board and have now approved plans for this year's scheme. A call to the business community will take place shortly in search of examples of actions that have gone beyond environmental compliance and resulted in positive outcomes for the economy and society.

Working closely with the Scottish Government, Enterprise Agencies and other public partners, the focus of the 2021 Awards will be to maximise opportunities to integrate with COP26. In particular, this year VIBES will be looking to reward and recognise businesses that have made outstanding progress towards achieving 'net zero'. Through the production of case studies from top entries this year and various other dissemination actions, VIBES will help support a green recovery. Plans are underway for a high-profile event to announce winners and celebrate business in October 2021.

2.9 Water & Planning - Land use planning – triage update (John Kenny)

We have developed a triage framework to rationalise and prioritise the planning consultation backlog which has accumulated since the cyberattack.

The framework was launched in late March as planning staff came back online. The approach relies on close dialogue with planning authorities by holding triage meetings. At the end of week commencing 3 May, 33 out of 39 local authorities will have had their first of these triage meetings. Casework advice is being provided within the meetings, while those cases which require more detailed consideration in-house are being prioritised. Feedback from our staff and local authority colleagues has been very positive to date, and we intend to continue with this more efficient and collaborative approach going forward.

2.10 Energy - Decommissioning Regulatory Hub (John Kenny)

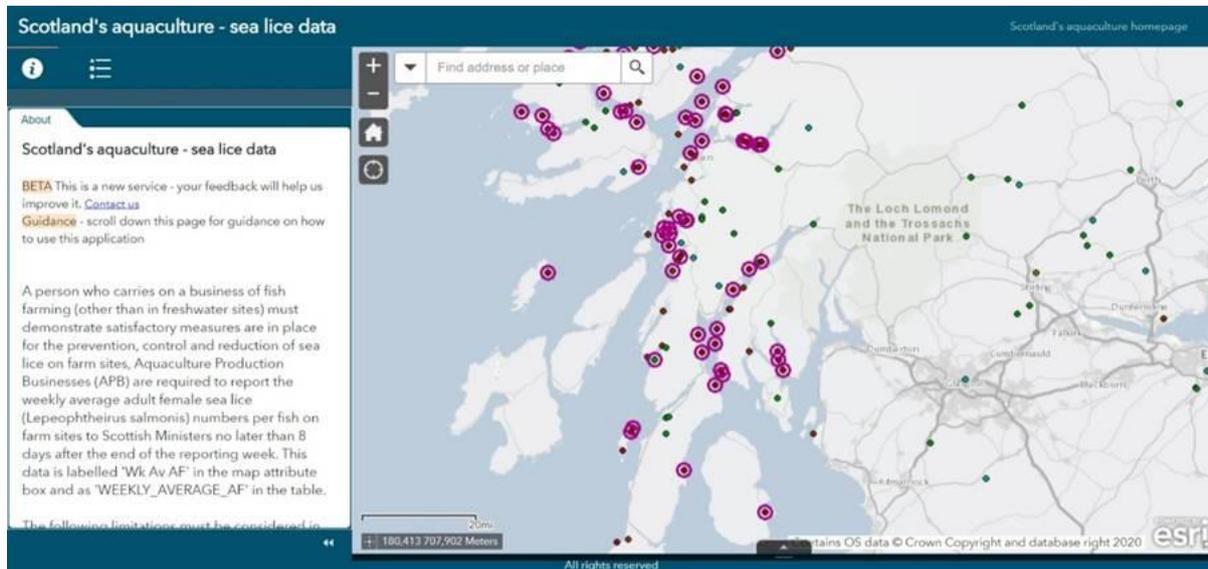
Each week between 20 April and 11 May 2021 the Oil and Gas Decommissioning Regulatory Hub (Decomreghub) is rolling out a series of joint lunch and learn events to the staff of the key organisations responsible for regulating the oil and gas decommissioning sector. As well as SEPA, these include the Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment and Decommissioning, the Oil and Gas Authority, and the Health and Safety Executive. The intention is to promote efficiency and collaboration through a wider understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the Regulatory stakeholders. On 4 May, we will provide an overview with the aim to further facilitate effective environmental regulation and promotion of circular economy opportunities.

2.11 Scotland's Aquaculture Website (David Pirie)

On 16 April, publication of weekly sea lice counts from marine finfish farms began for the first time. Sea lice from marine finfish farms can interact with, and harm, wild Atlantic salmon.

The data is being published on Scotland's Aquaculture Website on a new, interactive mapping tool developed by our Geographic Information System Development Team with support from our Aquaculture Website leads. The work was undertaken in close liaison with Marine Scotland.

In the first two weeks following its launch, over 200 views of the mapping tool were recorded.



Why have we done it?

Under legislation introduced last year, operators of marine finfish farms must report sea lice counts to Marine Scotland.

Marine Scotland identified publication of this information as the top priority for the development of the Website.

The use of the new, interactive mapping tool for this application will also provide a test bed for the wider development and improvement of the website and for other applications.

About Scotland's Aquaculture Website

[Scotland's Aquaculture website](#), which is part of Scotland's Environment Web, provides a wide range of information about Scotland's shellfish and finfish aquaculture sectors.

The information on the Website is provided by The Crown Estate Scotland, Food Standards Scotland, Marine Scotland and SEPA.

The website is widely used by communities, retail buyers, operators and others as a trusted source of information about the environmental performance of finfish farms.

2.12 Waste Water Monitoring for Sars-CoV-2 RNA (David Pirie)

We continue to work with Scottish Water to provide a monitoring service for the genetic signal (RNA) from COVID-19 infection detected in wastewater.

For the week beginning 3 May, Scottish Water plan to collect 206 samples from 103 locations across Scotland – covering roughly 80% of the population.

The results are publicly available [on our website](#). We have also developed a more in-depth tool which is available to Public Health and Health Policy experts. Working with Biomathematics and Statistics Scotland, we have developed an algorithm has to convert wastewater results into case numbers. This data is provided to Public Health Scotland who are including it on their community testing dashboard. We are currently investigating the extent to which we can detect the likelihood of ‘Variants of Concern’ within these samples to further inform the public health response.

COVID Waste Testing Waste Guidance (Ian Buchanan)

As part of our COVID waste contingencies work we have been providing waste management guidance to support the roll out of COVID testing. This commenced in November 2020 and the guidance has been updated when required to reflect the evolving needs of Scottish Government, the organisations delivering the tests, the care home and healthcare sectors, and the waste management industry. The latest version was issued at the end of March and our supportive approach to the development of the guidance has been welcomed by stakeholders.