

COMMITTEE ON MEDICAL ASPECTS OF RADIATION IN THE ENVIRONMENT

130th COMARE MEETING, Thursday 18th November 2021.

Online meeting

Present

Chair: Professor John Harrison

Members: Professor Frank de Vocht
Dr Mark Hill
Dr Ray Kemp
Dr Colin Martin
Dr Susan McCready-Shea
Dr Richard McNally
Dr Teik Chooi Oh
Professor David Read
Professor Graham Smith
Professor James Smith
Professor Malcolm Sperrin
Professor David Sutton
Dr Chris Westcott

Assessors: DHSC
EA
FSA
NDA
ONR
SEPA
SG
UKHSA
WG

Representative: UKHSA HPRU

Secretariat: Dr Simon Mann (UKHSA)
Dr Emma Petty (UKHSA)
Mrs Samantha Watson (UKHSA)

Open Session

1. Welcome & declarations

- 1.1 The Chair opened the 130th meeting, welcoming members and assessors to the fifth online meeting for COMARE, and his first meeting as Chair.
- 1.2 The Chair noted that due to the online format the meeting was not being opened to observers to ensure meeting security. The meeting would still be split into an open and a closed session due to the minuting requirements of specific items. The Chair reminded members of the online meeting protocols.
- 1.3 The Chair welcomed three of the four new COMARE members (Dr Susan McCready-Shea, Professor David Read and Dr Teik Chooi Oh) to their first meeting. He welcomed the new NDA assessor and the representative from FSA. The Chair also welcomed the HPRU Knowledge Mobilisation Manager from UKHSA.
- 1.4 Apologies were received from Professor Mireille Toledano, Professor Stewart Martin, Professor Lesley Rhodes, Professor Roger Taylor and assessors from DforE, FSA, EA, HSE, NI DH and NHS Scotland. The Chair reminded assessors that substitutes may attend the meeting.
- 1.5 The Chair advised members that this would have been the last meeting for Professor Roger Taylor, but he was unable to attend this meeting. Professor Taylor will complete 10 years on the Committee at the end of the month. The Chair noted thanks for Professor Taylor's work on COMARE.
- 1.6 The Chair reminded members of the private nature of the Committee's proceedings and that papers marked "For Members Use Only" should be kept in members' own hands. Members were also reminded that they should disclose any relevant interests to the Chair.

2. Minutes of the 129th COMARE meeting

i. Minutes, actions & matters arising

- 2.1 The Chair asked for comments or corrections to the minutes from the 129th meeting. The minutes were agreed with no amendments. The Chair noted that the minutes of the open session will be posted on the COMARE webpage. The minutes of the closed session will remain confidential.

[Action: Secretariat]
- 2.2 The Chair noted that an action was previously placed on BEIS to provide details of the consultation on the draft policy on radioactive substances. The BEIS assessor was not present at this meeting to provide an update.
- 2.3 The Chair noted that the 127th meeting minutes mentioned the forthcoming HSE EMF report. The HSE assessor was not present at this meeting to provide an update.

3. Committee matters

i. Membership

- 3.1 The Chair informed members that the 2021 recruitment campaign successfully appointed four new members to COMARE. Dr Mann formally introduced the three new members

present at this meeting: Professor David Read, Dr Susan McCready-Shea and Dr Teik Chooi Oh. The Chair thanked new members for joining the committee.

- 3.2 The Chair noted that no appointments were made for the posts of Public Health Physician or Clinical Oncologist, and that these will be included in the next recruitment round in 2022.

ii. Correspondence

- 3.3 The Chair informed members that one FOI request had been received by the secretariat since the last meeting. The request regarded EU Electronic Communications Code 2018 Directives retained in UK legislation post Brexit and the response was made that COMARE does not hold that information. No external submissions have been received for the attention of the committee.

- 3.4 The Chair noted that COMARE's submission on the revised Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees (CoPSAC) was made on 5th October 2021. A copy of the submission had been circulated to members. There is no information on when the outcome of the consultation or the revised guidance will be published.

- 3.5 The Chair commented on two expectations on committees from the revised CoPSAC. Firstly, that committees are expected to act proactively in setting their own agenda as well as responding to requests from their sponsors. Secondly, that SAC chairs should form relationships with other committee chairs. The Chair has already met with the Chair of the Committee on Radioactive Waste Management (CoRWM), a BEIS advisory committee, and will do the same with other relevant DHSC committees.

- 3.6 The Chair informed members that there has been no update on the Goldacre Review to date.

- 3.7 The Chair reminded members that a response was submitted on 22nd October 2021 on the revised FSA risk assessment on the radiological risk to public health from consuming Japanese food imported into the UK if the 100 Bq/kg maximum permitted limit on radiocaesium for food imported from Japan was removed. The response noted that the original comments provided by COMARE had, in general, been addressed in the revised version and that the analyses supported the conclusions of the risk assessment. The over-complex nature of the document was noted. The FSA assessor reported that once discussions about accessibility and confidentiality were complete the assessment would be published online. It is anticipated that this will be within the next week or so, and members will be provided with the online link¹. COMARE will be acknowledged in the publication.

[Action: FSA & the Secretariat]

iii. Programme and promotion of COMARE's work

- 3.8 The Chair reminded members that the COMARE annual work programme is drafted by the Chair and DHSC, and then approved by members at the first meeting of the year. Members are encouraged to put forward topics which may be of interest to the Committee and to DHSC.

- 3.9 The Chair asked members for their thoughts on the promotion of COMARE's work, potentially through the wider distribution of COMARE reports and targeted presentations at

¹ [Quantitative risk assessment of radiocaesium in Japanese foods | Food Standards Agency](#) published on 10th December 2021.

scientific meetings. The production of shorter reports in addition to the substantive reports, and summaries/reviews of reports for journals was suggested.

- 3.10 Members felt that promotion of COMARE's work was an important issue and the Committee should consider the audience(s) to be reached. Engagement with the Science Media Centre (SMC) was suggested. The Secretariat reported that the SMC had been used successfully in the past for the launch of several COMARE reports. It was noted that it would be good to form a relationship in advance of any emergency situation arising.
- 3.11 Work planning was discussed, with the suggestion of horizon scanning for upcoming topics to allow planning for future engagement and presentations.
- 3.12 The Chair hoped to talk to each member individually over the next few months about thoughts on COMARE and promotion of its work.

[Action: The Chair]

4. Working group reports:

i. Contaminations Working Group (CWG)

- 4.1 The Chair, as Chair of the CWG, informed members that the CWG met on 17th November 2021 and introduced a new member of the CWG, Professor James Smith. The Chair brought members' attention to the particle updates received by the CWG and briefing notes from both EA and SEPA. Since the particles update was circulated, a further particle has been detected on Dounreay West Foreshore. The Chair gave a summary of topics discussed at the CWG meeting, which included remediation at Dalgety Bay; the monitoring at Dounreay and Sellafield; the Sellafield notification and intervention plan; an ecological assessment of the risk to wildlife from Sellafield particles and the leak from the Magnox swarf storage silo at Sellafield. An update on shaft remediation at Dounreay has been offered to the CWG by the NDA and is expected in due course.
- 4.2 The EA assessor provided an update on the Sellafield Beach Monitoring Programme. He reported that monitoring was on target, with 83 out of 105 hectares completed by the end of September. A total of 69 particles and two larger objects were recovered during this period. An initial high find-rate of particles on St Bees beach this year was due to turnover of sand from storm events and the find rate has now returned to a more normal level. Following queries from CWG members on the impact of COVID on the use of the beaches, the EA assessor confirmed that Cefas had reviewed this in their habit survey and the report was provided by EA and circulated to the CWG by the secretariat.
- 4.3 The EA assessor reported that the leak from the Magnox swarf storage silo at Sellafield is ongoing at an estimated rate of around 2.5 m³ per day. This has stabilised since October 2020 and is still closely monitored. Permit improvement requirements from the EA are in place, together with regulatory issues from ONR. The first submissions for a programme of work to find the cause of the leak and options to stop or minimise it have been received. Main submissions on options will follow next year. The EA assessor noted that monitoring currently extends both to the site boundary and offsite. The NDA assessor responded that the NDA would continue to cooperate with the regulators and to work to implement the best options in a safe manner. The EA assessor also commented on the detection of some elevated levels of more mobile radionuclides, such as tritium and chlorine-36, in the closest groundwater boreholes. It is too early to determine any trends in concentrations of these

radionuclides. The EA assessor answered questions posed by the CWG and confirmed that chlorine-36 is one of the radionuclides routinely monitored on the site.

- 4.4 The SEPA assessor noted that the update presented at the 129th COMARE meeting included background information on Dounreay and Dalgety Bay.
- 4.5 The SEPA assessor gave an update on the monitoring programme at Dounreay. Beach monitoring is back to normal following the lockdowns linked to the COVID pandemic. One additional particle of a minor category has been found on Sandside beach since the last meeting. In 2021 there have been a total of 4 particles found on Sandside Beach and one of the Dounreay Foreshore. There was a beach trial in August at both Sandside Beach and Dounreay Foreshore to compare the Sellafield Fiddler system against the Dounreay Synergy system, working under Dounreay conditions. The results of this have been discussed by the Particle Retrieval Advisory Group (Dounreay) (PRAG(D)), but the final report is not available.
- 4.6 The SEPA assessor provided an update on the remediation work at Dalgety Bay, which started in May 2021. This involves extraction of material from the beach, screening and removal of asbestos, radiological screening and removal of radium-226 particles, replacing treated material on the beach and covering with a geotextile membrane and graded rock armour. Verification monitoring will continue for two years. Signage remains in place along with demarcation of the high activity area and there is a Food and Environment Protection Act (FEPA) ban in place around the bay. SEPA will continue to undertake drone surveys for two years to monitor the coastline.
- 4.7 The SEPA assessor confirmed that progress with the remediation had been slow this year. SEPA have been on site every day and lessons learned will be taken forward for next year's work. They will liaise with MoD and the contractors to implement required changes. The SEPA assessor agreed to include a note on the end-state of the remediation and clarify the perceived risk to the public.

[Action: SEPA]

ii. Authorisations Working Group

- 4.8 Professor Sutton, the AWG Chair, reported that there has been one application since the last meeting, a consultation from EA for an application from HMNB Devonport to vary its radioactive substances approval. A best available techniques assessment of three options and an impact assessment were provided for the consultation, showing negligible impact from a well-managed implementation of the best option. AWG responded to the EA on 21st July 2021 to seek assurance that the option appraisal and current ability to pump from the pit will be reinforced in their approval.

5. Information papers.

- 5.1 The Chair brought members' attention to the twelve information papers and two digital links. He drew attention to papers by Clement et al on keeping ICRP recommendations fit for purpose; Wakeford on overviewing epidemiological studies of nuclear workers; and Clero et al on cancer risk from chronic exposures to chemicals and radiation. The Chair asked for comments from members on the papers circulated for this meeting and on the usefulness of having information papers provided. Members noted that the Clero et al paper provided the benefit of being able to put toxicological and radiological risks together, particularly as perceptions of these risk are often different.

- 5.2 Members noted that a paper by Belpomme et al includes several authors from anti EMF/anti 5G activist groups and can be seen as a defensive response to work suggesting that previous biomarkers studies published by Belpomme are flawed.
- 5.3 Attention was drawn to a paper by Yoshida & Coates. Members commented that while COMARE deals with facts, consideration of perceptions may be increasingly relevant in the UK where populations may have low degrees of trust in authority figures, which can limit the impact of the scientific community. It was suggested that the difference between fact and perception could be discussed with other scientific committees with a view to agreeing the use of common terminology, e.g. the meaning of significant and trivial. Similarly, common ways of explaining risk should be clear and consistent.
- 5.4 A number of members commented that it is useful to receive the information papers and that it provides exposure to papers that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. The selection of papers to be circulated was discussed by members, including the need to show a range of views on the topics covered by COMARE's remit. Members were reminded that they can recommend papers for circulation to the Secretariat.

[Action: Members]

6 UKHSA Updates

- 6.1 The UKHSA assessor advised members that the health protection functions from Public Health England (PHE) transitioned into the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) on 1st October 2021. The structure has been slightly changed, with a deputy director tier added within the radiation, chemical and environmental hazards directorate, with appointments as interim positions up to April 2022.

i. EMF and health

- 6.2 The UKHSA assessor provided a summary of the briefing note supplied to members on EMF and health, which covered the following topics:

International developments:

- WHO and IARC developments
- ICNIRP Guidelines
- EU Commission position on 5G
- Reports from other countries
 - Australia – ARPANSA RF Guidelines (February 2021)
 - France – ANSES 5G Report (April 2021)
 - Sweden – SSM 15th Annual Report (May 2021)

UK developments:

- EMF-related Policy Activities
 - Ofcom
 - Health and Safety Executive
- Research activities related to EMF and health
 - Airwave Health Monitoring Study
 - COSMOS – cohort study of mobile phone use and health

- SCAMP – study of cognition, adolescents and mobile phones
- UKHSA research activities (including EU FP7 EMF projects and Smart meter project)
- Areas of public and occupational concern and national responses (including exposure to radio waves from 5G technologies)

ii Radon

6.3 The UKHSA assessor provided a summary of the briefing note supplied to members on radon. Work on radon has continued on a “business as usual” basis, while following COVID-secure procedures, through the COVID-19 pandemic and demand for services has remained high throughout 2021.

6.4 Members were provided with an update on the following issues:

Recent programmes and publications

- Work with HSE
- Targeted radon campaigns and public information
- Professional training
- Laboratory services
- International collaborations and standards

Forthcoming publications

- Work programmes
- Publications

6.5 The Chair noted a reference to there being no change to the use of new radon dose coefficients. HSE agreed to supply an additional note on this topic. Members were informed that the radon map had been updated with more information from the British Geological Survey and changes to the presentation. Members discussed the impact of the COVID pandemic on radon exposure, with more people working from home.

[Action: HSE]

7 AOB

7.1 No additional items were raised.

Close of meeting

The Chair thanked members for their attendance and contributions to the meeting. The next COMARE meeting will be held on Friday 11th March 2022, the format will be confirmed in due course. The meeting was then declared closed at 12.45pm.

[Action: Secretariat]

Abbreviations

ARPANSA	Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency
AWG	Authorisations Working Group
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
CoPSAC	Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees
CORWM	Committee on Radioactive Waste Management
CWG	Contaminations Working Group
DforE	Department for Education
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care
EA	Environment Agency
EMF	Electromagnetic fields
EU	European Union
FEPA	Food and Environment Protection Act
FOI	Freedom of information
FSA	Food Standards Agency
FSS	Food Standards Scotland
HMNB	Her Majesty's Naval Base
HPRU	Health Protection Research Unit
HSE	Health & Safety Executive
IARC	International Agency for Research on Cancer
ICNIRP	International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection
NDA	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
NI DH	Department of Health for Northern Ireland
ONR	Office for Nuclear Regulation
PRAG(D)	Particles Retrieval Advisory Group (Dounreay)
SAHSU	Small Area Health Statistics Unit
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
SG	Scottish Government
SMC	Science Media Centre
SSM	Swedish Radiation Safety Authority
UKHSA	UK Health Security Agency
WG	Welsh Government
WHO	World Health Organisation