

# COMARE – Annual Report 2021

## 1. What we do / our role

The Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) is an expert scientific advisory committee for the Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) that provides independent advice to the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations on a wide range of public health issues associated with radioactivity and radiation.

The main committee meets three times a year and the minutes of these meetings are published on the [COMARE webpage](#). COMARE's working groups and specialist subcommittees meet more often to consider evidence and prepare materials to support the main Committee. Much of the work is done outside the formal meetings.

The main Committee hears, considers, questions and discusses reports from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), the Environment Agency (EA), and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) among others. The committee opens its face-to-face meetings to observers and receives submissions from third parties.

## 2. Membership

At the close of 2020, the Committee consisted of thirteen appointed expert members, one appointed lay member and three vacancies. The appointment of three new members (two expert members, Professor Jim Smith and Professor Malcolm Sperrin, and one lay member, Dr Chris Westcott) had been agreed in 2020 and these members started their terms of office in January 2021.

An open recruitment round was undertaken in the latter part of the year for six positions and appointments were agreed for four new expert members to join the Committee in November 2021 - Professor David Read, Professor Lesley Rhodes, Dr Susan McCready-Shea and Dr Teik Chooi Oh. Two expert posts remained unfilled. The next recruitment round is planned during 2022.

October 2021 saw the retirement of Dr Chris Gibson as the Chair of COMARE, completing six years in this role. During this time, Dr Gibson introduced lay members onto the Committee and opened up face-to-face meetings to observers. Professor John Harrison was appointed as the new Chair from November 2021. Professor Roger Taylor also ended his term of office during 2021, having completed ten years on the Committee.

At the close of 2021, the Committee comprised of seventeen expert members, two lay members and had two vacancies.

Expert members are drawn from a broad range of scientific and medical disciplines to support COMARE's technical work. Lay members have a specific role to represent the public interest aspects of the Committee's work and to advise accordingly. All members have equal status on the Committee.

### 3. COMARE Meetings

In 2021, the main Committee meetings were:

- 128<sup>th</sup> meeting – 11<sup>th</sup> March
- 129<sup>th</sup> meeting – 8<sup>th</sup> July
- 130<sup>th</sup> meeting – 18<sup>th</sup> November

All three meetings were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and were held using an online platform.

*Subcommittees, working groups and working parties:*

The Cardio-/Cerebrovascular Effects Subcommittee (CCES), held a preliminary meeting in February 2021 to plan the project. This was followed by two further meetings in 2021. All meetings were held online due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- 1<sup>st</sup> CCES meeting – 30<sup>th</sup> March
- 2<sup>nd</sup> CCES meeting – 27<sup>th</sup> July

The standing Contaminations Working Group (CWG) completed its two annual meetings. Both meetings were conducted using an online platform.

- 17<sup>th</sup> CWG meeting – 10<sup>th</sup> March
- 18<sup>th</sup> CWG meeting – 17<sup>th</sup> November

### 4. Progress on 2020-2021 work programme

*PUBLICATIONS:*

COMARE published its 19<sup>th</sup> Report ([Radiation doses in interventional radiology: issues for patients and staff within the UK](#)) in August 2021. The report provides an introduction to interventional radiology (IR) and an overview of the benefits and risks associated with IR procedures, and of the wide range of radiation protection measures to minimise risks to both patient and staff. COMARE makes eleven recommendations in the report.

*SUBCOMMITTEES:*

*Cardio-/cerebrovascular effects of ionising radiation*

There is increasing evidence of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular effects from radiation exposure. In 2020, COMARE established a subcommittee to investigate the potential health impacts that may be caused by low doses of radiation and to advise DHSC on possible implications for the UK. In 2021, following a preliminary planning meeting, two meetings were held to define and initiate work on the project.

## WORKING GROUPS:

### *Contaminations*

The Contaminations Working Group (CWG) met twice in 2021 and considered updates on two beach monitoring programmes: at Dounreay in Scotland and Sellafield in Cumbria, noting the radioactive particles detected at each site. The Working Group also followed the monitoring work and remediation programme being undertaken at Dalgety Bay in the Firth of Forth.

Disruptions were noted in all these programmes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Working Group updated the main Committee on its discussions.

### *Authorisations*

The Authorisations Working Group (AWG) is responsible for COMARE's standing commitment to advise on discharges of radioactive materials as and when applications are received for new or revised authorisations. The Working Group responds to relevant consultations on draft authorisations and keeps the main Committee aware of its proceedings. The AWG continued to conduct its work online throughout the year.

In 2021, the Group responded to a consultation from the Environment Agency regarding an application to vary the Radioactive Substances Approval at Her Majesty's Naval Base Devonport.

## 5. Requests for advice

In March 2021, COMARE received a request from the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to review an FSA risk assessment on the radiological risk to public health from the removal of a 100 Bq/kg maximum permitted limit on radiocaesium (Caesium-137) for food imported from Japan and consumed in the UK. The limit was introduced in the retained EU Regulation 2016/62 which imposed special conditions governing controls of the import of food from Japan following the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant (FDNPP) accident.

COMARE comments were taken into account and the [risk assessment](#) was published by the FSA in December 2021.

## 6. Additional items under consideration by the committee

- The Committee received and considered two updates from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) on radon issues. The first was delivered at its 128<sup>th</sup> meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021, having been postponed from November 2020. The second was delivered at its 130<sup>th</sup> meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021. COMARE also considered an annual update from UKHSA on electromagnetic fields (EMFs) at the 130<sup>th</sup> meeting.
- COMARE continued to work with the Small Area Health Statistics Unit (SAHSU), based in Imperial College, London, on the surveillance of childhood cancer incidence in the vicinity of nuclear installations in Great Britain. Updates were provided to COMARE throughout the year.

## 7. Correspondence

The Committee received and responded to correspondence regarding public concerns on issues of relevance to COMARE's work. In 2020 there were five detailed emails that required a response. The secretariat took primary responsibility for responses, referring to the Chair as necessary and keeping the Committee informed.

The Committee received and responded to one Freedom of Information request in 2021. 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 this information.

## 8. Representation

Professor Stewart Martin continued as COMARE's representative on the Public and Community Oversight Group (PCOG) for the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Health Protection Research Unit (HPRU) in Chemical & Radiation Threats and Hazards.

## 9. Items of published information provided to members

In addition to the primary papers circulated for discussion at each meeting, COMARE members are provided with copies of relevant peer-reviewed publications and digital links to reports from professional bodies and other scientific committees. In 2021, information papers and links were provided to Committee members for the following topics:

Ionising radiation	15 items
Non-ionising radiation	22 items
Other (e.g. cancer causes)	3 items

## 10. Future meetings and work programme

The meetings dates for 2022 were agreed by the committee.

- 131<sup>st</sup> meeting – 11<sup>th</sup> March
- 132<sup>nd</sup> meeting – 7<sup>th</sup> July
- 133<sup>rd</sup> meeting – 15<sup>th</sup> November

The Committee will continue with the major themes of its work during 2022, supported by its Contaminations Working Group and Authorisations Working Group. It is hoped that the work of the subcommittee on cardiovascular and cerebrovascular effects will be completed during the year. Updates from UKHSA will be considered, including regular items on EMFs and radon, as will peer-reviewed papers and reports published during the year.