

Resources and Waste Targets Expert Group (RWTEG)

Meeting minutes – 30 April 2021

Attendees

Expert panellists: Paul Ekins (Chair), John Barrett, Margaret Bates, Raimund Bleischwitz, Peter Hopkinson, Lucy O'Shea, Phil Purnell, Jacopo Torriti.

Other attendees: 6 Defra group officials, and representatives from the Environment Agency and WRAP.

1. Resource Productivity Baseline

- 1.1 A presentation was given by Defra to outline work that had been commissioned to model a UK-level resource productivity baseline through to 2050, which will be published in due course
- 1.2 As part of this work, Defra and the University of Leeds hosted two workshops to which RWTEG members were invited as well as industry experts. This provided an opportunity for RWTEG members and industry experts to contribute views as to which key scenarios should be utilised in the baselining work, i.e., which levels of economic growth would be most appropriate. RWTEG expressed support of the process, highlighting its transparency and the opportunity for robust debate.
- 1.3 There was discussion around the baseline outputs of the work. The improvements in resource productivity in the baseline seem small compared to previous research¹. It is suggested that this may be due to the different levels of servitisation growth that is assumed in the two models. The UK has a higher service-based economy than some countries in the EU, and there may be less room for a further shift towards increased servitisation.
- 1.4 The potential of reaching market saturation of different materials at some point in the future was also discussed. No agreement was reached amongst the RWTEG members. There is ongoing work by the University of Leeds into the saturation of materials and future infrastructure development—and the associated emissions and energy demands—that may further inform the discussion.

¹ [Study on modelling of the economic and environmental impacts of raw material consumption](#) (Cambridge Econometrics and Bio Intelligence Service, 2014).

- 1.5 Whilst the group were broadly supportive of the underlying model, there was a lack of consensus regarding some of the incorporated economic assumptions such as the rate of predicted growth.
- 1.6 RWTEG outlined the need to understand the economic impacts of increasing resource productivity, as well as how the target will connect with complementary policies and strategies such as the Waste Prevention Programme, the UKRI NICER program, and net zero. It will be important to consider other potential environmental costs and benefits of increased resource productivity in addition to carbon emissions, even if the model cannot incorporate them.

2. Residual Waste Baseline

- 2.1 A presentation was given by Defra outlining ongoing work commissioned to model England-level waste arisings through to 2050, which will be published in due course. The work entails forecasts for waste arisings from a range of different waste streams including waste from households, local authority collected waste, municipal solid waste, commercial and industrial waste, and construction, demolition and excavation waste.
- 2.2 RWTEG raised several points for feedback regarding the data sources, assumptions and drivers included in the models of different waste streams. These will be taken forward by Defra.
- 2.3 Household expenditure and/or household income was agreed by RWTEG as a more relevant driver to waste from households and local authority collected waste than Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
- 2.4 There was general agreement from RWTEG that there is currently a paucity of available, robust data sources for several waste streams such as commercial and industrial waste, and waste from construction, demolition and excavation sources. This may change with the introduction of Smart Waste Tracking, which is currently in development. While RWTEG expressed that they were pleased to see work for these work streams being taken forward, they were unsure whether the resulting forecasts would be robust enough upon which to build a target.

3. Central Targets Scenarios

- 3.1 A presentation and brief workshop was hosted by Defra, outlining central scenarios being developed in support of the target development work.
- 3.2 This exercise was well-received by RWTEG, who found that all scenarios were plausible and underscored the need for ambitious targets.

3.3 RWTEG expressed that they would like to see a fuller range of scenarios incorporating perspectives from both urban and rural communities as well as a range of socioeconomic demographics. There was interest in how the scenarios could be quantified, which was agreed as the logical next step.

4. Next Steps

4.1 In coming meetings, Defra will seek feedback on potential policy levers and their possible impacts on the resource productivity and residual waste metrics, as well as further discussion regarding the scope of the residual waste target.

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