

Resources and Waste Targets Expert Group (RWTEG)

Meeting minutes – 18 June 2021

Attendees

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

Other attendees: 7 Defra group officials, and representatives from WRAP.

1. Resource Productivity Target: Scope and Planned Policy Analysis

- 1.1 A presentation was given by Defra outlining ongoing work on the development of the resource productivity indicator. Defra are continuing to investigate several options based on feedback from RWTEG and stakeholders, such as whether to incorporate an economic numerator—for example, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or another suitable alternative. Also presented were the proposed next steps for analysis of potential policy levers that could enable achievement of a target set in this area, and the method undertaken to identify and longlist these potential policies as guided by the Green Book¹.
- 1.2 RWTEG suggested that an understanding of commodity prices would be useful to determine costs and benefits of a target. There has been a recent increase in the prices of non-energy commodities, for example.
- 1.3 The proposed approach to longlisting potential policy levers and analysing their possible impact on resource productivity was acknowledged by RWTEG as an approach that is compatible with multi-regional input output (MRIO) modelling, which will be used to model the resource productivity target. Suggested limitations of the proposed approach include limited capacity to incorporate competing strategies.
- 1.4 RWTEG suggested that it could be helpful, in the modelling, to disaggregate sectors by materials. This was suggested as certain materials are more closely associated with certain sectors. Sub-targets for different materials may be appropriate to avoid the overall target being dominated by non-metallic minerals.

¹ [The Green Book](#): HM Treasury guidance on how to appraise and evaluate policies, projects and programmes.

- 1.5 A Delphi approach accompanied by a call for evidence was suggested for arriving at agreed costs, benefits and impacts of potential policy levers, drawing on RWTEG's expertise. RWTEG were in provisional agreement with the approach, recognising the gaps in the existing evidence base and the need for informed, expert judgement to plug these gaps. They emphasised the need for guidance and specificity, and noted that their ability to make assessments of the costs, benefits and impacts of policies could depend on the type of policy intervention, specific sector, and material. There would be a risk that the approach would become too granular.
- 1.6 Defra have commissioned WRAP to conduct work including literature reviews of the costs, benefits and impacts of potential policy levers in several key sectors (which will be for internal use in the first instance, with possible subsequent publication). RWTEG agreed that they would find it helpful to see the outputs from these reviews before any Delphi workshop. It was also noted that there may be value in extending the invitation to a Delphi workshop to experts beyond RWTEG, including industry.
- 1.7 Defra presented the proposed approach to modelling the impacts of resource material consumption (RMC) based on microeconomic evidence to produce initial estimates of the impact of potential policy interventions. The method was agreed by RWTEG as a sensible approach.

2. Residual Waste Target: Scope and Planned Policy Analysis

- 2.1 Defra presented a proposal to narrow the scope of the residual waste target to municipal residual waste only. This proposal was based on the rationale that more robust waste data and a stronger evidence base exists around policy impacts in this area, allowing for more robust modelling upon which a more meaningful target level may be able to be set. It is expected that the introduction of Smart Waste Tracking will provide improved data for broader waste streams, including construction, demolition and excavation waste.
- 2.2 RWTEG views were mixed. While it was broadly recognised that the lack of robust data available for waste streams broader than municipal limits Defra's ability to set a meaningful target, it was also acknowledged that the majority of waste (in tonnage terms) originates from sectors that would not be captured by a municipal scope. The potential environmental impact of this waste and its importance was acknowledged.
- 2.3 The potential for narrowing the scope of the residual waste target to municipal only but continuing to look to develop further targets in the future that address broader waste streams was discussed.
- 2.4 Defra also presented the proposal to exclude waste that originates in the devolved authorities or outside of the UK but that is sent for end-of-life treatment in England from the target scope and, vice versa, to include waste that originates from England but that is sent for end-of-life treatment in the devolved authorities or sent overseas for energy

recovery. Waste collection and recycling infrastructure and policies outside of England are outside of Defra's remit. This proposal was generally agreed by RWTEG. It was noted that refuse derived fuel (RDF) and solid recovered fuel (SRF), which can be sent overseas for energy recovery, require different standards of manufacture and meet different quality standards. This may mean that the target should differentiate between RDF and SRF sent overseas for treatment.

2.5 RWTEG noted that fly-tipping, other waste crime, and materials exported as recyclate that are sent to landfill or incineration once past borders are potential gaps in the target scope. Under the UK Plan for Shipments of Waste², the import and export of waste for disposal either by incineration or landfill is generally prohibited. RWTEG expressed the need for improved enforcement.

2.6 Defra presented the proposal to include R1 accredited Energy from Waste incineration facilities within the target scope. This proposal was based on the aim of driving waste up the waste hierarchy, away from both landfill and incineration. There is a risk that excluding R1 accredited facilities from the target scope would divert waste from landfill to incineration as opposed to recycling or reuse.

2.7 RWTEG views were mixed. A R1 accredited facility is legally termed a 'recovery' facility and produces energy from waste as an output. Including R1 accredited facilities in the target scope could potentially discourage investment into developing these energy-producing facilities. Similarities were drawn between other end-of-life treatment options termed 'recovery'. It could be argued that it would be more appropriate to place more of a focus on preventing the generation of residual waste as opposed to diverting it from one end of life treatment to another. However, it was acknowledged that incineration, even with energy recovery, burns materials (including material that could potentially have been reused or recycled) and removes them from the circular economy, therefore RWTEG agreed that it was sensible to include all EfW facilities within the scope.

2.8 The potential for a future indicator and possible target that captured the circular economy was raised. An indicator to measure the circular economy could involve measuring the share of secondary materials re-entering the marketplace.

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² [The UK plan for shipments of waste](#) (2021) sets out government policy on shipments of waste for disposal to and from the UK.