

Resources and Waste Targets Expert Group

Meeting minutes – 24 September 2021

Attendees

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

Apologies: Margaret Bates

Other attendees: Defra group officials and representatives from WRAP

1. Discussion on the residual waste target work

- 1.1. A presentation was given by Defra to seek feedback on in-house modelling that has been carried out to determine the impact of several shortlisted potential policies that may contribute towards achieving a target to reduce residual waste. RWTEG provided feedback around suggestions on how to account for qualitative evidence in modelling the target ambition level.
- 1.2. Defra shared WRAP's reviews of potential impacts of policies to reduce residual waste to gain RWTEG's feedback on how to apply these to Defra's ambition level modelling. One reservation expressed by RWTEG was that the analysis carried out by WRAP was focussed more on the impacts at local scale, which may not be comparable to likely effects at the England level.
- 1.3. For several potential policy levers, the most relevant evidence was over five years old. Defra asked RWTEG whether there would be any value to referencing these reports when modelling the impacts of potential policy levers and their possible costs and benefits and, if so, what the most appropriate way to do this would be. RWTEG responded that the principles should still apply, however there would have been a wider range of materials included than at present, and the costs will have since changed.
- 1.4. RWTEG stressed the importance of stringent regulation to stop waste from landfill being diverted directly to incineration or energy recovery. Defra agreed and replied that there is still some value from the energy recovered from Energy from Waste (EfW) treatment of waste, and that EfW is, in many cases, a preferable end of life treatment option when compared to landfill. However, ultimately there needs to be policies to move waste further up the hierarchy and transition towards a more circular economy. Including EfW facilities within the residual waste target scope will help incentivise this change.

2. Discussion on the resource productivity target work

- 2.1. Defra presented an update on work carried out so far on resource productivity, which included the University of Leeds' baseline modelling, shortlisting of policies for further analysis by Defra, modelling of food waste impacts on resource productivity by WRAP, and construction policy modelling from the University of Leeds.
- 2.2. Defra asked the experts whether they were content with the current informal approach to engagement on resource productivity or if they would benefit from a more formal Delphi method. RWTEG responded by saying that a more formal approach may get more detailed responses but the group may not have time. A formal approach would be difficult to carry out, however a more targeted approach could be more effective. RWTEG suggested that if focussing on a particular product group, it might be effective to have a smaller working group to discuss policies to increase the resource productivity of specific materials.
- 2.3. WRAP presented their work on the impact of furniture and electrical regulatory policies on resource productivity. In response to WRAP's results on the impact of electrical vehicles (EVs), RWTEG asserted there needs to be recycling systems in place before common use of these vehicles. There is currently a gap in the infrastructure available for dealing with and recovering a whole host of trace elements from EVs. It will be important to improve the performance of recycling vehicle materials and policies in order to increase resource productivity.
- 2.4. Defra requested feedback from RWTEG on the set of proposed policy scenarios that will be used to explore potential impacts on resource productivity and macroeconomic changes.

3. Next Steps

- 3.1. Residual waste target – further modelling of the impacts of the collection and packaging reforms, and additional policies to determine the target ambition level.
- 3.2. Resource productivity target – to finalise the required inputs to feed into an exploratory research project currently being undertaken to provide a macroeconomic assessment of hypothetical pathways to increase resource productivity in England.

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