

**COMMITTEE ON MEDICAL ASPECTS OF RADIATION IN THE ENVIRONMENT**

**125<sup>th</sup> COMARE MEETING, Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

**Skipton House, London**

**Present**

**Chair:** Dr Chris Gibson

**Members:** Dr Frank de Vocht  
Professor John Harrison  
Professor Brenda Howard  
Dr Ray Kemp  
Dr Colin Martin  
Professor Stewart Martin  
Professor Stephanie McKeown  
Dr Richard McNally  
Professor Paul Pharoah  
Professor David Sutton  
Professor Mireille Toledano

**Assessors:** BEIS  
DHSC  
EA  
FSA  
HSE  
ONR  
PHE  
SEPA  
WG

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

## Open Session

### 1. Welcome & declarations

- 1.1 The Chair commenced the 125<sup>th</sup> meeting and welcomed members. He welcomed the substitute assessors for this meeting from FSA and WG.
- 1.2 The Chair informed members that Dr Tom Nunan had retired from COMARE and noted thanks for Dr Nunan's input into COMARE's work during his time on the Committee.
- 1.3 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 either now or before the items concerned.
- 1.4 The Chair noted that although no observers will be present during the meeting, it will still be split into an open and a closed session due to the minuting requirements of specific items.
- 1.5 Apologies were received from Dr Jane Barrett, Dr Paul Darragh, Professor Graham Smith and Professor Roger Taylor. Apologies were also received from the assessors for DforE, SG, WG, EA, DoH NI, NDA, FSS, FSA and MHCLG. The Chair reminded assessors that substitutes may attend the meeting.

### 2. Minutes of the 124<sup>th</sup> COMARE meeting

#### i. Minutes, actions & matters arising

- 2.1 The Chair asked for comments or corrections to the minutes from the 124<sup>th</sup> meeting. The minutes were approved subject to three amendments and the open session minutes would be published on the COMARE webpage.

**[ACTION: Secretariat]**

- 2.2 The Chair noted that one of the actions from the last meeting was to determine if there was any correlation between the atlas of respiratory disease and the radon atlas. The PHE assessor was asked to provide an update for the Committee. It was reported that because smoking dominates the risk from radon, it is very difficult to demonstrate any correlation unless a case control study is undertaken.

- 2.3 The Chair reminded members that at the last meeting it was noted that a formal complaint had been made by the UK & Commonwealth EMF Action Group against the Committee. The complaint has gone through the three stages of the DHSC complaints process and was not upheld at any stage. The UK & Commonwealth EMF Action Group have signalled their intent to escalate the complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

- 2.4 The Chair informed members that the UK & Commonwealth EMF Action Group provided a written submission for this meeting, but as there was no EMF item on the agenda in which to discuss this, it was not circulated to members. The secretariat will provide a copy of the submission to members on request.

**[ACTION: Secretariat]**

- 2.5 The Chair encouraged members to complete a 360° feedback exercise on the performance of the Chair and the handling of committee processes by the secretariat, as per last year. The provision of feedback is not obligatory but does give useful information to DHSC on the workings of the Committee. The secretariat will circulate the feedback form to members and replies should be sent directly to DHSC.

**[ACTION: Secretariat]**

2.6 The Chair noted that the secretariat has been approached to provide secretariat support for the coronavirus public health response. The exact level of input to the response is still to be established, but the Chair noted his support, while acknowledging that secretariat provision on COMARE matters would be at a reduced level during this time. Committee members were happy to add their support.

### 3. Committee matters

#### i. Membership

3.1 The Chair informed members that in addition to Dr Nunan's retirement, Professor Howard, Professor McKeown and Dr Darragh will be completing their terms of office with COMARE between now and the next meeting. He thanked the three members for their work on the Committee. Professor McKeown's post will be filled by Dr Mark Hill from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020, while the other three posts will be advertised with the outstanding three vacancies in the next annual recruitment round. Members were encouraged to consider potential candidates and promote the details of the Committee vacancies where possible. It was noted that there is a formal process for the appointment of members to the Committee. Members discussed contacting relevant colleges to seek a potential new lay member for COMARE.

#### ii. 2020-2021 Work Programme + 2019 Annual Report

3.2 The Chair introduced COMARE's work programme for April 2020-March 2021. He informed members that the work programme had been discussed with DHSC and noted that approval has been given to move forward with the cardiovascular and cerebrovascular project. The Chair asked for comments on areas of work for consideration in the future. Several members expressed support for more work regarding EMFs including technological developments. It was also noted that there is work being undertaken on radon which the Committee may wish to consider. The Chair agreed to discuss strengthening EMF and radon related work with DHSC.

**[ACTION: The Chair]**

3.3 The Chair brought the 2019 annual report to the Committee's attention. Members agreed that it was a correct factual document, but the current format could be viewed as bland. Suggestions were made for improvements to future versions. The 2019 annual report would be placed on the COMARE webpage, together with the work programme, following this meeting.

**[ACTION: Secretariat]**

### 4. Working group reports

#### i. Contaminations Working Group (CWG)

4.1 The Chair advised members that the CWG met on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and drew members' attention to the particle updates received by the CWG and the draft minutes of the previous (14<sup>th</sup>) meeting held in November 2019.

4.2 The EA assessor noted that the PHE risk assessment has been completed and that the secretariat had circulated links to the published documents.

4.3 The EA assessor updated members on the Sellafield beach monitoring programme. The 2019 programme has been completed, with a total of 157 hectares monitored (against the planned 150 hectares) and 119 finds, of which 113 were particles. The find rate is comparable to previous years. A new format has been agreed for the 2020 monitoring programme, with a smaller area of 105 hectares and fewer time constraints. To date 16 hectares have been monitored and there have been 17 finds.

- 4.4 The EA assessor reported on discussions at the CWG meeting regarding the revision of the intervention plan. It has been suggested that with increased understanding of risks an intervention plan may not be required, but instead a notification plan using PHE trigger levels could be used. This will be further discussed at the November CWG meeting. It was noted that the ecological risk assessment is nearing completion and will be provided to the CWG for information. Members were also informed that Sellafield is investigating possible future detection technologies, such as drones.

**[ACTION: EA]**

- 4.5 The Chair asked the EA assessor to provide an update on two previously reported leaks at Sellafield. One is a leak from a redundant sludge tank used for the treatment of sludge from the First Generation Magnox Storage Pond, which it is hoped will be sealed shortly. The other leak, from a Magnox Swarf Storage Silo, is inaccessible. The waste in the silo will be removed; however, this is likely to be a 10 to 20-year programme of work. Various options are being considered for dealing with this. Members were advised that there is currently no evidence of an offsite leakage. Monitoring is being undertaken and both leaks are being investigated by ONR and EA.
- 4.6 The Chair noted that Professor Smith had provided information papers to the CWG regarding international work on particle finds in the environment.
- 4.7 The SEPA assessor was asked to provide an update on the monitoring programme for Dounreay. Regular monitoring has been undertaken on Sandside beach and on the West Foreshore, though there have been restrictions on monitoring the East Foreshore due to bird nesting and lack of sediment. Ten particles were found in 2019, compared with 15 in 2018. To date in 2020, one particle has been found on Sandside beach and three on the Foreshore.
- 4.8 The Particles Retrieval Advisory Group (Dounreay) (PRAG(D)) have recruited a statistician and are now able to review the available data. The group held a meeting in January and determined a series of work areas for both the group and the site operator to cover during 2020. The site operator has been asked to look at the impact of changes in beach height and the detection of particles. The site operator has also been asked to look into the possible origins of the high activity Am-241 particle, and to trial the Sellafield Fidler monitoring system against the Dounreay Synergy system. Comparison of backpack monitoring versus wheelbarrow monitoring is to continue for another year. PRAG(D) are to review the particle find data; consider the health impact of the high Am-241 particle; and review the monitoring system comparisons. SEPA will review the site permit, including the requirement for beach monitoring.
- 4.9 The SEPA assessor also reported on the beach monitoring and remediation works at Dalgety Bay. Balfour Beatty have been asked to undertake a remediation programme, costing £10.5 million. The final designs are not yet available. Work can only take place between April and September each year due to the weather and sea conditions. A permit is still required, but it is hoped that work can commence soon. Monthly monitoring and signage restrictions are to remain in place during the remediation work. SEPA will continue to undertake independent monitoring, to monitor the mussel bed area and survey the movement of sediment with winter storms with a drone survey in April. The Chair welcomed the progress with the remediation work.

#### ii. Authorisations Working Group (AWG)

- 4.10 The Chair asked the Chair of the AWG, Professor David Sutton, to update the Committee on the consultations considered by the working group since the last meeting. There was one consultation under consideration on proposed changes to the Letters of Agreement

for HMNB Clyde, Faslane and Coulport. The working group had no issues with the proposed changes. Two consultation responses had been submitted since the last meeting. One was for the disposal of low level radioactive waste at the Port Clarence site on Teeside. The second was for a consultation on EA's draft decision document on Sellafield Ltd's Radioactive Substances Activities Permit. It was noted that both consultations contained a large amount of material for review.

- 4.11 Professor Sutton noted that there was only one current COMARE member remaining on the AWG. The Chair encouraged members to volunteer to join the working group.

**[ACTION: Members]**

- 4.12 Members discussed issues with lengthy consultations and reported that it was not a trivial matter to review the material. The EA assessor stated that environmental safety cases must be thorough and often need to be lengthy. It was suggested that a lay summary could be helpful to accompany the application, or that specific questions could be asked in relation to the application. The Chair proposed that the AWG should communicate the issues regarding lengthy consultations to EA and SEPA.

**[ACTION: AWG]**

## 5. COMARE project

### i. Cardiovascular effects

- 5.1 The Chair reminded members of a scoping exercise undertaken in 2019 to consider the available evidence of an association between radiation exposure and cardiovascular/cerebrovascular disease. It was agreed that sufficient evidence existed to investigate the potential health impacts of this issue and DHSC has accepted a project proposal, with work to commence following the completion of the Interventional Radiology report.

- 5.2 The establishment of a subcommittee to undertake this work, on a time-limited basis, has been included in the 2020-2021 work programme for the Committee. Members of the 2019 working party confirmed they would be willing to be on this subcommittee. The Chair asked for volunteers from the other Committee members and for recommendations for other experts for this subcommittee, noting that physics and dosimetry experts would be particularly relevant. The terms of reference agreed for the working party would be used for the subcommittee and would be circulated to members by the secretariat.

**[ACTION: Members]**

**[ACTION: Secretariat]**

- 5.3 The Chair asked Dr de Vocht to update members on his study on 'Occupational Exposure to Ionising Radiation and Mortality from Ischaemic Heart Disease' carried out for DHSC. The study is currently under peer-review and Dr de Vocht had been given permission by DHSC to discuss this with the Committee. The paper will be circulated to members when it is published and will be relevant to the cardiovascular effects project.

## 6. Information papers.

- 6.1 The Chair drew attention to eight information papers and three digital links and asked members for their comments on these papers. Members were reminded that suggestions of relevant publications, in particular papers published by them or their institutions, are welcomed.

- 6.2 Professor McKeown noted that the paper by Little et al is relevant to the Interventional Radiology report and will be referenced.

**[ACTION: MPS(IR)]**

- 6.3 The Chair advised members that the UK & Commonwealth EMF Action Group provided details of four potential information papers for consideration by the Committee. These have not been circulated to members; however, the details will be provided by the secretariat on request.

**[ACTION: Secretariat]**

7. **Any Other Business.**

- 7.1 The BEIS assessor informed members that a new policy paper on radioactive substances is being developed. There will be a consultation on the paper this year and it is hoped that the new policy will be ready at the end of 2020. The offer of a presentation from BEIS on the policy paper at the July meeting of COMARE was accepted.

**[ACTION: BEIS]**

- 7.2 The next COMARE meeting will be held on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020 at Skipton House, London. The Chair thanked members for attending and closed the meeting at 2.25pm.

## Abbreviations

Am-241	Americium-241
AWG	Authorisations Working Group
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
CT	Computed tomography
CWG	Contaminations Working Group
DforE	Department for Education
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care
DoH NI	Department of Health for Northern Ireland
DRL	Diagnostic Reference Levels
EA	Environment Agency
EMF	electromagnetic field
FSA	Food Standards Agency
FSS	Food Standards Scotland
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HSE	Health & Safety Executive
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICRP	International Commission on Radiological Protection
IPEM	Institute of Physics and Engineering in Medicine
IR	Interventional Radiology
ISD	Information Services Division (NHS Scotland)
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government
MPS(IR)	Medical Practices Subcommittee (Interventional Radiology)
NDA	Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
ONR	Office for Nuclear Regulation
PHE	Public Health England
PRAG(D)	Particles Retrieval Advisory Group (Dounreay)
SAFRAD	SAFety in RADiological procedures
SAHSU	Small Area Health Statistics Unit
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
SG	Scottish Government
SIR	standard incidence ratio
WG	Welsh Government