

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

**127<sup>th</sup> COMARE MEETING, Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

**Online meeting**

**Present**

**Chair:** Dr Chris Gibson

**Members:** Dr Jane Barrett  
Dr Frank de Vocht  
Professor John Harrison  
Dr Mark Hill  
Dr Ray Kemp  
Dr Colin Martin  
Professor Stewart Martin  
Dr Richard McNally  
Professor Graham Smith  
Professor David Sutton  
Professor Roger Taylor  
Professor Mireille Toledano

**Assessors:** BEIS  
DHSC  
EA  
FSA  
FSS  
HSE  
ISD (NHS Scotland)  
NDA  
ONR  
PHE  
SEPA  
SG

**Invited attendee:** Professor Alex Elliott

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

## Open Session

### 1. Welcome & declarations

- 1.1 The Chair commenced the 127<sup>th</sup> meeting and welcomed members to the second online meeting for the Committee, due to the COVID pandemic. It was noted that the agenda has been condensed to accommodate the change in format, and that meeting is not being opened to observers to ensure meeting security. The meeting would still be split into an open and a closed session due to the minuting requirements of specific items.
- 1.2 The Chair welcomed back Professor Elliott, who is the Chair of the Medical Practices Subcommittee (Interventional Radiology) and who would be presenting the updated draft of the MPS(IR) report.
- 1.3 The Chair welcomed the substitute assessors for HSE and FSA.
- 1.4 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.
- 1.5 Apologies were received from Professor Paul Pharoah and the assessors for BEIS, FSA, HSE, DforE, DoH NI and WG. The Chair reminded assessors that substitutes may attend the meetings.

### 2. Minutes of the 126<sup>th</sup> COMARE meeting

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

- 2.1 The Chair asked for comments or corrections to the minutes from the 126<sup>th</sup> meeting. The minutes were approved with one amendment and the open session minutes would be published on the COMARE webpage.

**[ACTION: Secretariat]**

- 2.2 The Chair reminded members that an invitation for a representative from COMARE to join the Public and Community Oversight Group (PCOG) for the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Health Protection Research Unit (HPRU) was discussed at the last meeting. Professor Stewart Martin has volunteered for this role and will be attending the first meeting of the group on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020. The committee would welcome feedback from the PCOG in due course.

**[ACTION: Professor Martin]**

- 2.3 The Chair noted that discussion of the information papers at the last meeting raised questions on the work of the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP) task group 111. Dr Simon Bouffler, the Chair of the task group, has advised that the work is likely to take at least two years to complete and includes undertaking of systematic review work. The reviews will be published in due course and may be considered by COMARE when they become available. It was agreed that COMARE would maintain a watching brief.
- 2.4 The Chair noted the recent media reports on the establishment of the new National Institute for Health Protection (NIHP) and asked the PHE assessor to update the committee on the current status for PHE and the proposed transition into NIHP. The PHE assessor reported that the Future of Public Health policy paper, published in September, gave a high-level overview of the plans. The new NIHP will combine parts of PHE, the Joint Biosecurity Centre, and the Test & Trace programme. It will be a science-led national institute and will continue to monitor and respond to health threats. The Centre for Radiation, Chemical and Environmental Hazards (CRCE) has been specifically mentioned as being included in the NIHP. The future position of the health improvement parts of PHE, including the cancer registries, is still being considered. Existing PHE functions will continue as normal until Spring

2021, while work is being undertaken on the organisational design on the NIHP. There will be an opportunity to comment on the changes and the details will be circulated by the secretariat when available.

**[ACTION: Secretariat]**

- 2.5 The Chair reminded members that the Committee's work programme includes the investigation of the association of cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease with radiation exposure. The original working party members present (Dr Jane Barrett, Dr Frank de Vocht, Professor John Harrison and Dr Richard McNally) agreed to continue with the project. This work was due to be initiated following the completion of the Interventional Radiology report but may now start early in 2021. The Chair asked for volunteers from the other Committee members and for recommendations for other experts to join this subcommittee, noting that physics and dosimetry experts would be particularly relevant. A volunteer was also requested to chair the subcommittee and direct this work. The secretariat will liaise with the subcommittee on dates of an initial meeting to discuss the focus of the project.

**[ACTION: Members]**

**[ACTION: Secretariat]**

### 3. Committee matters

#### i. Membership

- 3.1 The Chair informed members that following the recruitment campaign for six members (five expert posts and one lay member), nine applications were received. Shortlisting was carried out on 15<sup>th</sup> October and interviews of selected candidates will take place on 16<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> November. Unfortunately, applications were not received against each of the posts, so some vacancies will be carried over to the 2021 recruitment campaign.

#### ii. Correspondence and communications

- 3.2 The Chair informed members that no Freedom of Information (FOI) requests had been received since the last meeting. The secretariat responded to a parliamentary question (PQ) request regarding advisory committee secretariat provision by PHE (for 12 committees) and the impact of COVID on that provision. The full answer to the PQ has not yet been published. The Chair thanked the secretariat for their support for both the committee and for the COVID response.
- 3.3 A written submission on EMF concerns was received for consideration, which contained comments on COMARE. It will be made available to members from the secretariat on request. The Chair noted that the formal complaint lodged with the Chair in August 2020 by the UK & Commonwealth EMF Action Group, which was not upheld by the DHSC complaints process, has now been referred to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

**[ACTION: Secretariat]**

### 4. Working group reports

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

- 4.1 The Chair informed members that the CWG met yesterday (11<sup>th</sup> November) via an online meeting. He brought the members' attention to the two circulated updates.
- 4.2 The Chair asked the EA assessor to provide the Committee with an update on the Sellafield Beach Monitoring Programme. The monitoring programme was halted between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic; although the aim is still to complete the targets by the end of the year through acceleration of the programme. The findings for 2020 to 30<sup>th</sup> September (42 particles and 2 objects) have been consistent with previous reports and should have no impact on risk assessments. The ecological risk assessment is

still being finalised. Following an action from the 126<sup>th</sup> COMARE meeting, information on beach occupancy has been provided to the secretariat. Occupancy increased at St Bees beach, and it was noted that the risk to residents is likely to be higher than the risk to visitors. More information should be available from the Cefas habit survey undertaken in the summer.

- 4.3 The Chair asked the EA assessor to update the Committee on the previously reported leaks at Sellafield. The first reported leak, in the redundant settling tank used for the treatment of sludge from the First Generation Magnox Storage Pond has been stopped. The removal of intermediate level waste from the tank allowed a new concrete floor and concrete rings around the tank walls to be installed. The investigations by EA and ONR have been completed. The second leak, from a Magnox Swarf Storage Silo, is continuing, and is likely to continue for several years. There has been a step increase in the release rate since October. EA are continuing their investigation and considering, in conjunction with ONR, what improvement requirements to put on Sellafield Ltd.
- 4.4 Members asked the EA assessor about potential for off-site release, monitoring and modelling. It was confirmed that currently there is no off-site release from the leak, with no expectation of such a release for about a decade for the more mobile radionuclides. Members were informed that modelling of ground water forms part of the existing modelling and monitoring of the site continues.
- 4.5 The Chair asked the SEPA assessor to give a brief update on the current situation at Dounreay and Dalgety Bay. Monitoring at Dounreay was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic but has restarted and the statutory monitoring has caught up, including for the distal beaches. To 8<sup>th</sup> September, five particles had been recovered from the Dounreay foreshore, and six from Sandside beach. All have been minor and consistent with previous finds. Laboratory work on finds has ceased due to the limited staff available. SEPA has commissioned a COVID habit review of all sites. The report is expected early in 2021 and can be made available to the CWG.
- 4.6 Monitoring at Dalgety Bay was also impacted by the pandemic and resumed in August. The remediation issues have been resolved; however, SEPA is awaiting a permit application from the contractor before work can commence.

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

- 4.7 Professor Sutton, the AWG Chair, informed members that since the last meeting the AWG have responded to two consultations. The first regarded a permit variation (increasing emissions back to the original level after a period of lower emissions) at Sizewell B; the second application, for Sizewell C, was to permit discharge and storage of liquid and gaseous radioactive material from 2030. The AWG provided a comprehensive response to both consultations, with no major issues identified. The group did note that the proposal for Sizewell C was based on a 60-year life span, with decommissioning for 25 years; however, the proposal did not address waste storage.
- 4.8 The Chair thanked Professor Sutton for the work carried out by the AWG.
5. **Committee briefings and updates:**
- 5.1 The Chair advised members that the annual update on Radon, with an additional briefing by Professor Harrison would be postponed to the next meeting as certain reviews were not available for this meeting.

## i. EMF and health

### a. PHE annual update

- 5.2 The Chair asked the PHE assessor to present the PHE annual update on EMF and health. Members were provided with an update on the following issues:

*International developments:*

- WHO and IARC developments
- ICNIRP Guidelines

*UK developments:*

- General research activities related to EMF and health
  - Airwave Health Monitoring Study
  - COSMOS – cohort study of mobile phone use and health
  - SCAMP – study of cognition, adolescents and mobile phones
  - PHE research activities (including exposure to radio waves from smart meters)
- Areas of public and occupational concern and national responses (including exposure to radio waves from 5g technologies)
- New public information activities

- 5.3 Members were advised that the funding for the UK COSMOS study ceased in March 2020, raising concern on the ability to complete the analysis of the study data. The Chair stated that the Committee would support the continuation of funding for this work.

- 5.4 Members discussed the campaigning by various groups to not acknowledge the 2020 ICNIRP limits. It was recognised that there was dissonance between scientific advice and community concerns on EMF issues, leading to anxiety and lack of trust. The Chair noted that the underlying public concerns are genuine and reminded members that the Committee maintains a watching brief in this area. Members were informed of forthcoming reports from HSE and ARPANSA, which could be included in the next PHE update.

### ii. BEIS – radioactive substances policy

- 5.5 The Chair asked the BEIS assessor to present work on the new policy paper on radioactive substances to the Committee.

- 5.6 This work is a review of the radioactive substances and decommissioning policy areas since 1989, with the aim to consolidate policy and identify areas for improvement. Members were informed of the benefits of the policy proposals. The review process has been impacted by the COVID pandemic, but it is hoped the consultation document will be finalised by the end of November. The consultation will run in early 2021 and it is expected that the policy framework will be published in winter 2021. It was agreed that BEIS would inform the secretariat when the consultation is published in January 2021. Members queried whether there has been interaction with the new Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) committee on decommissioning and legacy management; BEIS agreed to flag this with colleagues.

**[ACTION: BEIS]**

## 6. Information papers

- 6.1 The Chair drew attention to ten information papers and two digital links and asked members for their comments on these papers. It was noted that two of the circulated papers were of relevance for the cardio/cerebro-vascular effects subcommittee.

- 6.2 The Chair advised members that details of additional potential information papers were provided by an external group for consideration by the Committee. Recognising the number of information papers already selected, none of these have been circulated for this particular meeting. Details of the suggested papers may be provided by the secretariat on request.

**[ACTION: Secretariat]**

7. **Any Other Business**

- 7.1 No additional items were raised.

**CLOSED SESSION**

8. **Studies in progress**

- i. Thyroid cancer incidence study
- ii. SAHSU update

- 8.1 The minutes for these items were considered as reserved business as they concerned pre-publication material.

9. **COMARE publications in progress**

- i. Interventional radiology issues

- 9.1 The minutes for this item were considered as reserved business as it concerned pre-publication material.

The next COMARE meeting will be held on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021. The format of the meeting is still to be agreed. The Chair thanked members for attending and closed the meeting at 12.45 pm.

## Abbreviations

ARPANSA	Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency
AWG	Authorisations Working Group
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
CRCE	Centre for Radiation, Chemical and Environmental Hazards
CWG	Contaminations Working Group
DforE	Department for Education
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care
DoH NI	Department of Health for Northern Ireland
EA	Environment Agency
EMF	electromagnetic field
FOI	Freedom of information
FSA	Food Standards Agency
FSS	Food Standards Scotland
HPRU	Health Protection Research Unit
HSE	Health & Safety Executive
ICRP	International Commission on Radiological Protection
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
NEA	Nuclear Energy Agency
NIHP	National Institute for Health Protection
NIHR	National Institute for Health Research
ONR	Office for Nuclear Regulation
PCOG	Public and Community Oversight Group
PHE	Public Health England
PQ	Parliamentary Question
SAHSU	Small Area Health Statistics Unit
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
SG	Scottish Government
WG	Welsh Government
WHO	World Health Organisation