

Minutes of 87th UK Chemical Stakeholder Forum meeting, 9 February 2023, Virtual Conference

1. Chair's welcome

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. See Annex A for attendance and apologies.

The Chair of the meeting was drawn from the Steering group, on a rotating basis, and the meeting was held under Chatham House rule.

The draft minutes for the 86th CSF July meeting (UKCSF/22/11) were approved following comments raised by attendees to the Secretariat.

2. Opening statement

The Joint Deputy Director for Chemicals, Pesticides, and Hazardous Waste at Defra gave an opening statement verbally to set the scene for the CSF meeting.

Context was provided on the current policy landscape, and they presented the current state-of-play for both domestic and international chemicals policy at the start of the new year. They also provided reassurances on continuing work to improve the overall management of chemicals, by working closely with a variety of stakeholders and using an evidence-based approach, to find workable solutions and maintain a high level of protection for human health and the environment.

An attendee asked what the impact of the Retained EU Law (REUL) Bill would have on UK REACH if passed. Defra responded that it considered a decision not to retain REACH to be unlikely, given its importance to the management of chemicals. They added that there were ongoing Parliamentary debates on the matter and Defra remained committed to REACH. The attendee highlighted that if REACH were to be retained, it would need to be compatible with all previous legislation.

3. Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions, Triple Conference of the Parties (COP), Geneva, May 2023

The Executive Secretary for the BRS Convention, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), presented on the Triple COP, which was scheduled to take place in Geneva, in May 2023. See Annex B.

An attendee raised that China, with India likely to follow, had come out against the restriction on medium chain chlorinated paraffins, which the UK had proposed, under the Stockholm Convention. They continued that two-thirds of the Convention's parties would be required to vote in favour of the restriction to be passed. They asked if the voting system was weighted, based on the size of the country's economy, or if there was a 'one country-one vote' system.

The presenter responded that firstly a quorum was required, then a 'one party-one vote' process would be followed.

Another attendee raised that the EU had recently published a restriction proposal for approximately 10,000 Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS). They asked whether the BRS conventions and the UK were considering a similar broad PFAS restriction. The presenter responded that the BRS conventions do not consider such restrictions and it would be for individual parties to make these decisions through the Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee (POPRC). They added that with PFAS being such a broad group of chemicals, with many different uses in different countries, it would not be simple for the BRS conventions to address. However, there could be scope for listing more individual chemicals and where there was opportunity, where industry was focused, for a group of chemicals to be listed, the BRS conventions had remained flexible. Defra responded that the PFAS Regulatory management option analysis (RMOA), due to be published in the Spring, would be a comprehensive document looking at the regulatory options for tackling these chemicals.

4. Rotterdam Convention: COP11 and the Amendment Proposal

Defra presented on 'The Rotterdam Convention: COP11 and the Amendment Proposal'. See Annex C.

Defra presented questions for attendees to discuss, with their officials, in breakout groups, using EasyRetro virtually. See Annex D for the questions and noted discussion points.

5. CSF Sub- / Working group updates

a. Beyond 2020 (UN SAICM) Sub-group

Defra presented an update on the 'UKCSF Sub-group: Beyond 2020'. See Annex E.

An attendee asked whether there were discussions taking place within the UN Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) to link Beyond-2020 with the new UN Science Policy Panel (SPP) together. Defra confirmed that discussions were taking place with the caveat that neither the Beyond-2020 framework or the SPP had yet been formalised.

The attendee also asked whether industry involvement was now being mirrored within SAICM as seen within the SPP. Defra confirmed that industry associations were actively involved in the Beyond-2020 process.

Another attendee asked for clarification on what politically binding targets could mean in the context of SAICM being a voluntary partnership. Defra responded that this term was used to differentiate from legal obligations adding that, the UK would not be legally bound to the Beyond-2020 framework but, would negotiate in good faith with the intention of acting on what has been committed to.

b. PFAS Working Group

Defra gave a verbal update on the PFAS Working Group.

Defra explained that the PFAS Working Group was launched as part of wider work on PFAS, to look at specific areas where designing policy with close stakeholder engagement in the process, and learning from stakeholder experiences, could be of most value. The PFAS working group had 30 members, including government officials, with a good range of PFAS interests represented. Defra thanked everyone who had put themselves forward and everyone who attended the first meeting in November 2022. The first stage of the meeting was to acknowledge differing member perspectives and understandings of PFAS overall. Defra thanked the Royal Society of Chemistry for presenting background on the PFAS issue. Following this, the group discussed three main topics including, what were the common barriers and challenges of moving away from PFAS, what policy options were available to government to accelerate industry leadership in moving away from PFAS and, how government could support innovation for developing cost-effective alternatives of PFAS. The next stage was to gather volunteers from the group to prepare 'think piece' papers, bringing together initial ideas around the three main topics, for further discussion at the next meeting. Defra concluded that the group would run for one year initially, with the aim of producing a range of policy options or proposals, that could be developed further through ongoing work.

An attendee asked whether Defra would review the EU PFAS restriction proposal dossier published two days before the CSF meeting. Defra responded that they had already started reviewing the proposal and were interested to receive stakeholder views on the EU dossier.

Another attendee asked about the exemption categories noted in the EU PFAS restriction proposal and whether Defra agreed with those being proposed e.g., medical devices. Defra responded that PFAS covered many uses with alternatives in some cases but, not all. They added that they could not comment on EU judgements on individual cases but, that the PFAS RMOA would provide information about uses and the approach in the UK.

An attendee highlighted that in previous CSF meetings, stakeholders had expressed concerns about divergence from the EU. They asked whether the UK government and responsible authorities had enough resources to follow suit and consider a restriction on the same scale as the EU PFAS restriction proposal. Defra responded that the PFAS RMOA would provide recommendations for risk management in the UK and, these would be considered to make decisions on the best way forward.

6. New CSF Working Group: Friends of the Chemicals Strategy

a. Chemicals Strategy update

Defra presented an update on 'Developing a Chemicals Strategy'. See Annex F.

Defra then gave a verbal presentation on the launch a new 'Friends of the Strategy' (FotS) CSF working group to support the ongoing development of a Chemicals Strategy. They spoke to a term of reference, shared in follow-up the meeting, that had been agreed by the CSF Steering Group.

An attendee asked whether the Chemicals Strategy would be published in final form following review by the FotS working group or whether there would be a public consultation.

Defra responded that the Chemicals Strategy was a long-awaited document and, as it currently stood, the plan was to publish a final Chemicals Strategy to provide much needed certainty for stakeholders however, this was still being discussed. They continued that Defra had undergone extensive stakeholder engagement through workshops held over the Summer 2022 and, would use the new FotS working group to further develop content and seek feedback. They added that the Chemicals Strategy would set the framework and direction of travel for chemicals policy and that any specific positions or actions that would arise from the Chemicals Strategy would be consulted on.

Another attendee asked for clarity on whether the FotS working group would be the final stage of stakeholder engagement on the Chemicals Strategy before publication. Defra responded that as it currently stood, this would be the case for the Chemicals Strategy document however, Defra would keep the CSF engaged more broadly and continue engaging with stakeholders separately on different chemicals policy issues.

An attendee noted that the FotS working group would be a closed group and asked whether there would be transparency of where the group had come to a consensus or not, given the divergent views of its members. Defra responded that they had received feedback on this concern previously and, would look to include where views had differed in discussions in their high-level updates to the CSF.

7. Policy update

a. Verbal updates

Defra gave a verbal update on the UN Science Policy Panel (SPP).

Defra explained that the UK attended the first set of negotiations for the new SPP, the week prior the CSF meeting, in Thailand. There was consensus on having a broad integrative scope to be inclusive of a wide range of issues. This was reflected in a draft objective, which was that the SPP was to strengthen the science-policy interface, to contribute to the sound management of chemicals and waste and, to prevent pollution for the protection of human health and the environment. Defra continued that this would be supported by functions which were negotiated at the UN Environment Assembly in 2022 including, horizon scanning, global assessments of the state of chemicals, waste and pollution prevention, provision of information to identify research gaps, increasing public awareness and facilitating information sharing. The UK delegation emphasized the importance of SPP outputs to contain evidence-based relevant policy options, to address issues that policymakers have the levers to tackle. Additionally, that the SPP should promote innovation and opportunities to exploit innovation. Defra confirmed that some of this language would be included as part of the SPP's operating principles. Defra concluded that next steps were to develop a prioritisation criteria and conceptual framework and, further discussion on capacity building.

An attendee noted that they attended the negotiations but, not as part of the UK delegation. They added that stakeholders could attend as an accredited UNEP organisation and, many various groups of stakeholders that were present, were able to comment and contribute views without taking part in the political process. They continued that they would also be able to provide views on the functions of the SPP and how these could be taken forward.

The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) gave a verbal update on departmental changes which took place the week of the CSF meeting.

DBT explained that the former Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the former Department for International Trade (DIT) had now become three new departments, DBT, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). DBT emphasized that the practicalities of the changes and how teams would work were currently being worked out. DBT explained that they would absorb some of the business sectors, trade and opportunities and, market frameworks areas of BEIS. DSIT would include aspects of technology which previously sat with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). DBT added that because of the broad portfolios, some of these would likely be shared across the new departments, with some aspects led by the Cabinet Office, however, this was still currently being organised. DBT confirmed that the former BEIS & DIT chemicals teams would continue to function and work closely as before withing the newly formed DBT. The aim was to be a 'one stop shop' for businesses, bringing the domestic and international aspects together in one place, whilst the wider departmental changes allowed for reprioritization on core government goals, in what was a challenging time for industry to operate in.

An attendee asked whether the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) would be absorbed into DBT. DBT responded that they believed this to be the case as things currently stood and they continue to work closely with OPSS on overlapping issues.

b. Q&A

The Chair invited questions and comments on the CSF policy update paper, shared in advance of the meeting, for which UK government officials were present to respond.

An attendee asked whether the timeline for the Chemicals Strategy publication would be affected by the outcomes of the UK REACH Alternative Transitional Registration (ATR) model. Defra responded that the Chemicals Strategy would set out approaches to regulation and lay the ground for what would follow longer term on the ATR model, setting out the principles and framework for what should be considered in developing that system. The attendee noted that given that the deadlines for providing data for UK REACH registrations had been pushed back, in their view, the development of the registration process could continue almost indefinitely if it is not addressed adequately by the ATR model.

Another attendee asked whether the £1.5 to £2 billion figure that was published in a Defra impact assessment, in July 2022, regarding the cost of UK REACH to industry was still valid, given that at the Environmental Audit Committee in November 2022, Defra stated that there was no clear picture on the cost. Defra responded this cost was difficult to calculate with various figures derived from differing methodologies, which meant the true cost was unclear.

8. CSF Membership & Steering Group refresh

The CSF Secretariat explained that following the last CSF meeting, there had been a delay in refreshing the CSF Steering Group, whilst the current Steering Group were agreeing how to conduct the changes. They explained that this was a new process and, the agreement was for the Steering Group to refresh in a staggered manner, with two members changing over at a time, in-between the three CSF meetings, over the course of the year. This would allow for continuity of knowledge and experience on the Steering Group, whilst ensuring new members were able to learn from others and build confidence. The Steering Group would continue to be representative of the wider CSF membership. The Secretariat continued that the CSF membership refresh would also go ahead, to ensure that it was up to date and that there was future capacity for continuation of representation of all views in the CSF and its Steering Group. They clarified that this would not be a total overhaul of the current CSF membership but, an opportunity to fill any gaps where organisations had changed or closed and refresh with new voices where required. A call for expressions of interest to become a CSF member would be launched in the coming weeks.

9. AOB

No additional business was raised.

The Chair thanked Defra, all the presenters and everyone for attending. The next meeting would be held virtually on Thursday 20 July 2023.

Annexes

Annex A: Attendance and apologies

Annex B: UNEP Briefing on BRS COPs

Annex C: The Rotterdam Convention: COP11 and the Amendment Proposal

Annex D: EasyRetro board: The Rotterdam Convention

Annex E: UKCSF Sub-group: Beyond 2020

Annex F: Developing a Chemicals Strategy

For accessibility reasons, Annexes B, C, D, E and F will not be made available on the UKCSF website. Copies can be obtained by contacting the Secretariat at Chemicals@defra.gov.uk.

Annex A: Attendance and apologies

Attendees

Aaliyah Vayez	EUK Consulting
David Gurden-Williams	3M
Tony Bingham	AGB Chemical Compliance
Daphne Vlastari	BASF
Neil Hollis	BASF
Alessandra Menga	Burson Cohn & Wolfe
Elisabeth Laird	Burson Cohn & Wolfe
Rebecca Lentini	Beryllium Science & Technology Association
John Reid	British Chemicals Association
Ciara Dempsey	British Coatings Federation
Chris Moges-Beach	British Electrotechnical and Allied Manufacturers' Association
Helen Jordan	British Plastics Federation
Adrian Simpson	British Retail Consortium
Ray Parmenter	Chartered Institute of Waste Management
Anna Watson	CHEM Trust
Chloe Alexander	CHEM Trust
Elaine McGavin	Chemical Business Association
Kirsty Eley	Chemical Industries Association
Roger Pullin	Chemical Industries Association
Clelia Oziel	Chemical Watch
Leigh Stringer	Chemical Watch
Lara Dickens	Chemservice UK Ltd
Joanna Sacks	CLEAPSS
Samantha Saunders	Cruelty Free International
Caroline Rainsford	Cosmetic, Toiletry and Perfumery Association
Shosha Adie	ENDS Report / Haymarket
Nik Robinson	European Oilfield Speciality Chemicals Association (UK)
Catherine Gunby	Fidra

Heather McFarlane	Fidra
Peter Wragg	Flame Retardant Textiles Network Ltd
Zoe Avison	Green Alliance
James Clark	Green Chemistry Network
Nigel Haigh	Institute for European Environmental Policy (UK)
Amit Verma	Institution of Chemical Engineers
Chris Howick	INOVYN
Ian Axford	Laboratory of the Government Chemist
Liz Nicol	Logika group
Brigitte Amoruso	Make UK
Kate Cameron	Natural Resources Wales
Steve Whitehouse	Non-Ferrous Alliance
Elaine Webb	Office for Environmental Protection
Mandy Veillette	PETA Science Consortium International e.V.
Graham Pattle	Ricardo Energy & Environment
Catherine Phillips	RINA Tech UK Ltd
Helen Middleton	Rolls-Royce / UK Aerospace, Defence, Security and Space industries (ADS)
Marlen Moreno	Rolls-Royce / ADS Susmat Working Group
Camilla Alexander-White	Royal Society of Chemistry
Stephanie Metzger	Royal Society of Chemistry
David Carlander	RPA Ltd
David Bott	Society of Chemical Industry
Hilda Akhideno	Solenis Netherlands BV
Naheed Rehman	Tronox
Shiny Mathew	UKRI - Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
Philip Malpass	UK Cleaning Products Industry Association
Chris Magee	Understanding Animal Research
Imogen Poyntz-Wright	University of Exeter
Michelle Bloor	University of Glasgow
Ola Dosunmu	University of Lancaster

Lowenna Jones	University of Sheffield
Peter Silverans	Venator Belgium
David Taylor	WCA Ltd
Hannah Conway	Wildlife & Countryside Link
Kristina Flexman	WSP Global Inc.
Mick Goodwin	WSP Global Inc.
William Wilson	Wyeside Consulting Ltd

Government Officials

Amber Chainey	Defra	Anchen Kehler	Defra
Catriona McCallion	Defra	Cecile Brich	Defra
Edward Latter	Defra	Ellie Bates	Defra
Gabrielle Edwards	Defra	Katie Bridger	Defra
Lillian Koma	Defra	Lyndon Ashmore	Defra
Matthew Lovatt	Defra	Megan Thomsett	Defra
Melanie Foster	Defra	Michael-Anne Lockhart	Defra
Philip Douglas	Defra	Rebecca Gibbard-Walker	Defra
Ruth Hailay-Michael	Defra	Steve Morris	Defra
Vanessa Sanderson	Defra	Aroon Akhtar	DBT
Liz Philpott	EA	Tom Nickson	EA
Abi Williams	HSE	Bethan Taylor	HSE
Dave Adams	HSE	Jill Wakefield	HSE
Miriam Jacobs	UKHSA	Ovnair Sepai	UKHSA
Dan Merckel	Scottish Gov		

Apologies

Luke Collins	Unite the Union
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