

The UK Expert Committee on Pesticides (ECP)

Full Minutes of the meeting of the UK Expert Committee on Pesticides (ECP) held 21 November 2023

The meeting was held as a virtual meeting.

Those present:

Chair:

Prof W Cushley

Members:

Prof T Butt; Mr J Clarke; Dr I Cano Cejas; Dr D Chandler; Prof J Coulson; Prof M Eddleston; Dr J Garratt; Mr M Glynn; Dr R Gwynn; Dr C Harris; Dr I Katsiadaki; Prof E Lock; Dr R Mann; Dr M Rose; Dr A Rowbotham; Mr P Stephenson; Prof D Spurgeon; Dr M Wakefield; Prof M Whelan and Prof M Wright

Assessors:

Dr S Jess (DAERA); Mr B Macdonald (Welsh Government); Ms G Reay (Scottish Government); Dr C Snaith (HSE) and Mr D Williams (Defra)

Advisors:

Mr A Dixon (HSE); Mr D Flynn (HSE); Mr N Graham (HSE); Ms R Leete (Defra); Ms S Mattock (HSE); Mr B Maycock (HSE); Ms H Nakeeb (UKHSA); Dr J Newman (Environment Agency); Ms A Porter (Defra); Dr S Qassim (Natural England); Ms G Shawe (Natural England); Mr G Stark (HSE) and Ms M Wade (HSE)

Others:

Ms L Creswell (DfT); Mr J Dale (HSE); Ms E Farman (HSE); Mr G Kenney (HSE); Mr R Mace (DFT); Mr J Murphy (DfT)

Apologies:

Dr S Brescia (HSE)

Agenda Item 1: Introduction

1.1 The Chair reminded the meeting of the confidentiality of the papers and their discussions. If Members believed that they had a commercial or financial interest in any of the items being discussed, they were required to declare their interest to the Chair and Secretariat prior to the meeting. They may then either be invited to absent themselves from the discussions, not participate and/or not be involved in any discussions and decision-making, unless invited to do so.

1.2 Two Members identified potential conflicts of interests. They were deemed to be non-personal, non-specific conflicts and it was decided they could remain and participate in discussion on the relevant agenda items.

1.3 The Chair welcomed Prof T Butt, Dr I Cejas, Dr D Chandler, Dr Roma Gwynn and Dr M Wakefield to the Committee. They have been appointed as members of the Biopesticide Cloud.

1.4 The Chair noted this will be his and Prof E Lock's last meeting as Members of the ECP due to them both serving their full terms.

Agenda Item 2: Full Minutes of the previous meeting [ECP 1 (62/2023)]

2.1 Members agreed the Full Minutes of the September 2023 meeting.

Agenda Item 3: Matters Arising and Forward Business Plan [ECP 2 (62/2023)]

3.1 The Secretariat provided an update on matters arising from previous meetings and invited Members to suggest any additions/amendments to the forward business plan which would be incorporated before the next meeting.

3.2 The Committee congratulated Prof M Eddleston on his appointment as Deputy Chair.

Agenda Item 4: ECP Ways of Working Document [ECP 3 (62/2023)]

4.1 The Secretariat introduced a draft Ways of Working (WoW) document, noting it was a requirement under the revised Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Councils for each committee to have a WoW document. It is intended to be a working document that details the working practices of the Committee and introduce the proposed procedures for the biopesticide cloud and the provisioning of limited independent scientific advice outside the regular schedule of meetings.

4.2 Members discussed the document and noted that:

- They feel the document should include a clearer feedback mechanism to highlight the policy outcomes on issues the Committee has been asked to advise on.
- The Committee has generally aimed to reach a consensus within the degree of scientific uncertainty that exists. However, the committee agreed that it is important, for reasons of transparency, to establish and note a clear mechanism for the committee to adopt a majority and minority opinions when they are significant and relevant.
- That it would be useful to include a reference to the role of Members in assisting in recruitment, this would include raising awareness of open roles and the work of the committee.
- The process for notifying, and if appropriate, referring media enquiries to the Secretariat should be included.

4.3 The Secretariat agreed to redraft the relevant clauses to address the comments raised. It was agreed to include an annual review of Ways of Working document as a standing item for the November meeting.

Action: Secretariat

Agenda Item 5: Updates of HSE's work with drones being used for pesticide application

5.1 HSE updated the committee on their regulatory work concerning the use of drones to spray pesticides, noting that the long-term ambition is to develop a bespoke regulatory approach.

5.2 This is a key focus of international activity, with HSE chairing an OECD Working Party for Pesticides sub-group on the topic. HSE is working closely with other regulators, researchers, and industry groups from the Americas, Europe, Far East and Australasia to develop a robust suite of data and tools on which regulatory risk assessments can be based.

5.3 National work involves HSE chairing of a drone stakeholder group, that brings interested parties together in order that knowledge and information can be pooled. HSE currently considers applications to apply pesticides on a case-by-case basis, it is anticipated that developments could allow for a more standardised risk assessment to emerge in the medium term.

5.4 The Committee thanked HSE for the update and discussed:

- The role of operator training and if a specific qualification for the use and handling of pesticides in relation to drone spraying was being considered. HSE noted they

currently consider that handling, filling and cleaning operations to be sufficiently similar to that of more traditional application technologies that, at this time, they have not identified the need for a drone-specific training programme.

- The breakdown of regulatory interests and responsibilities between the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and HSE.
- That understanding spray drift remains a key regulatory focus, in particular how specific design features of drones such as flying practice and the power and placement of rotors (relative to nozzles) affect spray drift.
- The opportunity for cross-committee working to develop expertise in the policy area within the UK.
- That HSE is moving forward with plans to authorise the use of drones in fully enclosed spaces.

Agenda Item 6: Human Health Monitoring Data: review

6.1 National Poisons Information Service (NPIS) and Human Health Enquiry Incident Survey (HHEIS) [ECP 4 – 4-1 and ECP 5 – 5-3 (62/2023)]

6.1.1 HSE presented the 2022 to 2023 NPIS pesticide exposure monitoring report and the 2022 HHEIS report. Noting they are continuing to explore how best to integrate the data sets and expect to take on the project in the next financial year.

6.1.2 Members noted:

- The results show a decrease in total incidents and the trend over the last decade has been broadly positive. While an exact cause was not clear, they noted that NPIS have retained the same criteria for classifying incidents since 2008.
- That there has been an increase in incidents relating to the use of rodenticides. HSE noted these results were highlighted to colleagues concerned with the regulation of biocides.
- That there had been exposure to a limited number of products that were unapproved and unavailable in the UK and that it was not immediately obvious how they had been attained.
- That there were other datasets that could be used to develop a more robust image, including the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme (WIIS) and human bio-monitoring data to see if similar trends are evident. HSE noted Defra are leading on work to develop a range of environmental indicator work and the suggestions could be referred onto colleagues within Defra's evidence team for consideration.

Agenda Item 7: Date of next meeting

7.1 23 January 2024 – To be held in a virtual manner.

Agenda Item 8: Any other business

8.1 Committee update: Work of the Pesticide Residues in Food (PRiF) Committee and Monitoring Report [ECP 6 – 7 (62/2023)]

8.1.1 The Chair noted he had discussed the opportunity to work more closely with the PRiF at the annual Defra Scientific Advisory Committee Chairs meeting.

8.1.2 Members noted that the report highlights the difficulty in addressing Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) exceedances from imports. HSE noted the onus remains on the supplier to ensure compliance with MRLs at all times.

8.1.3 Members discussed the monitoring of biopesticides, noting that biopesticides are often exempt from MRLs which means they are a lower priority for monitoring than conventional pesticides.

8.2 Chair's Report

8.2.1 The Chair noted alongside his update Mr J Clarke would provide a short update as the incoming Chair. The Chair discussed how he and Mr J Clarke attended the Defra Scientific Advisory Committee Chairs meeting and the value in engaging with other committees. The Chair raised that he felt there was an opportunity for more direct feedback and communication from Defra on how advice from the ECP is used.

8.2.2 The annual ECP audit of the regulatory work of HSE's Chemical Regulation Division is expected to conclude shortly. The results will be formally submitted to HSE, but the Committee noted it highlighted the thoroughness of HSE's work.

8.2.3 Mr J Clarke noted the committee would be looking to appoint two new members in 2024. As part of this recruitment, he would be inviting existing Members to form an informal working group to think through how best to highlight the value of membership and drive engagement with potential applicants.

Action: Secretariat

8.2.4 Those present noted Prof E Lock is the longest standing member of the committee, who has consistently brought a wealth of scientific experience, dedication and positivity to the committee throughout his tenure. The Secretariat in particular noted their thanks to Prof E Lock for agreeing to remain beyond his initial term of appointment to support the Committee.

8.2.5 They further noted their thanks to Prof W Cushley for his work as Chair. His consistent hard work and inclusive attitude have been crucial in allowing the ECP to flourish. It was noted over his time as Chair he has skilfully dealt with the transition from

the ACP to the ECP, the significant changes as a result of EU exit and the challenging circumstances of Covid. Members, officials and the Secretariat all noted he has consistently created an inclusive, open environment throughout his time as Chair.

Ethan Clabby
ECP Secretariat
January 2024