



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Food Data Transparency Partnership Eco Working Group minutes

Date 04 September 2023
Time 13:30-15:00
Venue Nobel House / Microsoft Teams

Attendance

Co-Chairs:

Judith Batchelar Food sector expert and Environment Agency Deputy Chair
Karen Lepper Deputy Director Food Data, Standards and Sustainability, Defra

Eighteen Eco working group members in attendance

FDTP team

The Eco working group is a stakeholder engagement group that provides input on policy development as part of an open policy design process. These discussions do not reflect agreed government policy.

1. **Welcome**

- Judith Batchelar (JB) recapped Chatham House rules and SharePoint access.
- JB gave a brief recap on the previous meeting and set out the upcoming meeting agenda.

2. **Progress since last meeting**

- Defra are undertaking further engagement with SMEs to understand specific needs and will feedback to Eco WG on findings.
- FDTP are undertaking further engagement with farm and fish assurance schemes to increase their awareness of the FDTP objectives and to identify areas where we can work more closely to streamline data asks from producers.
- Food and Drink Sector Council (FDSC) is scoping work on sustainability, which will concentrate on net zero with a particular focus on scope 3 emissions. The FDSC has committed to taking a leadership role in ensuring that the sector comes together to support action to achieve net zero. This could include consolidation of data asks through pre-competitive agreements. The FDSC will be considering its role at its next meeting on 17th October.

3. Upcoming Work:

- As previously discussed, Defra is establishing an “eco data sources task and finish group” through an open EOI, which is currently underway. From September, this group will work up key actions to ensure consistency, accessibility and continuous improvement of secondary data quality and specificity. The Eco and Data working groups, and the Design Partnership Group will feedback on these proposals to determine next steps.
- Product level methodology task and finish group to be established in early 2024 to work on a standardised method, through another open EOI.
- Defra to publish a roadmap by the end of 2023 to set out the planned approach to standardising and streamlining the measurement and reporting of food related GHG emissions, and the actions committed to through the FDTP.
- Aim to run a public consultation on high level principals on eco-labelling planned to start early next year. A second more detailed consultation to follow later on the technical detail.

4. Discussion

- Judith Batchelar (JB) mentioned seafood aquaculture has been underrepresented in FDTP work so far.
- One member highlighted that all aquaculture farms need to collect carbon data to be ASC certified and would therefore have good knowledge.
- Julie Pierce (JP) said the Data working group had been talking to aquaculture sector and offered to share these discussions with other members.
- JB flagged the developments in food safety that may offer lessons in approach. The BRC food safety audit transitioned into the Global Food Safety Initiative, in response to similar challenges of consolidating different methodologies and standards, including international differences.

5. Defra Eco labelling Presentation

- A Defra official summarised FDTP’s work so far on eco-labelling (see slides for detail):
- The FDTP team is aiming to establish a mandatory methodology for voluntary food eco-labels as per the commitment in the government’s Food Strategy.
- This aims to bring about standardisation and consistency to enable consumers to make informed choices whilst encouraging a shift to more sustainable supply chains.
- Defra has developed early thoughts on the content of the methodology on scope, calculation of eco-scores, data requirements and label design – these will be further developed and consulted on.
- Defra’s other current work includes international engagement on eco-labelling and supporting a number of research projects.
- The role of the Eco Working Group will be to provide feedback and challenge on Defra’s proposals and IGD’s recommendations.
- IGD’s work is independent of government.

- JB: Talking about exports as well as imports is very important. Multinational businesses at every part of supply chain and the first question they are going to be asked is how UK stacks up against other countries.

Discussion:

Members asked about international context and gave some examples of eco-labelling schemes in other countries.

- One Defra official explained there are no known mature government schemes, but that we are communicating with other countries who are also developing schemes.

- Another Defra official mentioned that Defra’s Food Science team have reviewed international approaches to data sources. FDTP will aim to ensure best bits replicated and alignment achieved where necessary.
- A Defra official stated that the current starting assumption was for all food sectors to be included, but FDTP open to discussion and challenge as the policy is developed.
- Another member asked if decision had been made on carbon metric vs multi-metric.
- A Defra official explained this would be explored in the consultation. However, the current steer from ministers is to focus on carbon metric.
- One member asked if relationship between the label and the data behind it will be clear and transparent.
- A Defra official said yes. Proposals for eco data sources T&F group sets this out – same data will be used in different cases; we need to think about what quality this data will need to be.
- The group discussed whether the approach to data quality could be based on sensitivity analysis and the relative contribution of a specific activity to product GHG emissions.
- JB: Vital part of Eco WG is determining how good is good enough for data to be shown to consumer.
- One member asked whether businesses be able to feed in their own data, as product averages have many drawbacks.
- A Defra official: Yes. Supply chain specific data can be of higher quality, and we are looking at how to enable and incentivise use.

6. IGD Presentation and Discussion Facilitated by Defra

Part 1 – Context:

Introduction to IGD’s work and preliminary recommendations.

- Proliferation of existing schemes will cause confusion for consumers and inefficiency for businesses.
- IGD asked by industry leaders to mobilise UK businesses to harmonise solution.
- Recommendations will help inform government’s consultation early 2024.
- Steering group helped develop approach (with wider stakeholder consultation). Monthly meetings.
- Multiple guiding principles, including:
 - Led by science.
 - “Good but not perfect”.
 - Inclusive, scalable, and pragmatic.
- Looking at full life cycle – cradle to grave.
- One member asked if there was any look at international harmonization, especially for Europe.
- IGD confirmed – several countries and organisations (e.g. OECD and Wageningen University) are working on this and IGD has been joined up with this work. Aim is to be UK-specific whilst also interoperable with other schemes.

Part 2 – Methodology and Data (Sarah Haynes):

Four key phases of development:

- Phase 1- Reviewed existing schemes and datasets.
- Phase 2- Developed draft methodology.
- Phase 3- Stakeholder engagement, peer review, and continually improved methodology

- Phase 4 (now)- Understanding how the methodology works in practise. Stress tests, further stakeholder feedback. Finalise recommendations.

Three steps to draft methodology:

- Step 1, Calculation:
 - Recommending an LCA-based approach.
 - 4 indicators – climate change, water use, land use, water quality.
 - UK representative average database good starting point.
 - Also supply-chain specific data where available (will require some standardization of methodologies).
- Step 2, Score:
 - Recommend calculating scores using an **absolute planetary boundary approach**.
 - Planetary boundary for each indicator > annual per capita “allowance” > daily per capita “allowance” > impact of product relative to this daily allowance.
 - Allows to compare products against real world global target, instead of comparing products' impact within a product catalogue.
 - Note individual's environmental daily allowance would not be reflected on pack for consumers.
- Step 3, Presenting scores:
 - To align with general principles / **traffic light system** used to determine colours for nutrition labelling. Red, Amber Green (RAG) bands.
 - Scores **based on per 100g** of the product.
- Aware science is constantly evolving – current recommendations are based on best understanding of existing science. Recommendation to continually improve and update in line with latest science.

Continuum of data specificity:

- Still determining the threshold for when data is "good enough" to be presented to consumers.
- Supply-chain specific data could also feed into the representative average database.

Stress tests:

- Currently under way.
- Aim to determine when data is 'good enough' to put in front of consumers.
- Methodology might be improved based on their findings.
- Key stress tests:
 - Approach for calculating representative average scores.
 - Approach to integrating supply-chain specific data.
- Poultry and sandwiches case studies are being used for stress tests.

Next steps:

- September: Finalise stress-tests, responses to stakeholder feedback and methodology.
- October: Share recommendations with government and the Eco working group.

A Defra official posed two questions to the group:

1. What does the group think about a **centralised UK representative average database** rather than wide range of databases?
2. What does the group think of the **planetary boundary approach** for an eco-label?

Part 3 – Consumer Research (Michael Freedman):

The research:

- Four phases of consumer research have been conducted. In phase four research, shoppers were put in a simulated shopping environment and shown a range of scenarios where labels changed.
- Packs did not have branding/prices. Different eco-labels added/taken away.

Conclusions:

- Clear desire for environmental impact labels from consumers.
- Colour is key, simplicity important. A-E label design preferred.
- Providing extra detail (e.g. on water quality) on the label made no difference.
- Label itself had limited impact on product choice (without education and awareness from a communications campaign).
- Would need good communication on what the indicators mean.

Part 4 – Governance (Natasha Maynard):

Planning:

- Brought together key stakeholders to scope recommendations for future work on governance.
- Research by subgroup of steering group.
- Looked at existing governance structures.

Draft recommendations for scope of operational rules, assurance, and compliance:

- Develop rules for method and data.
- Develop rules for the application of an environmental label.
- Develop rules for displaying an environmental label.
- Develop rules for assurance and compliance.
- Developed guidance for communicating to consumers.
- Considering when appropriate to update a score (e.g. seasonal/supply chain). Rules need to be pragmatic (avoid packaging waste).

Framework:

- Robust governance needed to ensure scheme remains credible and drives continuous improvement over time.
- Steering group would be key decision makers.
- Informed by subgroups (e.g. assurance and compliance, method and data, label and comms) and scientific community.
- Separate scheme operators.

Next steps:

- September: Finalise recommendations with Steering Group and agree scope of IGD's work on governance in 2023-24.
- October: Share recommendations with government and the Eco working group.

Discussion:

- There was discussion about sequencing and whether IGD's scheme would wait for Defra's mandatory methodology before allowing labels to be on shelves.

- IGD said their scheme still required several areas of work (broader consumer communication, business engagement, final decision on governance structure), but will take this question to their steering group.
- One member stated potential impact on scheme credibility if it was to roll out with averages and then later introduce primary data.
- IGD said they were still testing out how they would communicate data specificity to consumers. Working alongside Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) on this.

7. Next Steps and Close

- JB: As there was not enough time for members to ask all the questions they wanted, we will have another hour of Q&A with IGD in an optional overflow meeting.
- IGD will incorporate the group's feedback into their final outputs which they will send to Defra in w/c 23rd October.
- The next meeting will take place on 25th September and be held at the Oxford Martin School, hosted by Joseph Poore.