



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Food Data Transparency Partnership Eco working group minutes

Date 23 October 2023
Time 15:30-17:30
Venue 2 Marsham Street / 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

Fifteen 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 and introductions:

- Karen Lepper (KL) welcomed new Defra and DHSC officials to the group.
- KL set out the agenda:
 - Recap on agreements and decisions made so far and how these fit in with FDTP programme of work.
 - Reach agreement on the structure of the **draft December publication** including the plan for data. Agree on the **narrative** around outcome based environmental management and the approach to primary and secondary data.
 - Reach agreement on priorities/next steps for data infrastructure centralisation.

2. Updates from IGD:

- Stress tests – working alongside Anthesis + BRC Mondra coalition.
 - Complicated area and don't want to rush conclusions.
- Industry consult group wanted to see update on recommendations ahead of handing to government. Therefore, revised timings:

- Before end of November – share full summary of evidence, recommendations, and considerations with stakeholders.
- Early December – share full summary with government.
- As a reminder, IGD will **not** be handing over a full labelling scheme to government – will be evidence-based recommendations.
- There will be space to feedback to IGD.

Discussion:

- Members raised the issue that IGD’s recommendations to date are for a multi-metric labelling scheme, whereas Defra has been exploring a GHG emissions-only approach to date. IGD said they will still recommend a multi-metric scheme, and it is up to government to consider this evidence.
- Another member asked whether carbon sequestration would be considered in the recommendations. IGD replied that the recommendations will be aligned with current standards, but that the governance of the scheme will ensure it can adapt to the latest science.

3. DESNZ on their scope 3 emissions reporting call for evidence and work to update the Environmental Reporting Guidelines:

- Call for evidence will be live for 8 weeks between 19th October and 14th December:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/uk-greenhouse-gas-emissions-reporting-scope-3-emissions>.
- In June 2023, International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) published **IFRS S2**, which includes absolute scope 3 reporting.
- The call for evidence is seeking views on costs/benefits/practicality of scope 3 GHG emissions reporting.
- Also seeking feedback on the existing Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting (SECR) and the Environmental Reporting Guidelines (ERG).
- Will give feedback to the UK Sustainability Disclosure Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which is an independent committee, on their decision whether to endorse IFRS S2 or not.
- DESNZ/Defra will keep the group up to date with developments.
- DESNZ welcomes feedback from the group – either via email or formally via the call for evidence.

Discussion:

- One member asked if FDTP’s work will feed into ERG. The DESNZ representative replied that they will continue working closely with FDTP and aim to align approach.

4. Recap on agreements/decisions so far:

- Defra official: In past meetings, there has been broad agreement on the problems, but need to identify the solutions to ensure we are on the same page. Want feedback from the group for the December publication’s content. We also need clarity across the different work streams (inside and outside government).
- Firstly, the group has already agreed there is no need for a separate mechanism / legal requirement for food and drink scope 3 reporting – will be sector agnostic under DESNZ, working with DBT.

- We also had agreement on endorsing WRAP guidance. Think they are in the best position to do this.
- On eco-labelling, there is a lot of work before we can start on consistent product labels.
- Need to continue wider work by Defra on farm carbon audits, so that we can see primary data in parallel to improving secondary data.
- All work will need agreement by Defra Ministers.

Discussion:

- One member stated they do not agree that agriculture and food should be treated the same as other sectors. Agriculture different as methane biogenic. Food sector will have to do heavy lifting on carbon removals as well as reducing GHG.
- Defra official: Do need to think cross-sector whilst still recognising differences.
- One member asked what actions will be taken to encourage primary data collection. Currently support for farmers to audit carbon in NI and Scotland – will we see the same in England?
- KF: We are looking at data and how to do that. But important we explore other policies.
- Members raised the recent controversy with Red Tractor's "Green Tractor" assurance scheme. Will need to communicate effectively and openly. Members need to know what information they can share with the public.
- Defra officials replied that there is balance between transparency and sharing information or ambitions that have not had ministerial approval. Defra will consider if any further information can be shared publicly.
- Another member asked if any work will be done to fill in known gaps in secondary data, e.g. novelty ingredients, such as meat alternatives.
- Defra officials replied that this has been acknowledged by task and finish group and may be explored by them. However, is also ongoing work by the science team to fill gaps in LCA data.

5. Feedback from the data sources task and finish group:

- Defra official: Objective of coming up with proposals for improving secondary data. This obviously requires also talking about primary data. Trying to refine what falls under primary, and what falls under secondary.
- Also looking at infrastructure and governance of data.
- Several agreements so far and other areas to explore in future meetings:
 - Consistent data format will be key.
 - Scoring system for emissions data as well as activity data. Could then develop requirements/guidelines on different types of data.
 - Consolidate secondary data into an open access data base. Yet to agree scope, governance, and accountability.
 - Determine how can we ensure secondary data is a truly representative average and not skewed by "good" actors.

Discussion:

- Members outlined some practical case studies from their own experience. This included ARC Zero in Northern Ireland, and other examples of farmers carrying out carbon audits and allocating individual product footprints.
- Another member gave examples in the car industry on the issue of allocating individual product footprints – including glass in your assembly led to very negative results.
- Another member highlighted that the BRC-Mondra coalition is investigating the allocation issue.

Action: If members know of any other relevant case studies / work, please let the Defra team know.

6. Discussion on work plan structure and narrative for publication:

- The planned December publication will outline the background, guiding principles, and aims of our work.
- Want to discuss some topics with the group ahead of drafting the publication.
 1. Last meeting, **there was general agreement in the room that outcome-based standards would be desirable, but that practise-based standards will still be required and work alongside.** Is everyone aligned with this narrative?
 - *Room agreed.*
 - 2. While we are starting with GHG emissions, there is an implication that we will **move on to other environmental metrics** afterwards. What are they? In what order would we need to tackle them?
 - Members mentioned water quality, biodiversity, land use change.
 - Another member said they were nervous about diverging from Europe on eco-labelling, as they are looking at a more holistic approach.
 - Another member highlighted that an outcome-based approach is difficult and complex but can give producers/farmers flexibility. They did **not** believe outcome-based management of water quality would be worth the cost. Instead, there are cases, such as pesticides, where standards-based approach is preferable. Can make a pathway towards outcome-based approach for biodiversity, but not there yet.
 - Another member said we should ensure areas such as data infrastructure are created just once, and designed so they can be reused for different metrics.
 - Another member agreed, and suggested the focus should be on activity data first – not just emissions factors. Can retrofit model later if you had the activity data first.
 - There was agreement that we don't want to be counterproductive towards probable future opportunities, even for the sake of expediency.
 - 3. Is everyone aligned to the goal to **collect primary to inform secondary**, and that there will also be a **program of improvement**?
 - One member said they agreed on the improvement aspect.
 - No other disagreements with the question.

- One member highlighted that the **Republic of Ireland** has gone for a farm-based system ([Ireland Origin Green](#)) – primary data first to build up secondary data. In contrast, **France** is going secondary data first. The reason behind this is that France is going for dietary change, whereas Ireland going for farming improvements. UK could go for fusion. The approach will dictate where the focus is.
- Another member stated that the Irish approach is focused on the GHG national inventory.
- There was agreement that the UK needs to go for a fusion of both approaches, but that this will rely on resources.

7. Discussion on data infrastructure centralisation – agree on priorities and next steps:

- The group went through the survey members had filled in prior to the meeting on data infrastructure centralisation.
- Most aspects of data infrastructure had broad agreement on the centralisation approach.
- Aspects that saw differing opinions included:
 - a) Measured data collection
 - b) Provision of models and data collection methods to farmers and businesses
 - c) Data validation

Discussion on next steps for the given priority areas for data infrastructure did not happen due to time constraints. The group will return to this discussion alongside the Data working group.

8. Next steps and close:

- Before our November meeting Defra will share:
 - Draft version of the document we aim to publish in December.
 - Document from WRAP on recommendations for updates to the scope 3 reporting protocol. Will have sector-wide consultation in January 2024.
 - We will be asking group members to review these and provide any feedback.

Action: Read and provide feedback on draft document from Defra and from WRAP.