

Minutes for the 41st HSAC meeting

19 January 2024

Item 1: Welcome by the chair and approval of the draft agenda

Closed item

Item 2: Welcome from Chemicals Pesticides and Hazardous Waste (CPHW) Deputy Director, Rachel Irving

Closed item

Item 3: Chemicals policy update and next steps – Ed Latter (Defra)

Closed item

Item 4: Chronic risks update: pollution assessment – Kate Rogers (Cabinet Office) and Anuszk Maton and John Holmes (Government Office for Science)

Closed item

Item 5: Review of current commissions (closed) – led by Iseult Lynch as Chair

Closed item

Item 6: Chair to welcome participants to the open portion of the meeting

6.1 Iseult Lynch welcomed recently joined participants to the open portion of the meeting.

Item 7: Discussion on the next HSAC opinion papers – led by Iseult Lynch as Chair

7.1 A slide was presented showing the ideas for the next HSAC opinion piece that were previously discussed, along with which CPHW policy teams were interested in each item. Additional ideas raised by policy teams were also presented.

7.2 Camilla Alexander-White highlighted the work of the Royal Society of Chemistry, including a recent study looking at per and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in drinking water and a New Approach Methodologies (NAMs) Network meeting on 30 April 2024 that will share the recent work of the organisation NC3Rs.

7.3 Ovnair Sepai shared that the United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA) were building a public facing website to direct UK consumers to information on chemicals they might encounter.

7.4 Rachel Irving felt that question 2: the benefits and risks of the early adoption of NAMs, and question 6: what agile ways of regulating used internationally could be used in the UK, would be the most useful from a policy perspective. She felt that question 8: helping the consumer make better choices, would be hard for policy to use given they do not have access to many of the policy levers, although the project would be of interest more broadly.

7.5 Many points about the framing and scope of all the questions were discussed. It was decided that a specific document would be prepared bringing together the feedback on all the questions to generate a shorter list for discussion with the policy leads.

Action

HSAC Secretariat to draft a document giving all the feedback on the opinion piece ideas and circulate to the HSAC for prioritisation.

Item 8: Update from the Defra All Committee meeting – Iseult Lynch as Chair

8.1 The last Defra All Committee meeting was held on 19 October 2023. Iseult Lynch reported that the HSAC was celebrated for benefiting from the membership of Early Career Researchers and several other committees were considering doing the same.

8.2 It was noted that all committees could do better in highlighting their work. For HSAC this might include publicising publications, for example the upcoming NAMs report.

8.3 Camilla Alexander-White noted that other science advisory committees do not designate agenda items as closed, or instead list titles for closed agenda items. This increases the transparency of the proceedings, which HSAC should do better on. It was also noted that the HSAC has not published minutes for some years.

8.4 Iseult Lynch noted that the Defra Science Advisory Council pairs committee members with Defra colleagues to improve their understanding of the science and policy interface. Other committees, such as those run by UK HSA, include members of the public. There was support for the HSAC to consider doing the same.

8.5 Ovnair Sepai questioned whether the HSAC could get involved directly with decisions around the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) test guidelines. This was supported.

Action

HSAC Secretariat to investigate including members of the public in the committee, introducing a mentoring scheme for committee members, and whether the HSAC could have a role in decisions around OECD test guidelines.

Item 9: Update on the Chemicals Strategy – Julia Sussams (Secretariat, Defra)

9.1 Julia Sussams gave an update on the Chemicals Strategy that the new Secretary of State had given feedback requiring redrafting of the Strategy as it was. The policy team were considering his feedback and there were no timelines for the Strategy available.

9.2 John Colbourne expressed concern that the resulting delay would hold back policy decisions and asked whether the HSAC could help in speeding up the process. The Royal Society of Chemistry and Chemical Industries Association expressed the same. Their comments will be passed on.

Item 10: Review of current commissions (open) – led by Iseult Lynch as Chair

10.1 A sub-group of the HSAC will undertake an update of a 2019 HSAC review of the environmental fate, impact and degradability of oxo-degradable plastics (now referred to as pro-oxidant additive (PAC) plastics). The HSAC Secretariat presented a slide with draft wording for a call for evidence into the review, with a deadline of the end of February 2024.

10.2 Comments on the Environment Agency's flame retardants scoping report (round 2) were submitted by the HSAC. John Colbourne noted that it had been useful in the past for the comments to be collated so the group could make any summary comments, before being passed back to the commissioner. This will be considered for future commissions.

Item 11: Any other business – led by Iseult Lynch as Chair

11.1 It was agreed that the next 4 meetings should be organised in advance, to be roughly in March, June, September and December 2024. The June meeting will ideally be in person, in London, and will include time for writing the commissions and a social event.

Action

HSAC Secretariat to send round polls to identify dates for these meetings.

Annex A

Attendance list

HSAC:

- Iseult Lynch
- Stewart Owen
- Susan Chilton
- Luigi Margiotta-Casaluci
- John Colbourne
- Kevin Jones
- Stuart Harrad
- Laura Carter

Secretariat:

- Julia Sussams (Evidence Strategy Team)

Defra Policy Officials

- Rachel Irving (Deputy Director, Chemicals, Pesticides and Haz Waste)
- Mark Chandler (Head of Evidence and Analysis Hub, Chemicals, Pesticides and Haz Waste)
- Wassim Malik Choudhury (Chemicals Strategy Team)
- Edward Latter (Chemicals Policy Team)
- Joe Rosi (Defra Waste Policy Team)

Defra Agency Representatives

- Wojtek Koryczan (Environment Agency)
- Suzie Qassim (Natural England)

Other Government Department and Agencies

- Kate Rogers (Cabinet Office)
- John Holmes (Government Office for Science)
- Anuska Maton (Government Office for Science)
- Ovnair Sepai (UKHSA)
- Olivia Osborne (FSA)

External Stakeholders

- Camilla Alexander-White (Royal Society of Chemistry)
- Roger Pullin (Chemical Industries Association)
- Chloe Topping (ChemTrust)
- Kerry McLoughlin (British Retail Consortium)

Devolved Governments

- Caroline Barry (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland)
- Aoibhinn Corrigan (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland)