

Hazardous Substances Advisory Committee (HSAC)

Meeting Minutes – 44th HSAC Meeting

3rd December 2024

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

- 1.1 The Chair, Professor Iseult Lynch, welcomed all attendees to the meeting (see Annex A).
- 1.2 The draft agenda was approved with no additional items added under any other business. No conflicts of interest were declared with items on the agenda.

Item 2 Approval of the minutes from the 43rd meeting, and review of actions - Iseult Lynch, Chair

- 2.1 The minutes from the 43rd meeting have been actioned and accepted without objections.
 - **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.**
 - After discussion with Senior Leaders, it has been decided to keep attendance to the HSAC to those invited.
 - The Secretariat will go on to look at potential mentoring schemes for committee members.
 - **HSAC to prepare structured feedback based on Cecile's questions on the human health impact of flame retardants and identifying methodologies for chemicals prioritisation.**
 - The flame retardants piece has been completed and was gratefully received by Defra. Work is now underway looking at next steps.
 - The chemicals prioritisation piece is still ongoing.
 - **HSAC to review the draft benzotriazoles report and provide consolidated feedback by November 7th.**
 - This was completed and sent to the Environment Agency.
 - **Secretariat to arrange a meeting with the Defra NAMs policy lead and the HSAC to discuss the next HSAC policy advice paper.**
 - It was decided to have this meeting jointly with the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology. An update on this will be provide later

in this meeting. There will also be an opportunity for the HSAC to discuss what the focus area of this paper will be.

- **HSAC secretariat to set up a couple of informal check-ins between meetings to keep the momentum going.**
 - This was actioned. There have been two of these meetings since the last HSAC meeting.
- **Emerging evidence – Iseult to share the JRC guidance document on effectively using science to support chemicals risk assessment with the Secretariat.**
 - This item is outstanding.

Item 3 Forward look, upcoming meeting topics & commissions in progress – Yasmin Wright, Secretariat

3.1 Yasmin Wright presented upcoming meeting topics for 2025.

Item 4 Seeking HSACs views on the nomination process for the Science Policy Panel (SPP) and its priorities for the first year – Mathieu Ortega, DEFRA

4.1 Mathieu Ortega presented to the HSAC on the negotiations to establish an international Science Policy Panel (SPP) for the sound management of chemicals, waste and pollution prevention. He asked for the HSAC's views on best practice for how experts might be selected and nominated to the SPP and the topics that should be considered for inclusion in the SPP work programme. The HSAC provided their opinions on the following three questions:

1. Development criteria for nominees

The ideal candidate needs to be able to:

- Consider the UK Government's priorities within a broader global context, recognising that international perspectives may vary.
- Have broad, generalist skills and an understanding of working on a global level, considering various international pressures, such as those from different countries and indigenous inclusivity. Ideally, they have experience of working with the Global South and indigenous populations.
- Be able to consider a wide range of social, cultural, and political factors, as the panel's work requires balancing various global pressures and perspectives.
- Have a broad understanding of all the issues rather than specific technical knowledge.

4.2 It was agreed that whilst chemical expertise specific to the UK context would be useful, the Committee felt it was more important that a well-rounded approach to governance and economics is crucial for effective decision-making.

4.3 It was suggested that this position should resemble a Chief Scientist role, requiring someone with a wide-reaching expertise to navigate various issues, like health and societal impacts, without needing deep expertise in every specific field.

2. The procedures and approaches to help with the nomination and how we can best engage the breadth of the scientific community

The HSAC advised that the following approaches could help engage the scientific community:

- A clear mechanism for dialogue across government organisations to ensure information flows effectively.
- The creation of a cross-government organisation to facilitate input from agencies and Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs) on issues to be escalated to the international level.
- Considering how to leverage the UK representative from the Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC), especially when navigating processes or decisions related to SETAC.
- Ensuring that the individuals involved are diverse. Often the same individuals are involved across various committees/meetings and whilst this helps build relationships it may not be covering the breadth of expertise.
- Ensuring that the positions are advertised across different websites to reach the broadest audience of potential candidates.
- Ensuring that there is adequate support to facilitate UK members' participation.

3. Topics the panel could focus on to deliver greatest global value

4.4 Whilst the importance of international collaboration was noted, a member of the Committee noted that there are areas where independent action should be taken to manage pollution alongside the work of the SPP.

4.5 The approach to horizon scanning should be balanced with the urgency of achieving the EU's 2040 Greenhouse Gas Emissions reduction target, particularly regarding non-point source pollution, a growing biodiversity challenge compounded by climate change.

4.6 It was felt that the focus of the panel should not be on a prioritised list of issues, as the areas of concern will evolve over time. It is important that existing data, knowledge and solutions are shared globally as legacy issues in the UK may be emerging challenges in developing countries.

4.7 It was felt that the focus of the panel should be on substantial and complex environmental challenges, such as non-point source pollution, waste management and circular economy concepts. The focus should be on solutions, rather than just mapping out existing problems or pollution levels.

Item 5 Legacy Discussion on ecological effects of warfare/dumped munitions – Jason Weeks, HSAC Member

- 5.1 Jason Weeks presented information and discussion from a recent SETAC meeting on unexploded World War Two ordinance emissions in the Baltic Sea. Recent evidence has shown that the munitions casings, which were previously preventing the release of pollutants from the inside, are beginning to degrade and the munitions are starting to release their contents into the sea. A study in the Baltic Sea has shown that these emissions are potentially causing issues in the marine environment. It is currently unclear whether this problem impacts the UK as there is little to no data.
- 5.2 Susan Chilton acknowledged that global-scale concerns like munitions risk may not be suitable for HSAC. She highlighted the potential for Defra to drive change in how environmental valuation is conducted, especially in cases with uncertain risks, such as environmental contamination from munitions. She proposed a more risk-based approach, like valuing statistical lives, which could lead to higher, more usable values for the environment, especially in legal contexts. However, she noted that the practice of environmental valuation is still evolving.
- 5.3 Laura Carter pointed out the lack of UK-focused research and proactive initiatives addressing exposure to sea-dumped munitions. While some research, like that at Strathclyde University, is underway, she noted that the UK Marine Strategy does not specifically address this issue, unlike EU strategies. She highlighted that there are potential risks related to deep-sea fishing, which seem to be increasing.

➤ Action

- Agreed to have a follow-up discussion on this topic during the next informal HSAC catch up.
- Yasmin and Julia to consider reaching out to other government department committees to gauge their interest and involvement in the topic.

Item 6 Follow up on the 26th UK-Japan Bilateral Conference – Julia Sussams, Secretariat

- 6.1 Julia Sussams gave an update to the HSAC on the 26th UK-Japan (UK-J) bilateral conference on endocrine disrupting chemicals and other chemicals of concern. This took place in Winchester in November 2024 and alongside research updates from the partners, considered changes to the memorandum of understanding between the UK and Japan for the next five years. The partners are considering expanding the remit of the UK-J. She asked the HSAC on their thoughts on areas the research could be expanded into.
- 6.2 Laura Carter suggested that sublethal effects could be included in expanded research areas, especially in relation to chemical exposure. She noted that when presenting data on sublethal effects or behavioural endpoints, the challenge is

fitting them into existing regulatory guidelines, such as those of the OECD. Julia confirmed that the sublethal effects will be implicitly included in the new research cores and acknowledged the challenge of getting these used in practice.

- 6.3 Iseult Lynch wondered if this was a route to accelerate New Approach Methodologies (NAMs) acceptance by using the OECD's case study approach. Julia recognised that the UK-J partnership would be valuable for getting new methods supported by the OECD due to Japan's high level of engagement with that institution.
- 6.4 Iseult also raised the challenge of identifying synergistic mixtures, especially given the unpredictability of their effects. She suggested that the HSAC could give strategic guidance on what mixture combinations should be prioritised for testing to make sure they are likely to be found in the environment.
- 6.5 John Colbourne suggested exploring chemical databases in both countries to identify potential overlaps that could enhance understanding of causal links between exposure and harm. John also proposed the idea of working with UK Research & Innovation to establish a joint research program on chemical safety between UK and Japanese institutions, leveraging the MOU to foster deeper collaboration. He expressed support for working with Japanese colleagues to advance OECD initiatives.
- 6.6 Stewart Owen emphasised the importance of broadening the conversation beyond just endocrine issues when collaborating with Japan. He felt that research into mixtures would be a logical next step for collaboration. He highlighted the importance of developing relationships with new and early career researchers, alongside the established relationships with senior scientists. Stewart also highlighted the difficulty in directly linking research to tangible impacts on Japanese legislation, stressing the challenge of demonstrating how past research has influenced policy.
- 6.7 Iseult Lynch encouraged the group to share any relevant contacts or information about people working in Japan and in the areas of interest. She also invited suggestions for potential collaborations, particularly with Japan, when considering the next HSAC NAMs paper.

Action

- HSAC members to identify any colleagues they are aware of who are already working with Japanese academics or if they are aware of any Japanese counterparts to themselves.

Item 7 Next HSAC Policy Advice Paper – Julia Sussams, Secretariat

- 7.1 Julia Sussams revisited the topic from the last HSAC meeting where it was agreed that the next HSAC policy advice paper would be a follow up paper on New Approach Methodologies (NAMs). The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) will be the ultimate customer for the next NAMs paper.

The Secretariat will be meeting DSIT colleagues about this paper shortly after this meeting. It was agreed that a discussion on the level of detail and whether the team should focus on championing NAMs, or gathering real-world examples from their networks on what could be done, would be discussed with DSIT.

- 7.2 Stewart Owen discussed the need to reconsider certain toxicology studies considering new approaches like NAMs. He suggested there is an opportunity to advocate for alternative, more useful studies for NAMs. He acknowledged that it is a complex task to identify which studies and approaches are most suitable.
- 7.3 John Colbourne suggested the paper should explore what constitutes a "progressive regulatory framework" for adopting NAMs - particularly how it can be integrated into risk assessments to reduce animal testing, while providing more robust and scientifically sound data. He suggested that the adoption of NAMs requires not just scientific excellence but also changes in governance and regulatory processes.
- 7.4 John highlighted the work being done in Europe to eliminate animal testing, and stressed the importance of understanding both the benefits and risks of adopting NAMs to inform decisions by Defra and the UK government. Existing research on legislative mapping should be leveraged to identify early wins and the necessary changes—both in guidance documents and potential legislative changes—required to facilitate NAM adoption. He made the point that the adoption of NAMs needs to be practical for regulatory agencies so that it doesn't disrupt current processes too much.
- 7.5 Iseult Lynch emphasised the importance of validation in the adoption of NAMs and that validation should not be based solely on comparing NAMs to traditional animal tests. Instead, she suggested exploring alternative approaches to validation, particularly in the context of a progressive regulatory framework. The level of validation may vary depending on the stage of the regulatory process at which NAMs are applied.
- 7.6 Iseult also highlighted the need to consider the economics of implementing NAMs, stressing the importance of comparing the costs of maintaining the current system (with animal testing) versus the benefits of transitioning to a more flexible, NAM-based approach. She proposed bringing in Susan's expertise to assess these economic factors and weigh the costs of inaction against the potential benefits of adopting NAMs.
- 7.7 Lastly Iseult mentioned that at the upcoming Chemwatch conference that there will be a discussion on the process in the future for selecting case studies related to NAMs. She is considering whether the industry should be invited to share data or propose case studies, but is uncertain if this might blur the boundaries of what is acceptable for the group to engage in. Julia Sussams confirmed that this should not be an issue.

- **The Secretariat to have an initial conversation with DSIT on the proposed contents of the paper and will share the meeting notes with the committee.**

Item 8 Emerging evidence – HSAC members

8.1 There were no emerging evidence items brought to this meeting.

Item 9 Chemicals Prioritisation Structured Feedback Update – HSAC Members Action

- Iseult Lynch asked everyone to aim to finish inputting by the end of this week before the follow up meeting before Christmas.
- Yasmin Wright to arrange a follow up meeting next week.

Item 10 AOB

10.0 There were no items raised.

End of meeting – 12:30pm

ANNEX A

ATTENDANCE LIST

HSAC:

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

Secretariat:

- Yasmin Wright
- Julia Sussams
- Iqra Raja

Defra Policy Officials

- Marc Casale (Deputy Director, Chemicals, Pesticides and Hazardous Waste)
- Keegan Schroeder (Evidence and Analysis Hub, Chemicals, Pesticides and Hazardous Waste)
- Ussama Mohyuddin (Evidence and Analysis Hub, Chemicals, Pesticides and Hazardous Waste)
- Ed Latter (Chemicals Policy Team, Chemicals, Pesticides and Hazardous Waste)
- Julia Machalska (REACH Work Programme Team, Chemicals, Pesticides and Hazardous Waste)
- Mathieu Ortega (International Hub, Chemicals, Pesticides and Hazardous Waste)
- Leon Jackson (Chemicals Hub, Chemicals, Pesticides and Hazardous Waste)
- Liz Lawton (Chemicals Hub, Chemicals, Pesticides and Hazardous Waste)

Defra Agency Representatives

- Suzie Qassim (Natural England)

Other Government Department and Agencies

- Ovnair Sepai (UKHSA)
- Olivia Osborne (FSA)

External Stakeholders

- Roger Pullin (Chemical Industries Association)
- Chloe Topping (ChemTrust)
- Stephanie Metzger (RSC)
- Charlie Stevenson (Cruelty Free International)

Devolved Governments

- Aoibhinn Corrigan (Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland)

- Sarah Jane Murphy (Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland)
- Dan Merckel (Scottish Government)