

## Government Chemist Programme Expert Group Meeting

Monday 4 December 2023

Hybrid (LGC, Queens Road, Teddington, Middlesex TW11 0LY & MS Teams)

### Attendees:

<u>PEG</u> Chelvi Leonard (CL) David Franklin (DF) David Pickering (DP) Declan Naughton (DN) Diane Turner (DT) John L Collins (JC) Jonathon Griffin (JG) Paul Berryman (PB) Sophie Rollinson (SR) Kasia Kazimierczak (KK)  <u>Observers</u> David Skelton (DS)	<u>DSIT</u> Eli Johnson (EJ) Maria Turner (MT)  <u>LGC</u> Amber Meredith (AM) Caroline Pritchard (CP) Christopher McElroy (CM) Davide Ojeda (DO) John Black (JB) Julian Braybrook (JBr) Kirstin Gray (KG) Paul Hancock (PH) Selvarani Elahi (SE) Tejal Soni-Khamar (TSK) Tim Wilkes (TW)
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Apologies: Lucy Foster, Simon Branch, Brenda McRory

### 1. Welcome & minutes of the last meeting:

- 1.1 A PEG member opened with welcoming attendees and reminded all those present of the usual housekeeping.
- 1.2 Minutes from the previous GC PEG meeting (May 2023) were approved.

### 2. Review of actions and matters arising from previous meetings:

- 2.1 A PEG member commented that the list of GC PEG members on the GC website needs updating. **Action 5:** GC to update the PEG member section of the GC website. Action ongoing; awaiting updated biographies from some PEG members (**ACTION 1**).

### 3. DSIT Update

- 3.1 The DSIT presentation (slides circulated with these minutes) summarised the following:
- 3.2 The appointment of the new DSIT minister has caused a delay to the publication of the Government Chemist review. The new minister needs to approve the review prior to publication.
- 3.3 On September 7<sup>th</sup> it was announced that the UK Government has reached agreement to associate to Horizon and Copernicus. This enables the NMS laboratories to continue to participate in EURAMET and other Horizon projects.

- 3.4 The DSIT team have commenced work on the UK Measurement Strategy delivery plan, working with the NMS delivery laboratories and other NMS partners. The plan will act as a link between the strategy and the formulation of NMS programmes and guide DSIT's approach to the next Spending Review.
- 3.5 A PEG member asked if the new minister has a science background. DSIT replied that the new minister was previously Economic Secretary to the Treasury and has an interest in investment in R&D.
- 3.6 There were no comments or questions from PEG members on the update.

#### **4. GC Update**

- 4.1 The GC highlighted the success of the recent Government Chemist conference in June 2023, leading the UK delegation to the 9<sup>th</sup> International Chemical Societies Conference, held at the Chemical Society of Japan and their visit to the Hong Kong Government Chemist laboratory. The focus of the International Chemical Societies Conference was on circular and sustainable chemistry for food sustainability and a report summarising outputs from the meeting is currently being drafted.
- 4.2 A PEG member asked a question regarding the Guildford move. The GC replied that planning permission has now been granted and internal plans are close to being finalised. The internal fit has now been put out to tender for a planned February/March 2024 start. Once the actual move date is confirmed, individual consultations with staff will begin.
- 4.3 A PEG member asked if the report from the International Chemical Societies Conference was due to be published, to which the GC confirmed that the report will be a white paper and will be published.
- 4.4 A PEG member highlighted a conversation with a speaker from the Government Chemist conference who had no appreciation or knowledge of analytical chemistry but then gave a speech which had many elements of analytical chemistry in it. They expressed their concern around a general lack of awareness of analytical chemistry and also highlighted a shortage of analytical chemists in the UK which needs to be addressed.
- 4.5 A PEG member highlighted a need to link biologists with 'basic' science and in other areas such as farming.
- 4.6 A PEG member added that, from a University point of view, he considered that it was a labelling issue, particularly with biologists as many are not aware that they are in fact carrying out analytical chemistry.
- 4.7 A PEG member added over the last few decades that there has been more bioscience introduced into analytical measurement, and the key therefore is to ensure that there are courses available on the fundamentals of measurement. He agreed it was a challenge.
- 4.8 The GC added that the Research Councils do need reminding of the importance of analytical science. He also added that looking at the direction of travel of farming, there is a need for analytical scientists.
- 4.9 A GC staff member agreed that a conversation around the badging of science areas is needed.

## **5. International Science Review update**

- 5.1 The key points of the Science Review presentation can be found in the slides circulated with these minutes. Questions and comments are summarised below:
- 5.2 A PEG member congratulated the NML on the great results of the Science Review.
- 5.3 A PEG member added their congratulations on the outcome of the Science Review.
- 5.4 A PEG member stated that this was a fantastic outcome and added that PEG members can contribute to push for maintained funding to the Government Chemist.
- 5.5 The GC stated their thanks to all PEG members for their continued support.

## **6. GC2326 Programme Review**

- 6.1 The key points of the presentation can be found in the slides circulated with these minutes. Questions and comments are summarised below:
- 6.2 A conversation ensued regarding options for repurposing funds from set aside for SF1, due to low numbers of referee cases.
- 6.3 A PEG member stated that they were happy to fund the 'One Health' project as it was the next project on the list following the decision conference and there are now funds available.
- 6.4 A PEG member also stated their support for repurposing the current underspend.
- 6.5 A PEG member stated that regarding Wagyu beef, it was not really an issue of provenance and more a re-labelling issue on terms of Wagyu-style beef.
- 6.6 A PEG member stated that the Wagyu beef proposal would need discussion first and they suggested contacting the policy team at Defra regarding the labelling of Wagyu beef.
- 6.7 A PEG member also asked if, as part of our Horizon scanning activities whether anything unusual has come up and suggested that it was worth looking to track/trace any oddities and look for any isolated incidents. They also highlighted the issue with tyre particle as a potential topic to look at, potentially expanding on the current GC project on microplastics to microparticles.
- 6.8 A PEG member highlighted that tyre particles do come up as a potential emerging issue. They further added that allergens are a priority area for the FSA. They also added that FERA will be conducting a ring-trial for PFAS early next financial year.
- 6.9 A further conversation regarding referee case trends, whereby a PEG member asked as to whether local authority enforcement is effective and why aren't funds apportioned to it, to which a PEG member replied that some authorities still have budgets, but the level is dependent on the individual authority. They also added that a high level of samples are still being taken but some of the samples that fail are not being challenged, possibly due to lack of funding within local authorities to challenge.
- 6.10 The same PEG member added that the current referee case was as a result of an issue with the defence sample.
- 6.11 The GC asked if there was a need to issue relevant guidance to testing laboratories.

- 6.12 A PEG member observed that although there was a slump in local authority sampling during the pandemic, sampling was back up, but this has not resulted in an increase in referee cases. They also commented that food sampling is not a priority for local authorities.
- 6.13 A PEG member asked if the Government Chemist team looked at the source of referrer cases. A GC staff member replied that the main source of referee cases is from the Port Authorities, occasionally from Trading Standards. The PEG member supported Government outreach to food businesses.
- 6.14 The GC suggested that industry may not know that they can challenge testing results.
- 6.15 A GC staff member highlighted a loss of skills and that some local authorities have stated that they have a yearly budget of £20k for food sampling.
- 6.16 A PEG member asked how much the average food test was. Another PEG member replied that the average test cost is £150 per test.
- 6.17 A PEG member suggested that they could look at the number of samples taken by local authorities **(ACTION 2)**.

## **7. CB6: Measurement methods for microplastics in food**

- 7.1 The key points of this presentation can be found in the slides circulated with these minutes. Questions and comments are summarised below.
- 7.2 A PEG member praised the fabulous work presented. They asked a question regarding the shape of particles and if future work will look at real matrices. The GC staff member replied that currently they are using pristine particles at present. The XPT platform can look at particle shape and confirmed that future work will look at real matrices.
- 7.3 A PEG member raised the importance of sample preparation. They suggested potentially looking at a meat matrix and highlighted a database from Frontier Laboratories that could be a useful tool for selecting relevant microplastics.
- 7.4 A PEG member stated that particle shape is important. The GC staff member replied that XPT is an imaging platform, so particle shape should not make too much of a difference. He also highlighted that if a sample of sufficiency diluted, then particle shape should not be an issue.

## **8. CB7: Trace measurement of allergens in non-dairy milk substitutes**

- 8.1 The key points of this presentation can be found in the slides circulated with these minutes. Questions and comments are summarised below:
- 8.2 A PEG member asked how many runs were performed, to which the GC staff member replied more than thirty (30).
- 8.3 A PEG member also asked if the method developed could be extended to Latte in can products and if there would be any interference by caffeine. The GC staff member replied that the spiked approach developed should account for any interference.

- 8.4 A PEG member praised the fascinating work and asked if the GC team knew the origin of contamination in the products analysed. The GC staff member thought that it was most likely the emulsifier used in the product. The PEG member stated that that was something the GC could potentially go back to the manufacturers, stating that there is something in their process.
- 8.5 A PEG member also asked if the method developed could look at solid materials, but the GC staff member replied that the extraction method is not suitable for liquids.

## **9. Feedback and questions**

- 9.1 A PEG member asked PEG members for their feedback.
- 9.2 A PEG member praised the fabulous and excellent work of the Government Chemist and is amazed how much work is carried out on such a relatively low budget. They further raised a point to DSIT of the need for more funding into the Government Chemist Programme.
- 9.3 A PEG member echoed the fantastic work of the Government Chemist. Whilst there was a concern over the numbers of referee cases, they stated that it is good to have a capability for measuring microplastics within the Government Chemist Programmes. They also echoed the need for more funding into the Government Chemist Programme.
- 9.4 Another PEG member stated that they could foresee an increase in CBD sampling.
- 9.5 A PEG member repeated their congratulations on the outcome of the Science Review and highlighted the need for an in-depth Government review of food sampling and testing.
- 9.6 A GC staff member asked if the Government Chemist could play a role in improving sampling as it is not the first time that we have seen secondary sampling gone awry. A PEG member replied that businesses can go to any laboratory to get a sample retested. They also highlighted that commercial laboratories cannot deal with enforcement samples and there is an issue in how samples are prepared, e.g., they are not applying dilution ratios.
- 9.7 A GC staff member suggested that the Government Chemist investigate producing a note for defence laboratories. Government Chemist team to discuss internally (**ACTION 3**).
- 9.8 LGC to circulate a Doodle Poll for the Spring 2024 meeting (**ACTION 4**).