Decision to release commitments previously accepted by the CMA in respect of Google's Privacy Sandbox Proposals

17 October 2025



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1. Summary

1.1 In this Decision (the '**Decision'**), pursuant to section 31A(4) of the Competition Act 1998 (the '**Act**'), the CMA releases the Commitments we accepted from Google on 11 February 2022 regarding its Privacy Sandbox proposals.

1.2 The Privacy Sandbox is a set of proposed changes to Google's web browser ('**Chrome'**) that was intended to limit cross-site tracking by replacing third-party cookies ('**TPCs**') and other functionalities with a set of alternative technologies. The CMA accepted Commitments (the '**Commitments**') from Google to ensure that Google's Privacy Sandbox was developed in a way that does not distort competition in online advertising markets. Without the CMA's oversight, Google's original plans for the Privacy Sandbox could have weakened competition in the digital advertising sector, harming consumers who ultimately pay for the cost of online advertising. The CMA's concerns were centred on Google's plans to remove TPCs, which are the fundamental building block that support the effectiveness of online advertising services offered by the publishers and advertising businesses which compete with Google.

1.3 Since accepting those Commitments, there have been various changes in Google's approach to the Privacy Sandbox. In July 2024, Google announced that it would no longer remove TPCs from Chrome, and that instead it would show a standalone prompt asking all users to choose between restricting or maintaining TPCs. In April 2025, Google announced that it no longer planned to roll out such a prompt, and also confirmed that it is not going back to its original plans to remove TPCs.

1.4 Given that Google no longer plans to restrict TPCs, we consulted on a Notice of intention to release commitments (the '**Notice'**) in June and July 2025. In this Decision, we respond to submissions to the consultation, and set out our reasoning for concluding that the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concerns no longer arise and that it is appropriate to release the Commitments. The CMA has taken into account that, since publication of the Notice, Google stated in October 2025 that it has decided to retire various Privacy Sandbox technologies.[1]

[1] Google's submission of 10 October 2025 and see Google's announcement Update on plans for Privacy Sandbox technologies, 17 October 2025 (accessed on 17 October 2025).

1.5 The CMA's Commitments have ensured that Google designed and developed the Privacy Sandbox in a way that engaged stakeholders. Stakeholders had the opportunity to provide their feedback so that the Privacy Sandbox was not developed in a way that could distort competition by favouring Google's own online advertising services over those of competitors, while Google was planning to deprecate TPCs (or otherwise restrict TPCs through a standalone prompt). The CMA is grateful for stakeholders' engagement on the Privacy Sandbox proposals.

2. Introduction and background

2.1 On 11 February 2022, the CMA issued a decision (the '**February 2022 Decision**') under section 31A of the Act to accept the Commitments offered by Alphabet Inc.,[2] Google UK Limited[3] and Google LLC[4] (collectively, '**Google**')[5] in the context of the CMA's investigation concerning a suspected abuse of a dominant position by Google in the market for the supply of web browsers through its proposals to replace TPCs and other functionalities in Chrome with a range of alternative technologies known as the 'Privacy Sandbox' tools (the '**Investigation**').[6]

2.2 Cookies are small pieces of information, normally consisting of just letters and numbers, which websites provide when users visit them. A web browser can store cookies and send them back to the website next time they visit. Cookies are used to, among other things, track users' browsing behaviour.

2.3 First-party cookies are set by the website the user is visiting. TPCs are set by a domain other than the one the user is visiting. This typically occurs when the website incorporates elements from other sites, such as images, social media plugins or advertising. When the browser or other software fetches these elements from the other sites, those other sites can set cookies as well.[7]

Google's original plans for TPCs gave rise to competition concerns

2.4 In the February 2022 Decision, the CMA set out its competition concerns. Given that TPCs are the principal means by which publishers and ad techs[8] achieve common identification of web users on web pages, they are a fundamental building block to support the effectiveness of open display advertising services offered by the publishers and ad techs which compete with Google. The CMA's competition concerns were predicated on Google's plan to remove TPCs in Chrome. In the context of Google removing TPCs,

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[2] Registered office: 1600 Amphitheatre Parkway, Mountain View, CA 94043, USA.
[3] Registered office: 1 St. Giles High Street, London, WC2H 8AG; UK company number 03977902.
[4] Registered office: 1600 Amphitheatre Parkway, Mountain View, CA 94043, USA.
[5] Each of Alphabet Inc., Google UK Limited and Google LLC are part of the same corporate group. The Commitments are expressed as binding these three companies and 'any other member of their corporate Group'.
[6] Privacy Sandbox on Android was outside the scope of the CMA's investigation.
[7] See the Information Commissioner's Office, Guidance on the use of storage and access technologies (accessed on 15 October 2025).
[8] Intermediary services reliant on programmatic technology involved in the automatic buying, selling and serving of display advertisements.

these concerns were exacerbated by Google's plans to deprecate further information such as the IP address.

2.5 The CMA was concerned that the Privacy Sandbox Proposals,[9] if implemented without sufficient scrutiny and oversight, would be likely to amount to an abuse of Google's likely dominant position in the market for the supply of web browsers in the UK. More specifically, the CMA was concerned that without such scrutiny and oversight, the Privacy Sandbox Proposals would allow Google to:

(a) distort competition in the market for the supply of ad inventory in the UK and in the market for the supply of ad tech services in the UK, by restricting the functionality associated with user tracking for third parties, while retaining this functionality for Google;

(b) self-preference its own ad inventory and ad tech services by transferring key functionalities to Chrome, providing Google with the ability to affect digital advertising market outcomes through Chrome in a way that cannot be scrutinised by third parties, and leading to conflicts of interest; and

(c) exploit its likely dominant position by denying Chrome web users substantial choice in terms of whether and how their personal data is used for the purpose of targeting and delivering advertising to them.[10]

2.6 The CMA was also concerned that Google's announcements relating to the Privacy Sandbox Proposals and/or taking implementing steps prior to the issue of the CMA's notice of intention to accept commitments in June 2021 (the '**June 2021 Notice**'), were likely to, individually and/or collectively, amount to an abuse of its likely dominant position in the market for the supply of web browsers in the UK. Google's announcements and actions prior to the issue of the June 2021 Notice had caused uncertainty in the market as to the specific alternative solutions which would be available to publishers and ad tech providers once TPCs were deprecated. They showed (and created the expectation) that Google was determined to proceed with changes in the relevant areas, including by removing TPCs within two years of the

[9] The Privacy Sandbox Proposals were defined in the February 2022 Decision as 'a set of proposed changes on Google's web browser ('Chrome') that aim to address privacy concerns by removing the cross-site tracking of Chrome users through TPCs and other methods of tracking; and create a set of alternative tools to provide the functionalities that are currently dependent on cross-site tracking'. See the February 2022 Decision, page 4, footnote 6.

[10] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.3.

announcements, in ways which would advantage its own businesses and limit competition from rivals.[11]

2.7 In this respect, the CMA considered[12] that the concerns market participants had expressed to it regarding the impact that the Privacy Sandbox Proposals were likely to have on competition reflected in part:

(a) the asymmetry of information between Google and third parties regarding the development of the Privacy Sandbox Proposals, including the criteria that Google would use to assess different design options and evidence relating to their effectiveness against those criteria; and

(b) a lack of confidence from third parties in Google's statements about its intentions in developing and implementing the Privacy Sandbox Proposals. The CMA understood that this lack of confidence in part reflected the commercial incentives that Google faced in developing the Privacy Sandbox Proposals and the lack of independent scrutiny of the Privacy Sandbox Proposals and the process for their development.

Google offered the Commitments to address the CMA's competition concerns

2.8 While maintaining its plans to remove TPCs, Google offered commitments to address the CMA's competition concerns in relation to the Privacy Sandbox Proposals. The CMA's acceptance of the Commitments created obligations on Google around (i) transparency and consultation with third parties regarding the development of the Privacy Sandbox; (ii) CMA and Information Commissioner's Office ('**ICO**') involvement in the design, development and implementation of the Privacy Sandbox Proposals; (iii) non-discrimination against rivals of Google's own advertising businesses in the design, development and implementation of the Privacy Sandbox; (iv) limiting Google's use of data in its advertising businesses, from the point at which Google would remove TPCs in Chrome; and (v) reporting and compliance regarding the Commitments.

[11] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.6.
[12] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.7.

Since the CMA's February 2022 Decision to accept the Commitments, Google changed its plans for the Privacy Sandbox

2.9 Since the CMA's February 2022 Decision to accept the Commitments, there have been various developments and changes to the Privacy Sandbox.[13]

2.10 First, on 22 July 2024, Google announced in a blog post a new approach to the Privacy Sandbox.[14] Instead of deprecating (removing) TPCs, Google would introduce a new standalone prompt giving Chrome users a choice of whether to maintain or restrict TPCs. Compared to the previous approach of full TPC deprecation, the new standalone prompt was likely to result in some Chrome users maintaining TPCs. The CMA indicated that competition concerns remained under Google's revised approach, and began considering potential changes to the Commitments following that announcement.

2.11 Second, Google decided not to implement fully certain Privacy Sandbox features that it originally envisaged would limit the scope of cross-site tracking using identifiers other than TPCs. For example, Google confirmed that IP addresses would continue to be available outside Incognito mode. As a result, subject to compliance with data protection law, ad techs would be able to build alternative identifiers that can re-create some cross-site tracking functionality in Chrome even for users that do not allow TPCs.[15]

2.12 Third, on 22 April 2025, Google announced that it no longer intends to proceed with introducing a standalone prompt giving users a choice whether to restrict or maintain TPCs.[16] Google also said that it had instead decided to maintain its current approach to offering users third-party cookie choice in Chrome, which means that Google confirmed it will not be deprecating TPCs either. Google also stated that it will continue to enhance tracking protections in Chrome's Incognito mode – a feature in Chrome where users can browse in a more private way, which currently means that their browsing data is not saved on the device.

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[13] See the CMA's Privacy Sandbox investigation case page.
[14] See Google's announcement A new path for Privacy Sandbox on the web, 22 July 2024 (accessed on 15 October 2025).
[15] Under regulation 6 of PECR, consent may be required to store or access data on a user's device. See also Information Commissioner's Office, Guidance on the use of storage and access technologies (accessed on 15 October 2025).
[16] See Google's announcement Next steps for Privacy Sandbox and tracking protections in Chrome, 22 April 2025 (accessed on 15 October 2025).

Following Google's latest announcement, the CMA consulted on a proposal to release the Commitments

2.13 On 7 May 2025, Google requested that the Commitments be released by the CMA, in light of Google's decision neither to deprecate TPCs nor roll out a standalone prompt to users on whether to retain TPCs.

2.14 On 13 June 2025 the CMA gave Notice[17] that it proposed to release the Commitments and invited representations from interested third parties on this proposed course of action. The closing date for comments in response to the CMA's consultation was 4 July 2025 at 23:55.

2.15 In response to the request from Google for the Commitments to be released, the CMA has been considering whether it has reasonable grounds for believing that the competition concerns which it identified in its investigation no longer arise, in line with the statutory test in section 31A(4) of the Act. In this regard, the CMA has therefore been considering the competition concerns which were reflected in the February 2022 Decision.

2.16 As the statute gives the CMA a discretion to release Commitments in these circumstances, in considering the appropriateness of releasing the Commitments, the CMA has also taken into account developments since the February 2022 Decision, and considered whether it would be appropriate to instead seek variation/substitution of the Commitments under section 31A(3) of the Act.[18] Similarly, the CMA has considered whether it would be appropriate to retain the Commitments.

2.17 Since we published the Notice on 13 June 2025, Google has provided an update to the market on 17 October 2025 regarding its plans for Privacy Sandbox technologies. As part of this update, it stated that it has decided to retire various Privacy Sandbox technologies including IP Protection, Protected Audience API ('**PA API**', formerly known as FLEDGE), Topics API and Attribution Reporting API ('**ARA**'). This provides further clarity to the market on the extent to which the Privacy Sandbox tools will be maintained. Having

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[17] Pursuant to paragraph 2 of Schedule 6A to the Act.

[18] The Act, Section 31A(3) provides that:
'At any time when commitments are in force the CMA may accept from the person (or persons) who gave the commitments—
(a) a variation of them if it is satisfied that the commitments as varied will address its current competition concerns;
(b) commitments in substitution for them if it is satisfied that the new commitments will address its current competition concerns.'

considered the consultation responses, the CMA remains of the view that it has reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concerns no longer arise

2.18 All fifteen respondents to the consultation were against releasing the Commitments. In summary, stakeholders were concerned that:

(a) The CMA's original competition concerns would re-emerge if Google reversed its decision on TPC deprecation, if it were to restrict access to TPCs in other ways (eg by increasing the usage of Incognito mode), or, if it were to restrict cross-site tracking signals in other ways (eg by applying IP Protection to general browsing).[19]

(b) Absent TPC deprecation, there remains a risk of self-preferencing given that some Privacy Sandbox tools are important, or may become important, for competition in the supply of ad inventory and ad tech services in the UK.

(c) Google's 2025 announcement involved a lack of transparency regarding Google's plans for the Privacy Sandbox, meaning there is an asymmetry of information between Google and third parties.

(d) The CMA relies on transient conditions when proposing to release the Commitments.

2.19 Having carefully considered the representations made by third parties on the proposed release of the Commitments, the CMA remains of the view that it has reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concerns no longer arise. The CMA considers that Google no longer intends to pursue the conduct which gave rise to the CMA's competition concerns in the February 2022 Decision. In particular, the CMA's competition concerns were predicated on Google's plan to remove TPCs in Chrome, which is not going ahead.

2.20 First, the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that the concern that the Privacy Sandbox proposals would allow Google to distort competition as set out in paragraph 2.5(a) above no longer arises. Since Google no longer plans to restrict the functionality associated with user tracking for third parties by deprecating TPCs, there is no longer a concern that Google would be able to distort competition by restricting this functionality for third parties while retaining it for Google. As such, the CMA's concerns regarding the

[19] The process which anonymises the user's IP address, to help protect the user from potential cross-site tracking.

deprecation of other information, in particular User-Agent String and IP address information, have also fallen away. In any case, Google has implemented the changes to User-Agent String in such a way that the actual reduction in this information has been limited or non-existent. Additionally, Google has decided to retire its Privacy Sandbox IP Protection technology, such that IP address information will remain available in standard and Incognito mode.

2.21 The consultation responses the CMA received in relation to this first concern focused on hypothetical prospective changes to Google's conduct. As there is no evidence at this stage of Google engaging (or planning to engage) in such conduct, the CMA has not changed its provisional view that it has reasonable grounds for believing that its concern no longer arises.

2.22 Second, the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that the self-preferencing concern set out under paragraph 2.5(b) above no longer arises. The self-preferencing concern was predicated on Google's plan to remove TPCs in Chrome – ie that Google would thereby require third parties to use the Privacy Sandbox tools as an alternative to TPCs, and as such transition key functionalities to Chrome. Without TPC deprecation, the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that this concern no longer arises. TPCs (and other information for user tracking) will remain available to third parties in Chrome, and the CMA expects TPCs to continue to effectively support outcomes for the ad ecosystem. As such, the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its concern no longer arises. Moreover, and as stated in the Notice (paragraph 3.6(b)), the CMA expects that the Privacy Sandbox tools will not in their current state of development be materially valuable complements to TPCs,[20] and that the Privacy Sandbox tools are therefore unlikely to be important inputs to ad tech and ad inventory businesses' ability to compete. The consultation responses did not include evidence which showed that the Privacy Sandbox tools are important to competition where TPCs remain. Moreover, Google's decision to retire several Privacy Sandbox tools further emphasises that they are unlikely to be material to competition in

[20] See the CMA's Summary of Privacy Sandbox Testing Results which sets out the CMA's assessment that use of the Privacy Sandbox tools in place of TPCs (without changes to those tools) would lead to outcomes such as publisher revenue remaining materially below those seen on traffic with TPCs. Third-party analysis shows that uptake of the tools remained modest and stable since Google's 22 April 2025 announcement (for example, fewer than 20% of sites had adopted PA API auctions). PA API facilitates on-device auctions for remarketing and custom audiences, without relying on TPCs. See Johnson, Garrett, Unearthing Privacy-Enhancing Ad Technologies (PEAT): The adoption of Google's Privacy Sandbox, 15 September 2025, page 17 (accessed on 15 October 2025).

digital advertising. These considerations give the CMA further grounds for believing that the competition concerns no longer arise.

2.23 Third, the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its concern in relation to user controls as set out in paragraph 2.5(c) above no longer arises. Since Google no longer plans to deprecate TPCs, users will retain similar options to control how their data is used in the Chrome browser, as existed before the Privacy Sandbox Proposals. In relation to the Privacy Sandbox tools, although there is room for improvement, our process has provided oversight to ensure that the prompts currently available provide users with effective choices on how API callers use their data. Moreover, Google has recently stated that it has decided to retire several Privacy Sandbox tools, meaning that the relevance of the tools to users is likely to be limited in future.

2.24 Fourth, the CMA was concerned that Google's announcements prior to the issue of the June 2021 Notice had 'caused uncertainty in the market as to the specific alternative solutions which will be available to publishers and ad tech providers once TPCs are deprecated'.[21] Since Google will not deprecate TPCs, Google's announcement of April 2025 (and any subsequent announcements) falls outside the CMA's competition concerns. Similarly, Google's plan to maintain TPCs in Chrome means that the CMA is no longer concerned that a lack of transparency regarding the development of Privacy Sandbox could distort competition as originally envisaged in the Decision. One stakeholder suggested that the CMA's conclusions that it has reasonable grounds for believing that its concerns no longer arise rely on 'transient conditions' and 'voluntary restraint'. The CMA considers that it is appropriate to rely on Google's recent announcements together with correspondence from Google, as has been the practice in the Investigation.

2.25 Finally, some stakeholders raised issues that are outside the scope of the CMA's investigation. The CMA does not need to express a view on the substance of these issues. The CMA's characterisation of any given issue as being out of scope of this investigation does not involve any judgement as to whether the substance of those arguments is or is not valid for other purposes.

[21] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraphs 3.6 and 3.100.

The CMA considers it appropriate to release the Commitments

2.26 Several stakeholders submitted that the CMA should retain or vary the Commitments, as opposed to release them, on the basis that this would provide greater certainty or accommodate international developments. Other stakeholders referred to the potential for the ongoing development of the Privacy Sandbox to create competition concerns in future, or thought the CMA should extend the Commitments to capture a wider range of issues than those originally in scope of the Investigation.

2.27 The CMA considers that it has reasonable grounds for believing that the competition concerns it identified as arising from Google's Privacy Sandbox proposals no longer arise. The CMA also considers that it is appropriate to release the Commitments, rather than seek to vary/substitute them, as Google does not intend to otherwise restrict TPCs (eg through a standalone prompt) in a way which would fall within the scope of the Investigation. As such, there is no material benefit from retaining or varying the Commitments, and it is not justified to maintain the burden on Google, the CMA and other stakeholders associated with the compliance and monitoring of the Commitments.

2.28 The CMA considered whether it would be appropriate to retain or vary the Commitments in case its original competition concerns would re-emerge if Google reversed its decision on TPC deprecation, or if Google were to restrict access to TPCs in other ways in future which were within the scope of the Investigation. At this stage Google does not plan to take any such action, and so the CMA remains of the view that it is inappropriate to maintain the compliance and monitoring burden on Google, the CMA and other stakeholders associated with retaining or varying the Commitments. In the event that the CMA considered that adverse competition effects might result from Google's ongoing development and implementation of the Privacy Sandbox tools, or related design choices that affect the availability of signals that enable functionalities for user tracking, renewed scrutiny under the Act and/or the new Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 (the '**DMCCA**') may be appropriate. Any future investigations under the Act or DMCCA will be based on the relevant facts and circumstances at the time. Therefore, in this Decision, the CMA releases the Commitments, pursuant to section 31A(4) of the Act.

2.29 This Decision to release the Commitments is structured as follows:

(a) Chapter 3 sets out the legal framework for releasing commitments;

(b) Chapter 4 summarises stakeholders' submissions in response to the consultation, which are relevant to the CMA's competition concerns, and the CMA's response to those submissions;

(c) Chapter 5 includes other submissions which stakeholders have made in response to the consultation, and the CMA's response to those submissions; and

(d) Chapter 6 sets out the CMA's reasoning for releasing the Commitments.

3. Legal framework for releasing commitments

3.1 Section 31A(2) of the Act provides that for the purposes of addressing the competition concerns it has identified, the CMA may accept from such person (or persons) as it considers appropriate, commitments to take such action (or refrain from taking such action) as it considers appropriate.

3.2 Section 31A(4) of the Act provides that at any time when commitments are in force, the CMA may release commitments at the request of the person(s) who gave the commitments, or if it has reasonable grounds for believing that the competition concerns no longer arise.[22] The Guidance on the CMA's investigation procedures in Competition Act 1998 cases (CMA8) ('**Procedural Guidance**') sets out that, where a request for release of commitments is made, the CMA will generally consider it appropriate to release commitments only where it has reasonable grounds for believing that 'the competition concerns identified by it at the time of their acceptance or variation no longer arise'.[23]

3.3 Under Schedule 6A of the Act, before the CMA releases commitments, it must give notice and consider any representations made in accordance with the notice and not withdrawn.

3.4 The CMA's view is that, for the reasons set out in this Decision, the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that the competition concerns it identified (see paragraphs 2.5 to 2.7 above) no longer arise. The CMA's view is also that it is appropriate for the CMA to release the existing commitments (see paragraphs 6.40 to 6.46 below).

3.5 This is set out in further detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

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[22] The Act, Section 31A(4) provides:
'(4) Commitments under this section–
(a) shall come into force when accepted; and
(b) may be released by the CMA where–
(i) it is requested to do so by the person (or persons) who gave the commitments; or
(ii) it has reasonable grounds for believing that the competition concerns referred to in subsection (2) or (3) no longer arise.'

[23] See the CMA's Procedural Guidance, paragraph 10.30.

4. Consultation responses relevant to the CMA's competition concerns and the CMA's assessment

4.1 The CMA received fifteen responses to the consultation. All respondents were against releasing the Commitments, and several argued that the CMA's competition concerns remained.

4.2 This chapter summarises the responses to the consultation and the CMA's assessment. The assessment in this chapter has informed the CMA's overall reasons for releasing the Commitments as included in Chapter 6.

4.3 Responses covered in this chapter are relevant to the question of whether the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concerns no longer arise for the purposes of section 31A(4) of the Act.

4.4 Stakeholders shared their reflections on the CMA's provisional view that it had reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concerns no longer arise, including:

(a) submissions that the CMA had incorrectly interpreted Google's April 2025 announcement by assuming that this was the end of the Privacy Sandbox;

(b) submissions that the CMA's original competition concerns remained, or, that competition concerns could re-emerge if Google reversed its decision on TPC deprecation or decided to restrict TPCs and cross-site tracking signals in other ways; and

(c) submissions that it was not appropriate for the CMA to release the Commitments, with several respondents suggesting ways in which the Commitments could be revised to deal with their concerns.

4.5 In the remainder of this chapter, we summarise and respond to each of these categories of submission in turn.

4.6 The CMA has taken into account Google's decision not to deprecate TPCs, as well as its decision not to otherwise restrict TPCs through a standalone prompt, as part of the CMA's overall assessment of whether to release the Commitments. Given this connection, and to avoid repetition, deprecation of TPCs and 'otherwise restricting TPCs through a standalone prompt' are often mentioned together in this chapter and elsewhere.

The CMA's interpretation of Google's April 2025 announcement

Some respondents said the Privacy Sandbox will continue

4.7 One respondent (an association) told us that the CMA misunderstands Google's April 2025 announcement to be the end of the Privacy Sandbox.

4.8 Another respondent (a publisher) commented that Google is continuing to work on the Privacy Sandbox, adding that in June 2025, W3C published a paper authored by two data scientists at Google, alongside data scientists from Mozilla and Meta, specifying a browser API for the measurement of advertising performance.[24]

The CMA's assessment

4.9 In the Notice, the CMA did not understand, or present, Google's April 2025 announcement to be the end of the Privacy Sandbox. This Decision explains why the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concerns no longer arise in light of Google's decision not to deprecate TPCs (or otherwise restrict TPCs through a standalone prompt). This does not require that all aspects of the Privacy Sandbox must have come to an end.

The CMA's original competition concerns

One respondent thought the scope of the CMA's concerns was wider

4.10 One respondent (an association) submitted that the concerns set out in the February 2022 Decision, rather than the summary referenced in the Commitments,[25] should be regarded as the concerns that the CMA must have reasonable grounds for believing no longer arise. The respondent submitted that the CMA's justification for the release of the Commitments is, therefore, based on an incomplete subset of concerns and is procedurally flawed.

4.11 One respondent (an association) submitted that, in order to release commitments, the CMA must have reasonable grounds for believing that none of its original concerns 'could still arise'. The same respondent submitted that the CMA's reasoning from the February 2022 Decision remains compelling. It suggested that paragraph 4.97 of the February 2022 Decision indicates that

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[24] See W3C Attribution Level 1, last updated on 14 October 2025 (accessed on 15 October 2025) for the current working draft.
[25] The CMA understands this to be a reference to paragraph 7 of the Commitments.

the CMA's original reasoning for accepting commitments was to address future harm and shape future conduct.

The CMA's assessment

4.12 This Decision explains why the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concerns, as identified in the CMA's February 2022 Decision, no longer arise. Contrary to the respondent's submission, the CMA does not need to show that none of those concerns 'could still arise'.

4.13 The four broad areas of concern assessed in the Notice appear several times in the February 2022 Decision[26] and are an adequate articulation of the concerns that arose in light of Google's proposals at the time. Given that the CMA's concerns were predicated on Google's plan to remove TPCs in Chrome, and deprecation of TPCs (or the introduction of a standalone user prompt) will not occur, it is not necessary for the CMA to carry out a line-by-line assessment of Chapter 3 of the February 2022 Decision. That said, the CMA has supplemented its reasoning in this Decision as a result of responding to third-party submissions made in response to the Notice.

4.14 In the CMA's view, the CMA adequately disclosed the reasons for what was proposed in the Notice, putting consultees in a position properly to consider the consultation request and to make an informed response. The Procedural Guidance (at paragraph 10.23) indicates that a 'summary' of the CMA's competition concerns is all that is required to elicit an offer of commitments.[27]

4.15 It is correct that the aim of the Commitments was to address future harm and shape future conduct, as would be the aim for any commitments (per the CMA's statement in the February 2022 Decision).[28] However, the February 2022 Decision intended to address harm (including any future harm) which would have arisen in the context of Google's plan to deprecate TPCs, which Google is no longer planning to carry through.

Concern 1

4.16 In the February 2022 Decision, the CMA set out its concern that, without sufficient scrutiny and oversight, the Privacy Sandbox tools would allow

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[26] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraphs 1.7, 2.30, 3.3 to 3.7, 3.32, 3.70, 3.81, 3.99 to 3.101, 5.10, 5.12 to 5.13, 5.17, 5.43 and 5.53.
[27] See the CMA's Procedural Guidance, paragraph 10.23.
[28] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 4.97.

Google to distort competition in the market for the supply of ad inventory in the UK and in the market for the supply of ad tech services in the UK, by restricting the functionality associated with user tracking for third parties, while retaining this functionality for Google. The February 2022 Decision identified TPCs as the principal means of achieving common identification of web users on web pages and therefore a fundamental building block of the open display advertising used by publishers and ad tech providers.

4.17 The CMA set out its provisional reasons for having reasonable grounds for believing that concern 1 no longer arises at paragraph 3.6(a) of the Notice.

Stakeholders said that Google could reverse its decision on TPCs or user choice

4.18 Five respondents (two ad techs, a publisher, an association and a search aggregator) told us that Google may reverse its decision not to deprecate TPCs or to introduce a standalone prompt. Four respondents (two ad techs, a publisher and a search aggregator) observed that Google's public statements are not forward-looking and said that such statements, therefore, do not rule out a potential reversal. One respondent (an ad tech) also noted that the Privacy Sandbox web page advises visitors to prepare for TPC restrictions.[29] The same respondent said that the CMA is misinterpreting Google's announcement as a promise of what Google will not do. Two respondents (a publisher and a search aggregator) said that Google may deprecate TPCs in the absence of the CMA's oversight, and one stakeholder (a search aggregator) told us that commercial incentives for Google to deprecate TPCs remain.

4.19 One respondent (an association) suggested that Google could more gradually steer users away from TPCs or decrease the utility of TPCs, even without fully reversing its decision.

4.20 One respondent (an association) submitted that Google's announcement of 22 April 2025 provides no evidence that Google will not re-engage in potentially anti-competitive conduct that gave rise to the CMA's concerns. The respondent submitted that the CMA has placed an unreasonable degree of reliance on information that is not expressly stated in Google's announcement. The respondent also noted that it remains plausible that Google could resume its plans to restrict cross-site tracking in future,

[29] See Privacy Sandbox Developer Blog, Third-party cookie restrictions, last updated on 13 March 2024 (accessed on 15 October 2025).

depending on regulatory or market developments, and suggested that there are no reasonable grounds to believe that this concern no longer arises.

The CMA's assessment

4.21 In the announcement of 22 April 2025, Google stated that 'we've made the decision to maintain our current approach to offering users third-party cookie choice in Chrome, and will not be rolling out a new standalone prompt for third-party cookies.' In addition, Google's submission to the CMA of 16 April 2025 stated that Google has 'no plans to make any material changes to the third-party cookie (3PC) settings for Chrome users, or to introduce a stand-alone browser-level prompt offering a user choice to restrict or limit 3PCs for users browsing in Chrome's standard/default mode (Standard Chrome)'.[30]

4.22 The CMA understands this to mean that Google no longer plans to 'restrict the functionality associated with user tracking for third parties, while retaining this functionality for Google',[31] either via deprecation of TPCs or through the introduction of a standalone user prompt. It is appropriate for the CMA to rely on Google's announcement (as the CMA has done previously) together with correspondence with Google. The CMA notes that it has powers under the Act to impose financial penalties for the provision to the CMA of information that is false or misleading in a material particular.[32]

4.23 Where the Privacy Sandbox web page advises visitors to prepare for TPC restrictions, this web page was correct when published (13 March 2024), but is now out of date. The position as stated on the web page has been superseded by the announcement of 22 April 2025, in particular.

4.24 In the absence of the conduct which gave rise to the CMA's original competition concerns, there is no risk of that conduct distorting competition in digital advertising. Therefore, the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its concern no longer arises.

4.25 Even if Google has a commercial incentive to deprecate TPCs, this would not be inconsistent with the CMA having reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concern no longer arises. The CMA's concern was not based on

[30] Google's response of 16 April 2025 to CMA questions of 11 April 2025.
[31] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.3(a).
[32] See the Act, section 40ZE.

a commercial incentive to deprecate TPCs, but on Google's announced plan to do so.

4.26 If Google were to decide to deprecate TPCs or to introduce a standalone prompt, renewed scrutiny under the Act and/or the DMCCA may be appropriate.

Stakeholders said that the case was not just about cookies

4.27 One respondent (a consulting firm) said this case was never about cookies, but rather it was about abuse of dominance through changes in functionality that unfairly disadvantage rivals. Another respondent (an association) similarly noted that this was never a case just about cookies, but 'a foreclosure concern arising from Google's proposed changes to multiple mechanisms involved with communicating web data beyond cookies including the URL IP address and User-Agent String which are required for effective real-time interoperable communication'. Another respondent (a publisher) also commented that TPC deprecation was not the sole reason for the CMA's initial concern.

The CMA's assessment

4.28 The CMA's concerns about these elements fall away now Google no longer plans to remove TPCs. Even though some elements of the Privacy Sandbox are not direct replacements for the functionality of TPCs, the CMA's competition concerns were predicated on Google's plan to remove TPCs in Chrome. In any case, the CMA does not consider that Google's approach in relation to these wider elements of the Privacy Sandbox would distort competition in digital advertising.

4.29 In its February 2022 Decision, the CMA noted that the information provided in the User-Agent String could be useful for websites to optimise their appearance on the user's browser and device, and monitor fraud and abuse, but could also facilitate user identification and tracking.[33] The CMA had heard concerns that replacement of the User-Agent String with User-Agent Client-Hints ('**UA-CH**') could lead to Google's rival publishers offering a worse service when competing with Google to attract advertiser spend to their ad inventory.[34]

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[33] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraphs 3.22 and 3.48.
[34] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.48.

4.30 The CMA's concerns about reduction of the information in the User-Agent String were predicated on Google's plan to remove TPCs in Chrome. Now that Google no longer intends to deprecate TPCs (or introduce a standalone prompt), Google's rival publishers will remain able to attract advertiser spend to their inventory by using TPCs. The CMA therefore has reasonable grounds for believing that its concern about User-Agent Reduction and UA-CH no longer arises.

4.31 The respondent who referred to the User-Agent String suggested that access to the information is 'required for effective real-time interoperable communication'. As noted in the February 2022 Decision, TPCs were then 'the principal means of achieving common identification of web users on web pages'.[35] Since Google is not going to deprecate TPCs (or introduce a standalone prompt), the CMA considers that 'effective real-time interoperable communication' remains possible.

4.32 In any event, all of the information which was available in the User-Agent String is still available through UA-CH, though more than one request may be needed to obtain it. Furthermore, there are other ways in which publishers can optimise their online content to a user's device.[36] JavaScript can be used to detect browser features, for example.[37] For these reasons, individually and collectively, the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its concern about the effectiveness of UA-CH no longer arises.

4.33 IP Protection is considered in paragraphs 4.41 to 4.43 below.

Stakeholders said that Google could increase usage of Incognito mode, and restrict the ability for third parties to track users in Incognito

4.34 Five respondents (two ad techs, a consulting firm, a search aggregator, and an association) submitted that Google could nudge or steer users to increase browsing in Incognito mode, where there are more limited signals available to ad techs and publishers for tracking users.

4.35 One stakeholder (an ad tech) noted that Google plans to introduce Script Blocking in Incognito mode, where Google can still track user activity via its first-party data and attribute conversions better than rivals.[38] One respondent

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[35] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.34.
[36] Under regulation 6 of PECR, consent may be required to store or access data on a user's device.
[37] See, for example, this jQuery tutorial, last updated on 23 April 2024 (accessed on 15 October 2025).
[38] See Privacy Sandbox Developer Blog, Script Blocking, last updated on 14 July 2025 (accessed on 15 October 2025) which was published after the consultation had closed.

(a search aggregator) said that 'enhancing' IP Protection will make it more difficult for third-party ad techs to track users in Incognito mode.

The CMA's assessment

4.36 Google has told the CMA in its submission of 16 April 2025 that 'Google does not plan to promote Incognito mode as an alternative to Standard Chrome for users' day-to-day needs. With that in mind, Google does not have plans to amend its public-facing choice or information architecture in such a way that could lead to a materially increased proportion of user browsing activity taking place in Incognito mode.' As such, it is not Google's intention to nudge or steer users in order to increase browsing in Incognito mode.

4.37 Although Google published an 'Intent to Ship' of Script Blocking on Google's Privacy Sandbox website in July 2025,[39] Script Blocking was not part of the CMA's competition concerns as outlined in the February 2022 Decision to accept commitments.[40] Accordingly, the respondents' submissions on Script Blocking do not affect the CMA's view that it has reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concerns no longer arise.

4.38 Since the CMA published the Notice, Google has stated that it has decided to retire IP Protection, meaning that it will no longer roll out IP Protection in Incognito mode.[41] If Google had proceeded with its plans, enhancing IP Protection in Incognito mode would have removed some options for third-party ad techs to track users. However, this would not have affected the CMA's conclusion that it has reasonable grounds for believing that its concern no longer arises. The CMA's concern was predicated on Google's plan to deprecate TPCs in Chrome (or, later, introduce a standalone prompt), but Google will no longer take either of these steps. Further, even if Google were to introduce IP Protection in Incognito mode, the affected proportion of browsing activity (ie just in Incognito mode) would be very small.[42] As such, any impact on ad techs arising from such changes would be unlikely to result

[39] See Privacy Sandbox Developer Blog, Script Blocking, last updated on 14 July 2025 (accessed on 15 October 2025).
[40] Nor is Script Blocking mentioned in Annex 1 to the Commitments, to which the definitions of 'Privacy Sandbox' and 'Alternative Technologies' in the Commitments cross-refer.
[41] Google's submission of 10 October 2025.
[42] Google's response of 16 April 2025 to CMA questions dated 11 April 2025 states that in each of the UK and the EEA, Chrome Incognito mode represents less than 10% of navigations on devices running on the Android operating system; and less than 10% of navigations on devices running on the Windows operating system. The metrics which Google provided refer to navigations only on Chromium-based Chrome in the UK and the EEA.

in our original concern that Google's conduct would distort competition in the supply of ad tech services or ad inventory.

Stakeholders said that Google could restrict tracking signals, by extending features from Incognito mode to general browsing or by limiting alternative tracking

4.39 Two respondents (two ad techs) submitted that Google could restrict tracking signals used by rival ad techs and publishers by expanding features (such as IP Protection and Script Blocking) from Incognito mode to general Chrome browsing.

4.40 One respondent (an ad tech) said that Google has not promised that it will not negatively impact alternative tracking technologies like browser fingerprinting and that the CMA's interpretation of Google's statements ignores GitHub discussions about extending anti-fingerprinting techniques in Chrome.[43] One respondent (an association) submitted that Google may still be planning to reduce URL decoration or 'key Non Google Technologies' available to Google's rivals.

The CMA's assessment

4.41 As regards extending IP Protection in Standard Chrome, IP Protection was formerly known as Gnatcatcher.[44] In the February 2022 Decision, the CMA was concerned that, if implemented without sufficient regulatory scrutiny and oversight, the replacement of TPCs and other functionalities with the Privacy Sandbox Proposals (including Gnatcatcher) would allow Google to 'distort competition in the market for the supply of ad tech services in the UK, by restricting the functionality associated with user tracking for third parties, while retaining this functionality for Google'.[45] In other words, without sufficient regulatory scrutiny and oversight, this would have been likely to significantly tilt the playing field in display advertising in favour of Google.

4.42 The CMA had heard concerns that Gnatcatcher could lead to Google's rival publishers offering a worse service when competing with Google to attract advertiser spend to their ad inventory.[46] The CMA's concerns about reduction of the information in the IP address were predicated on Google's plan to

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[43] See Mitigating API Misuse for Browser Re-Identification on the Script Blocking repository on GitHub (accessed on 15 October 2025).
[44] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraphs 3.24 and 3.25.
[45] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.3(a).
[46] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.48.

remove TPCs in Chrome. Now that Google no longer intends to deprecate TPCs (or introduce a standalone prompt), Google's rival publishers will remain able to attract advertiser spend to their inventory by using TPCs. In addition, since the CMA published the Notice, Google has stated that it has decided to retire IP Protection.[47] For these reasons (individually and/or collectively), the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its concern about Gnatcatcher no longer arises.

4.43 In correspondence of 7 May 2025, Google told the CMA that it 'will not engage in material signal reduction from Standard Chrome' - although it said that it could not rule out that it may need to act on a targeted basis to respond to specific privacy and security issues or act due to changing legal obligations.

4.44 As regards URL decoration, the Privacy Sandbox does not include any technologies which critically affect URL (link) decoration as such. As regards 'key Non Google Technologies' or alternative tracking technologies (where 'Non Google Technologies' are defined in the Commitments), the CMA expressly stated in its February 2022 Decision that the CMA's competition concerns did not relate to 'Google's approach towards other market participants' alternative technologies'.[48]

Stakeholders were concerned about Google's data advantages

4.45 One respondent (an ad tech) said that Chrome has exclusive access to data through a user-level HTTP header generated by Chrome and potentially Chrome login which, due to Google's dominance, distorts competition. The same respondent added that Section G of the Commitments (Google's use of data) is still relevant even with TPCs available because Google is using exclusive data or identifiers in a way that is not accessible to competitors. The respondent added that usage of a user's Chrome browsing history in Google Ads Systems can go unnoticed.

The CMA's assessment

4.46 The CMA understands the respondent's reference to 'a user-level HTTP header generated by Chrome' to be a reference to X-Client Data. In footnote 92 of the February 2022 Decision, the CMA wrote that 'Google told the CMA that X-Client Data header is used to help Chrome test new features before

[47] Google's submission of 10 October 2025.
[48] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 4.324 for commentary on Google's market position as a provider of ad tech services.

rolling them out, not to identify or track individual users'. In the CMA's view, the X-Client Data header appears to be functionally similar to a first-party cookie. Any publisher or ad tech can use first-party cookies to track users across domains that they own.

4.47 In the February 2022 Decision, the CMA expressed its concern that third parties would be unable to effectively track individual web users on Chrome following the deprecation of TPCs and the implementation of the Privacy Sandbox, while Google would retain that ability due to its data advantages. The CMA was concerned that this would likely foreclose rival publishers and ad tech providers by worsening the quality of the ad inventory that they can offer to advertisers in the open display market, while having no or limited impact on the quality of Google's advertising services.[49]

4.48 To respond to the CMA's concerns, paragraphs 25 to 28 in Section G of the Commitments expressly stated that those paragraphs only take effect 'after Chrome ends support for Third-Party Cookies'. Given that Google no longer plans to deprecate TPCs (or otherwise restrict TPCs though a standalone prompt), the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its original competition concerns no longer arise – and relatedly, the conditions for the application of Section G of the Commitments no longer hold.

Concern 2

4.49 In the February 2022 Decision, the CMA set out its concern that, without sufficient regulatory scrutiny and oversight, the Privacy Sandbox Proposals would allow Google to self-preference its own ad inventory and ad tech services by transferring key functionalities to Chrome, providing Google with the ability to affect digital advertising market outcomes through Chrome in a way that cannot be scrutinised by third parties, and leading to conflicts of interest.

4.50 The CMA set out its provisional reasons for having reasonable grounds for believing that this concern no longer arises at paragraph 3.6(b) of the Notice.

The CMA's reasoning in relation to Concern 2

4.51 One respondent (an association) told us that the CMA's reasoning is circular as the Privacy Sandbox tools are unlikely to distort competition as they are

[49] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.54 et seq.

not significant enough for advertisers or publishers, but this insignificance is due to the Commitments.

4.52 The same respondent suggested that the Notice rests its conclusions on current evidence and voluntary corporate behaviour, which is unreasonable given, for example, Google's technical capacity and market power.

4.53 The respondent told us that there are no reasonable grounds for the CMA to believe that the second concern no longer exists.

The CMA's assessment

4.54 The CMA's reasoning with regard to Concern 2 was contained in paragraph 3.6(b) of the Notice. Although the CMA referred to scrutiny and oversight to date, the CMA also explained that 'current evidence suggests that the tools are unlikely to be sufficiently important inputs to ad tech and ad inventory businesses' ability to compete absent Google's conduct to restrict TPCs. This is because, in their current state of development, we expect TPCs to more effectively support outcomes for the ad ecosystem, and that the Privacy Sandbox tools will not be materially valuable complements to TPCs.'[50]

4.55 The CMA was saying that the tools are unlikely to be sufficiently important inputs to ad tech and ad tech inventory businesses' ability to compete because: (i) Google does not plan to deprecate TPCs (or otherwise restrict TPCs through a standalone prompt), meaning the Privacy Sandbox is not needed to enable tracking technology for advertising purposes; and (ii) the Privacy Sandbox tools are less effective than TPCs are to support tracking functionality for advertising purposes. The CMA considered that it had reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concerns no longer arise due to these factors, individually and/or collectively, rather than due to the existence of the Commitments. Accordingly, the CMA does not consider that there was (or is) any circularity in the CMA's reasoning. With regard to the stakeholder's suggestion that the Notice rests its conclusions on current evidence and voluntary corporate behaviour, see paragraphs 4.83 and 4.84 below.

[50] See the Notice, paragraph 3.6(b).

Stakeholders said there is a risk of self-preferencing arising from Google's conduct and development of the tools

4.56 Four respondents (two associations, a search aggregator and an ad tech) were concerned that, without the Commitments, the continued development of the Privacy Sandbox could undermine competition.

4.57 Five respondents (two ad techs, two associations and a publisher) expressed concerns that the Privacy Sandbox could be developed and used in a way that self-preferences Google.

4.58 One respondent (an ad tech) told us that the CMA should require Google to ensure that all APIs are provided to all market participants on equal terms as they are provided to Google before releasing the Commitments.

4.59 Another respondent (a search aggregator) said Google's dominance in online browsers and advertising could lead to advertisers and publishers being coerced into using the Privacy Sandbox. One respondent (an association) suggested that publishers are only adopting the Privacy Sandbox due to Google's market dominance.

4.60 Two respondents (a publisher and an association) told us that Google remains dominant in digital advertising and can leverage this to force changes, such as adoption of the Privacy Sandbox tools, on the ad tech ecosystem.

4.61 One respondent (an association) suggested that there is nothing in Google's announcement to suggest that it will not take actions currently prohibited under paragraphs 30 to 31 of the Commitments.[51]

4.62 One respondent (an ad tech) told us that Google has an inherent advantage in cross-device and cross-platform capabilities because of its first-party ecosystem. The same respondent said that if the Privacy Sandbox is not mandated to support similar cross-platform use cases for third-parties through explicit commitments, this could distort competition (as Google could effectively self-preference its own ad tech inventory and ad tech services by using its first-party data) and limit choice and innovation (by Google denying effective cross-platform capabilities to the broader ecosystem). This respondent also expressed the concern that Google could alter the current

[51] See the Commitments, paragraphs 30 and 31, which fall within the Section of the Commitments headed 'Non-discrimination'.

design of the Privacy Sandbox APIs to make their cross-device and cross-platform functionality less effective for third parties.

The CMA's assessment

4.63 Although the CMA did not define 'self-preferencing' in its February 2022 Decision, for self-preferencing to qualify as a competition concern for the purposes of section 31A of the Act, there need to be reasonable grounds for suspecting that (among other things) the conduct tends to restrict competition or is capable of having that effect.[52]

4.64 The CMA's concern about self-preferencing was predicated on Google's plan to remove TPCs in Chrome (or, later, introduce a standalone prompt) and replace this with the Privacy Sandbox tools. The concern was that this would transfer some functions performed by ad tech providers (ie the tracking of users across web pages) to Chrome, giving the opportunity to Google to leverage its likely dominant position in the supply of web browsers into open display advertising, by designing the Privacy Sandbox tools in a way that could self-preference its own ad tech services.

4.65 Since, as explained at paragraph 2.12 above, Google no longer plans to deprecate TPCs (or otherwise restrict TPCs through a standalone prompt), the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its concerns about self-preferencing no longer arise. Even if Google could amend the Privacy Sandbox tools to favour its own advertising businesses relative to those of its rivals, this would be unlikely to have a negative effect on competition given that TPCs (the principal means of achieving common identification of web users on web pages) will remain available to Google's advertising rivals for the purposes of user tracking.

4.66 Stakeholders did not provide any evidence that Google currently has plans to coerce advertisers and publishers into using the Privacy Sandbox tools. Since the publication of the Notice, Google has also confirmed that third parties will not be required to use the Privacy Sandbox tools that remain available for the purpose of selling ad inventory or ad tech services for users of Chrome,[53] and that it has decided to retire various Privacy Sandbox technologies.[54] If Google were to coerce advertisers and publishers into using the Privacy Sandbox

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[52] See, for example, the European Commission's decision in Case AT.39740 Google Search (Shopping), 27 June 2017, paragraph 339 and the case law cited there.
[53] Google's submission of 15 October 2025.
[54] Google's submission of 10 October 2025.

tools instead of TPCs, renewed scrutiny under the Act and/or the DMCCA may be appropriate. For the avoidance of doubt, the specific means of coercion which was the subject of the CMA's competition concerns was deprecation of TPCs (or, later, introduction of a standalone prompt) and not any other conceivable means of coercion.

4.67 Even if there is nothing in Google's announcement to suggest that it will not take actions currently prohibited under paragraphs 30 to 31 of the Commitments, as the respondent suggests, this does not affect the CMA's conclusion that it has reasonable grounds for believing that the second concern around self-preferencing no longer arises. The contents of the Commitments, including paragraphs 30 and 31, are not themselves the CMA's competition concerns, but the way in which the CMA's competition concerns were addressed. The CMA's competition concerns in respect of self-preferencing were as a result of Google's plans to deprecate TPCs in Chrome (or, later, introduce a standalone prompt), which is not going ahead (see paragraph 2.22 above).

4.68 Finally, the CMA's competition concerns related to Google replacing TPCs as a means to enable web-to-web user tracking on a single device in Chrome with the Privacy Sandbox tools. This is reflected throughout the February 2022 Decision, which refers to the conduct in scope of the Investigation as the withdrawal of TPCs as a means of 'cross-site tracking' and their replacement with the Privacy Sandbox tools.[55] Therefore, web-to-app conversion measurement is out of scope of the Investigation. As such, the CMA's competition concerns were not regarding any inherent advantage in cross-device and cross-platform tracking capabilities that Google may have.

Stakeholders raised concerns about specific Privacy Sandbox tools

4.69 One respondent (an ad tech) suggested that Topics API and ARA could be made exclusive to Google.

4.70 Two respondents (an association and an ad tech) submitted that the Privacy Sandbox APIs will be useful for ad techs going forward. In particular, one of the respondents (an ad tech) explained that the continued support by Google for ARA and PA API would ensure that ad techs can compete with Google on cross-device attribution and targeting:

[55] See, for example, the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 2.28.

(a) ARA provides incremental 1% conversions for web-to-web tracking and is a significant enabler for web-to-app tracking because there is currently no deterministic way to track users across platforms, which improves opportunities for advertisers;

(b) ARA could be more useful and competitive in future if Google were to maintain event-level reporting and relax its noise policy; and

(c) PA API could be used for cross-platform targeting, allowing interest groups registered in Chrome to be accessible in other environments.

4.71 One of these respondents (an ad tech) suggested that PA API retains significant potential for advertisers who want to respect user privacy and anticipate a future where TPCs may be less reliable.

4.72 The same respondent (an ad tech) added that releasing the Commitments should be contingent on Google's continued and equitable support for 'cross-platform interoperability' of the Privacy Sandbox APIs.

4.73 Two respondents (an ad tech and an association) pointed towards Google Ad Manager ('**GAM**'), arguing that there is substantial risk of competitive harm for GAM to have preferential treatment and be the default top-level seller in the vast majority of PA API auctions.

The CMA's assessment

4.74 The CMA is not in possession of any evidence that Google intends to make Topics API and ARA exclusive to Google. In fact, since the CMA published the Notice, Google has told the CMA that it has decided to retire Topics API, PA API and ARA.[56]

4.75 As regards PA API, the CMA notes that uptake of PA API is low[57] and, in its current state of development, would not have been likely to be a materially valuable complement to TPCs. Stakeholders did not provide any evidence to the contrary. In any case, alternatives to PA API could emerge if the ad tech market were to demand more 'privacy preserving' advertising solutions in Chrome. As regards ARA, the CMA notes that incremental 1% conversions

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[56] Google's submission of 10 October 2025.

[57] See the CMA's Summary of Privacy Sandbox Testing Results and third-party analysis showing that uptake of the tools has been modest over the last year (fewer than 20% of sites have adopted PA API auctions. PA API facilitates on-device auctions for remarketing and custom audiences, without relying on TPCs). See also footnote 20 above.

for web-to-web tracking represent only a modest improvement on the functionality of TPCs. The CMA therefore remains of the view (as stated in the Notice)[58] that the Privacy Sandbox tools are unlikely to be materially valuable complements to TPCs, even if Google had decided to maintain PA API and ARA.

4.76 Moreover, the CMA's competition concerns related to Google replacing TPCs in Chrome, which enable web-to-web tracking on a single device. This is reflected throughout the February 2022 Decision, which refers to the conduct in scope of the Investigation as the withdrawal of TPCs as a means of 'cross-site tracking' and their replacement with the Privacy Sandbox tools.[59] Therefore, web-to-app conversion measurement is out of scope of the Investigation. In any event, web-to-app conversion measurement relies on both ARA in Chrome and ARA in Android Privacy Sandbox.[60] Android Privacy Sandbox is out of scope of the Investigation, with the effect that web-to-app conversion measurement is also out of scope. Moreover, we are aware of other solutions in the app-to-web measurement space and consider that further solutions could emerge to meet demand for this type of measurement.

4.77 As regards GAM, the CMA included a 'potential concern' that 'GAM will not participate in PA component auctions unless it is the top-level PA seller' in three of the CMA's quarterly update reports (Q4 2023, Q1 2024 and Q2/Q3 2024). This 'potential concern' no longer arises as Google has stated that it has decided to retire PA API.[61] Even if Google had decided to maintain PA API, the CMA has concluded that this 'potential concern' regarding GAM did not fall within the scope of the Investigation, and therefore could not fall within the CMA's competition concerns. The CMA's 'potential concern' about GAM was about the conduct and likely market power of GAM, whereas the CMA's investigation and its competition concerns related to the conduct and likely market power of Chrome.

Concern 3

4.78 In the February 2022 Decision, the CMA set out its concern that, in the absence of sufficient regulatory scrutiny and oversight, Google could exploit its likely dominant position by denying Chrome web users substantial choice

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[58] See the Notice, paragraph 3.6(b).
[59] See, for example, the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 2.28.
[60] See Cross App and Web Attribution Measurement on the ARA repository on GitHub (accessed on 15 October 2025).
[61] Google's submission of 10 October 2025.

in terms of whether and how their personal data is used for the purpose of targeting and delivering advertising to them.

4.79 The CMA set out its provisional reasons for having reasonable grounds for believing that this concern no longer arises at paragraph 3.6(c) of the Notice.

One stakeholder said that the CMA relies on transient conditions

4.80 One respondent (an association) submitted that the CMA had assumed that the mere preservation of existing user controls and legal obligations is 'sufficient to neutralise future risks', without addressing how Google might incrementally shift its data practices under the guise of 'security' protections, user choice or compliance. The respondent also submitted that the CMA's 'conclusion' in respect of Concern 3 relies on transient conditions and voluntary restraint.

4.81 The CMA did not receive any further responses specifically commenting on this concern, though one respondent (a consulting firm) suggested that Google's justification had already shifted from 'privacy' to 'security', and that this is even more concerning.

The CMA's assessment

4.82 The CMA's competition concerns were about Google's Privacy Sandbox Proposals, as articulated in the February 2022 Decision. The CMA is not required to ensure that Google will never 'shift its data practices' when reaching the conclusion that the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concerns, as outlined in the February 2022 Decision, no longer arise.

4.83 The CMA considers that it is appropriate to rely on Google's recent announcements together with correspondence from Google, as has been the practice in the Investigation. The CMA notes that it has powers under the Act to impose financial penalties for the provision to the CMA of information that is false or misleading in a material particular.

4.84 In the event that the CMA considered that adverse competition effects might result from Google's ongoing development and implementation of the Privacy Sandbox tools, or related design choices that affect the availability of signals that enable functionalities for user tracking, renewed scrutiny under the Act and/or the DMCCA may be appropriate.

Announcements and asymmetry of information

4.85 In the February 2022 Decision, the CMA set out its concern that Google's announcements of its proposals for the Privacy Sandbox prior to issue of the June 2021 Notice had 'caused uncertainty in the market as to the specific alternative solutions which will be available to publishers and ad tech providers once TPCs are deprecated' and 'showed (and created the expectation) that Google was determined to proceed with changes in the relevant areas, including by deprecating TPCs within two years of the announcements, in ways which advantage its own businesses and limit competition from its rivals'.[62]

4.86 In the February 2022 Decision, the CMA also said that the concerns that market participants had expressed to it regarding the impact of the Privacy Sandbox Proposals were likely to have on competition reflected in part (a) the asymmetry of information between Google and third parties regarding the development of the Privacy Sandbox Proposals; and (b) a lack of confidence on the part of third parties regarding Google's statements concerning its intentions in developing and implementing the Privacy Sandbox Proposals.[63]

4.87 The CMA set out its provisional reasons for having reasonable grounds for believing that this concern no longer arises at paragraphs 3.8 to 3.10 of the Notice.

Stakeholders were concerned about lack of transparency/asymmetry of information over Privacy Sandbox developments

4.88 Two respondents (an association and a consulting firm) told us that Google's April 2025 announcement 're-raises the CMA's original … concern' about 'asymmetry of information'. Three respondents (two ad techs and an association) said that the underlying concerns about asymmetry and unequal access of information for rivals, which keep them out of the loop of any developments, remain.

4.89 One respondent (an ad tech) expressed concerns that Google has not provided any public details on the extent to which the Privacy Sandbox APIs will be maintained and further developed. Two respondents (two associations) told us that Google should share more information on its plans and timelines for the Privacy Sandbox. One of these respondents (an association) said this

[62] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.6.
[63] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.7

should be done prior to the release of the Commitments. One respondent (an association) proposed that Google publish a revised roadmap, outlining its new objectives, a list of planned initiatives, and a 'corresponding development and timeline'.

4.90 The CMA received one response (from a search aggregator) explaining that there is nothing in Google's announcement to suggest that the frequency of announcements relating to the Privacy Sandbox will decrease over time; moreover, the content of the announcements is more important than the frequency.

4.91 One respondent (a publisher) said Google has indicated that it may no longer pursue the Privacy Sandbox.

The CMA's assessment

4.92 In the Decision, the CMA was only concerned about announcements prior to the issue of the June 2021 Notice which 'caused uncertainty in the market as to the specific alternative solutions which will be available to publishers and ad tech providers once TPCs are deprecated' and 'showed (and created the expectation) that Google was determined to proceed with changes in the relevant areas, including by deprecating TPCs within two years of the announcements, in ways which advantage its own businesses and limit competition from its rivals'.[64] Since Google will not deprecate TPCs (or otherwise restrict TPCs through a standalone prompt) and replace them with the Privacy Sandbox tools, Google's announcement of April 2025 (and any future announcements relating to the Privacy Sandbox) falls outside the CMA's competition concerns.

4.93 The CMA had stated in paragraph 3.8 of the Notice that 'we expect the number and importance of announcements relating to the Privacy Sandbox to decrease'. Even if the frequency of announcements were not to reduce, as the respondent suggests, the importance of announcements regarding the Privacy Sandbox is likely to reduce, on the basis that Google no longer intends to deprecate TPCs (or otherwise restrict TPCs through a standalone prompt).

4.94 As regards asymmetry of information, in the Decision, the CMA identified a strong asymmetry of information between Google and market participants in relation to the development of the Privacy Sandbox Proposals. The CMA

[64] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.6.

considered it important to ensure greater transparency in relation to the process for developing the Privacy Sandbox Proposals and regarding the effectiveness of the Privacy Sandbox Proposals themselves to ensure that Google could not gain a competitive advantage from its likely dominant position in browsers.[65] As with other concerns, this needs to be read in the light of the scope of the Investigation. The concern that Google may gain such a competitive advantage over rivals was based on Google's plans to deprecate TPCs and replace them with the Privacy Sandbox tools. Since Google will not deprecate TPCs (or otherwise restrict TPCs through a standalone prompt), the CMA considers that Google can no longer gain a competitive advantage as originally envisaged in the Decision. As such, the basis for the transparency requirements contained in the Commitments also falls away, and the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that the concern regarding asymmetry of information no longer arises.

4.95 In the event that the CMA considered that adverse competition effects might result from Google's ongoing development and implementation of the Privacy Sandbox tools, or related design choices that affect the availability of signals that enable functionalities for user tracking, renewed scrutiny under the Act and/or the DMCCA may be appropriate.

Appropriateness of releasing the Commitments

General comments on oversight and commitments

4.96 Two respondents (two associations) told us that there is broad industry support for 'continued oversight'.

4.97 Two respondents (an association and a search aggregator) told us that they have incurred costs from Google's change of direction and that they feel uncertain about making any future investments, especially without the CMA's continued oversight. One of these respondents (a search aggregator) told us that the Commitments restore an element of certainty for businesses that rely on the ability to track users effectively. One respondent (an ad tech) advised that the CMA should clarify Google's intentions for TPC deprecation and anti-fingerprinting, memorialise them, and set an expiry date for them.

[65] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.93.

4.98 One respondent (an association) suggested that the Commitments should remain in place to ensure that Google engages with the industry on the future development of the Privacy Sandbox tools.

The CMA's response

4.99 The CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concerns no longer arise, because Google no longer intends to pursue the conduct which gave rise to the CMA's original competition concerns in the February 2022 Decision. Having considered the general comments from respondents on oversight above, the CMA considers it appropriate to release the Commitments, rather than retain/vary them, as explained further in Chapter 6.

International developments

4.100 Three respondents (two ad techs and an association) suggested that the CMA's Commitments should remain in place until the remedies arising from the US Department of Justice's ('**DOJ**') litigation in respect of Google Search are implemented, including the potential divestment of Chrome. One respondent (an association) said the Commitments should remain in place until the outcome of the DOJ's Search trial, to prevent any self-preferencing activities from Google. One respondent (a publisher) said that, to the extent that Privacy Sandbox is implemented in the Chrome browser, Google may not own Chrome following the US search remedies.

4.101 One respondent (a publisher) told us that Google has been found to engage in anticompetitive behaviour in international cases and suggested that the Privacy Sandbox was intended to increase Google's dominance in the online advertising market while that dominance was coming under international legal and regulatory pressures. Another respondent (a search aggregator) commented that Google's 'bad-faith approach' to complying with new digital competition rules in the European Union and 'early criticism' of the CMA's Proposed Decision to designate Google with strategic market status ('**SMS**') (in general search and search advertising services) indicate that Google is not willing to treat other businesses fairly.

The CMA's response

4.102 Actions taken by the Department of Justice in the US and the CMA in the UK involve separate processes by separate authorities in separate jurisdictions under separate legal frameworks.

4.103 The considerations from paragraph 4.99 above also apply here.

Comments on retaining certain commitments

4.104 Seven respondents (four associations, two ad techs and a consulting firm) commented on the non-discrimination commitment, arguing it should remain in some form. Two of these respondents (an association and a consulting firm) expressly made this point about paragraph 31 of the Commitments.

4.105 One of the respondents (an association) told us that releasing commitments relating to non-discrimination would be harmful to the marketplace, even if TPCs are still available.

4.106 One respondent (an association) said the Commitments should remain in place to monitor the Privacy Sandbox and ensure that its future does not impact competition in ad tech.

4.107 One respondent (an association) said the Commitments on non-discrimination, in particular, should remain in place in the event of any future decision on TPC deprecation.

4.108 Two stakeholders suggested that the CMA retain a minimum set of commitments to prevent or review the expansion of Incognito features into Standard Chrome (two ad techs).

4.109 Three respondents (two ad techs and a consulting firm) suggested that the CMA should retain commitments to prevent Google from steering or nudging users towards Incognito mode.

4.110 Two respondents (an ad tech and an association) suggested that the CMA's role could be performed with fewer resources by reducing operational oversight (eg technical reviews, quarterly update reports).

The CMA's response

4.111 The considerations from paragraph 4.99 above also apply here.

Comments about varying the Commitments

4.112 Two respondents (an association and a consulting firm) suggested that the CMA could offer varied commitments to Google. One of these respondents (an association) told us that the CMA may vary its commitments under section 31A of the Act if there has been a material change of circumstances since the original commitments were accepted.

4.113 The respondents suggested that any variation should retain paragraphs 30 to 31 on non-discrimination. One of these respondents (a consulting firm) said that the reporting and compliance commitments should also be retained if the Commitments are varied.

4.114 Two respondents (an ad tech and a consulting firm) said the non-discrimination commitment should cover Google Chrome, and the development of the Privacy Sandbox for Android, and one respondent (an ad tech) said it should be applied to the technologies within Chrome, Ads and Android.

The CMA's response

4.115 The respondent describes the legal test for variation of commitments incorrectly. The test for variation of commitments appears in section 31A(3) of the Act, but there is no reference to material change of circumstances in that provision. Material change of circumstances would be relevant to section 31B(4) of the Act.

4.116 The development of the Privacy Sandbox for Android is outside the scope of the Investigation, as is the behaviour of Google Ads, so could not feature in commitments in the absence of a new investigation under the Act.

4.117 The considerations from paragraph 4.99 above also apply here.

5. Other responses to the CMA's consultation and the CMA's assessment

5.1 This chapter includes other submissions which stakeholders have made in response to the consultation. The CMA considers that these issues are not directly relevant to the CMA's decision whether to release the Commitments.

Google could restrict access to other functionalities

5.2 One respondent (a consulting firm) submitted that Google can exploit its dominant position in search and mobile operating systems (as well as in browser technologies) to restrict rivals' access to other functionalities needed to compete.

The CMA's response

5.3 Case 50972 related to Google's likely dominant position in browsers, and the conduct within the scope of that investigation was limited to 'the proposals by Google to replace third-party cookies … and other functionalities with a range of changes known as the 'Privacy Sandbox'.[66]

5.4 If Google were to seek to exploit a suspected dominant position in other markets, or seek to exploit its likely dominant position in browsers in other ways, any intervention by the CMA would need to be under a new process, not the process relating to the Commitments. In any event, the CMA already has an open investigation under the Act into suspected anti-competitive conduct by Google in ad tech.[67] We also note the CMA's decision to designate Google with SMS in general search and search advertising [68] and open SMS investigation into Google's mobile platform[69] under the DMCCA.

[66] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 1.2.
[67] See the CMA's Google ad tech investigation case page.
[68] See the CMA's Search SMS case page.
[69] See the CMA's Google Mobile SMS case page.

The scope of the Investigation

5.5 In regard to the scope of the Investigation, one respondent (an association) submitted that the scope is defined by paragraphs 2.34 and 2.41 of the February 2022 Decision.[70]

The CMA's response

5.6 The scope of the Investigation is not defined by paragraphs 2.34 and 2.41 of the February 2022 Decision (which concern the markets on which Google's conduct might have impacted). The scope of the Investigation is as described in paragraph 1.2 of the February 2022 Decision. Paragraph 1.2 of the February 2022 Decision described the Investigation as 'concerning the proposals by Google to replace third-party cookies … and other functionalities with a range of changes known as the 'Privacy Sandbox''.

The scope of the Commitments

5.7 In regard to the scope of the Commitments, one respondent (an association) submitted that this extends beyond Google's conduct with changes to its Chrome browser.

The CMA's response

5.8 The CMA has been considering whether it has reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concerns from the February 2022 Decision no longer arise.

5.9 As regards the scope of the Commitments, the Commitments are clear that they relate to the 'Privacy Sandbox Proposals'.[71]

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[70] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 2.34: 'The CMA has considered the most likely definitions of the relevant markets that Google is engaged in which relate to the conduct under investigation. The CMA's preliminary view is that the main relevant product markets for the purposes of this investigation are: (i) the supply of web browsers to web users and publishers; (ii) the supply of display ad inventory to advertisers; (iii) the supply of search ad inventory to advertisers; and (iv) markets relating to the supply of ad tech services to publishers and advertisers'.
See also paragraph 2.41: 'The CMA considers that, for the purposes of this investigation, the relevant product market is likely to be that for the supply of display ad inventory to advertisers. However, the CMA considers that Google's position in the separate market for search advertising is also relevant for the purpose of assessing Google's incentives and the competitive effects of its proposals.'

[71] See, for example, the Commitments, paragraph 2.

5.10 In the Commitments, 'Privacy Sandbox' is defined as 'Google's proposals relating to the Removal of Third-Party Cookies, the design, development and implementation of the Alternative Technologies, and the changes to Chrome listed at Annex 1, including Gnatcatcher and the Privacy Budget'. 'Removal of Third-Party Cookies' is defined as 'Chrome ending support for Third-Party Cookies or clearing Third-Party Cookies more frequently than every 90 days, whichever is first'. 'Alternative Technologies' is defined as 'the technologies designed, developed and implemented by Google as alternatives to Third-Party Cookies in Chrome and Chromium listed at Annex 1, and any successor technologies having the same objective.' Each of these definitions therefore refers expressly to 'Chrome'.

The scope of non-discrimination commitments

5.11 Two respondents (an association and a consulting firm) suggested that paragraph 30 (the non-discrimination commitment) and paragraph 31 (which places limits on Google's ability to change certain Google policies in a way that would restrict a customer's use of Non Google Technologies)[72] are not limited to changes within the Chrome browser but extend to Google's ads businesses.

The CMA's response

5.12 Whilst the Commitments control behaviour in various Google ads products to a limited extent, the CMA's concerns were not about Google's ads products. The Commitments control behaviour of Google ads products only for specific purposes, which are related to Chrome and the Privacy Sandbox.

5.13 This is set out in the February 2022 Decision, which says that: 'the CMA's concerns in this investigation […] relate to the impact of Google's introduction of the Privacy Sandbox Proposals, not to Google's approach towards other market participants' alternative technologies.'[73]

5.14 In any event, paragraph 30 of the Commitments refers to paragraph 8 (the D&I Criteria), which is limited to the Privacy Sandbox, in such a way that paragraph 30 is similarly limited. Furthermore, with regard to paragraph 30 of the Commitments, the CMA explicitly said in the February 2022 Decision that

[72] For these purposes, the relevant customers are customers of Google Ad Manager, Campaign Manager 360, Display & Video 360 and Search Ads 360.
[73] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 4.324.

'the CMA does not consider that the obligation should cover Google's products and services generally'.[74]

5.15 With regard to paragraph 31 of the Commitments, this was introduced to address representations from respondents to the consultation of 26 November 2021 (the '**November 2021 Notice**'), rather than to address the CMA's own competition concerns.[75] The CMA accepted commitments including paragraph 31 because the provision would provide greater certainty for third parties who were developing alternative technologies which could compete with the Privacy Sandbox tools following the removal of TPCs.[76]

5.16 As mentioned above, the CMA's concerns in the Investigation did not relate to Google's approach towards other market participants' alternative technologies. On that basis, it is not necessary for the CMA to show that it has reasonable grounds for believing that this issue no longer arises – the issue was never a competition concern held by the CMA as arising from its investigation into Google's 'Privacy Sandbox' browser changes.

5.17 The CMA did recognise in the February 2022 Decision that Google's market position allowed it to have a significant impact on the viability of alternative technologies which could compete with the Privacy Sandbox tools following the removal of TPCs.[77] However, given that Google is not deprecating TPCs (or otherwise restricting TPCs through a standalone prompt), the rationale for paragraph 31 of the Commitments has fallen away.

The CMA's commitments process

5.18 One respondent (an ad tech) told us that it understands that Google rebuffed an attempt by the CMA to get Google to agree to updated Commitments. The respondent suggested that the CMA's decision to release the Commitments will be perceived as capitulating to Google and have implications for any future investigations.

5.19 That same respondent (an ad tech) told us that engagement with the CMA's commitments process sometimes came at great expense to stakeholders.

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[74] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 4.293.
[75] See the November 2021 Notice, paragraphs 4.113 and 4.117.
[76] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraphs 4.324 and 4.326.
[77] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 4.324.

The CMA's response

5.20 During the period from 22 July 2024 to 22 April 2025, Google intended to introduce a standalone prompt to give users a choice whether to restrict or maintain TPCs. The CMA had expressed the view publicly that it still had competition concerns about such a proposal which would require resolution through updated commitments, to be accepted under section 31A(3) of the Act. Interactions between the CMA and Google from 22 July 2024 to 22 April 2025 need to be understood in that context.

5.21 Google's most recent update report indicates that any offer of varied/substituted commitments would have related to the standalone prompt, but that the standalone prompt is now not going ahead.[78] As explained in Chapter 4 of this Decision, the CMA considers that it is appropriate to release the Commitments, rather than maintain, vary or substitute them.

5.22 The CMA's commitments have ensured that Google designed and developed the Privacy Sandbox in a way that engaged stakeholders. Stakeholders had the opportunity to provide their feedback (including anonymously via the CMA) so that the Privacy Sandbox was not developed in a way that favoured Google's own ad tech services over those of competitors, while Google was planning to deprecate TPCs (or otherwise restrict TPCs through a standalone prompt). The CMA is grateful for stakeholders' engagement on the Privacy Sandbox.

The CMA's consultation process

5.23 One respondent (an association) said that the consultation window was brief and coincided with the industry's biggest event in Cannes.

The CMA's response

5.24 As regards the duration of the consultation window, the CMA considers that three weeks was sufficient to ensure procedural fairness. The duration was in line with previous consultations on the Privacy Sandbox and the CMA has given stakeholders substantially more than the 11 days statutory minimum to respond to the consultation.[79]

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[78] See Google's Q2 2025 progress report, page 23 (accessed on 15 October 2025).
[79] See paragraph 2(3) of Schedule 6A to the Act.

Google should restore cookieless testing traffic

5.25 Four respondents (two ad techs, an association and a consulting firm) suggested that Google should restore the 1% of cookieless testing traffic to its standard state in Chrome.

The CMA's response

5.26 The question of whether the 1% is in a 'testing state' or a 'standard state' was not part of the CMA's competition concerns as outlined in the February 2022 Decision. In any event, in the CMA's view, it is unlikely that 1% of traffic in Chrome is significant enough to have an impact on Google's relative access to functionalities associated with user tracking such that it would be capable of distorting competition.

5.27 In any event, Google has told the CMA that 'the 1% of users who have TPCs restricted will be notified that their original 3PCs settings, which were changed by default, will be restored to their original state in line with Google's decision to maintain the current approach to TPCs on Chrome.'[80] Upon this notification, the relevant users will be able to choose their own cookie preferences via the settings menu, which they can also do at any time.[81]

Monitoring developments and planning future action

5.28 Five respondents (two ad techs, two associations and a publisher) said, or implied, that the CMA should proactively monitor Google's behaviour in relation to the Privacy Sandbox and prepare to intervene if needed. One respondent (an ad tech) commented that the CMA should monitor the UK digital advertising market, including Google's evolving Privacy Sandbox strategy and development/promotion of any alternative privacy enhancing technologies ('**PETs**'). One respondent (a publisher) suggested setting thresholds which trigger the re-imposition of the Commitments or the use of Conduct Requirements (under the DMCCA).

5.29 Two respondents (an association and an ad tech) suggested that the CMA should conduct an investigation under the DMCCA into the UK digital advertising market or the broader ad tech ecosystem. One of these respondents (an ad tech) said the CMA should also clarify if, and to what extent, digital advertising in mobile will be considered as part of the DMCCA

[80] Google's submission of 10 October 2025.
[81] Google's submission of 15 October 2025.

investigation into mobile ecosystems. One respondent (an association) noted that the CMA's SMS investigation into Google Search states the regulator's right to introduce Conduct Requirements or Pro-Competition Interventions in similar areas in future, and another (a publisher) asked if a Conduct Requirement could be to not deprecate TPCs.

5.30 However, two respondents (two ad techs) said that the CMA may be prevented from taking timely action in the future for various reasons. Examples given included political, operational or other considerations. One respondent (an association) added that lengthy delays in reopening a case would not provide as much certainty to stakeholders in digital markets as a means of addressing the original concerns of the CMA.

The CMA's response

5.31 There is no legal means by which to set thresholds to trigger the re-imposition of Commitments. In deciding to release the Commitments, the CMA has applied the legal tests under section 31A(4) of the Act. The CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concerns no longer arise and the CMA has concluded that it is appropriate to release the Commitments.

5.32 The CMA, as stated in the Notice, keeps under review information relating to the exercise of its functions, including under the Act and the DMCCA.

5.33 To make efficient and effective use of public resources the CMA needs to prioritise the work it does. Any investigation under the Act or the DMCCA would be based on the relevant facts and circumstances at the time and any future work will be prioritised in accordance with the CMA's prioritisation principles.[82]

5.34 The CMA has an open investigation under the DMCCA into mobile platforms[83] and designated Google with SMS in general search and search advertising on 10 October 2025.[84] Where work is already under way, existing SMS designation processes need to be followed. In addition, the CMA already has an open investigation under the Act into suspected anti-competitive conduct by Google in ad tech.

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[82] See the CMA's prioritisation principles.
[83] See the CMA's Google Mobile SMS case page.
[84] See the CMA's Search SMS case page.

Android

5.35 One respondent (an ad tech) expressed concerns that the Privacy Sandbox for Android will be developed without oversight from regulators and another respondent (a consulting firm) said the protections framework and transparency requirements for Chrome should be extended to Android. A separate respondent (an ad tech) added that there should be an oversight framework for Android whether through the mobile SMS investigation or otherwise. Another respondent (an ad tech) added that the CMA must preserve and expand the anti-discrimination principles in the original commitments and obligate Google to a process of evaluation prior to deprecation of Android Advertising ID.

5.36 One respondent (a consulting firm) submitted that Google's claim that Android is not part of the Commitments is inconsistent with the text of the Commitments which references 'Android' within the definition of 'Personal Data'.

5.37 One respondent (an association) submitted that the CMA had concluded that Google would not abuse its dominant position (referring to Android, search and ad tech) to discriminate against rivals in digital advertising, and that this conclusion was ‘insufficiently safeguarded’.

The CMA’s response

5.38 As the CMA stated in footnote 5 of the Notice, the development of the Privacy Sandbox for Android by Google was not in scope of the Investigation which led to acceptance of the Commitments. The scope of the Investigation is as described in paragraph 1.2 of the February 2022 Decision. It is not possible to extend the Commitments to Android at this stage, as the Investigation was closed in February 2022 and the scope of the Investigation cannot now be changed.

5.39 The reference to ‘Android’ in the definition of ‘Google First-Party Personal Data’ in the Commitments does not bring the Privacy Sandbox on Android within scope of the CMA’s investigation or its competition concerns.

5.40 Similarly, as regards claimed dominant positions in search and ad tech, any conduct abusing any dominant position in these markets falls outside the scope of the Investigation and, with that, the CMA’s competition concerns as set out in the February 2022 Decision. The CMA’s investigation related to Google’s conduct in Chrome and its likely dominance in web browsers. The

CMA has conducted a separate investigation in search[85] under the DMCCA and has a live investigation in ad tech under the Act.[86]

The CMA's ad tech investigation

5.41 One respondent (an association) suggested that while maintaining commitments, the CMA should link the 'review' of the commitments to its ad tech investigation into Google to see how the Privacy Sandbox and its future developments fit within Google's ad tech ecosystem and its impact on competition.

The CMA's response

5.42 The CMA has an open investigation under the Act into suspected anti-competitive conduct by Google in ad tech, separate to the Privacy Sandbox process.[87] This cannot be joined with the closed investigation into the Privacy Sandbox.

Other issues

5.43 Three respondents (an ad tech, a publisher and a consulting firm) submitted that Google could engage in anticompetitive behaviour in ways other than the Privacy Sandbox. One respondent (a publisher) suggested that the CMA should consider the impact of Google's AI Overviews on publisher search traffic revenue in the UK. One respondent (an association) expressed concern that Google could create competitive distortions in the display advertising market through its dominance in mobile operating systems, browsers and ad tech.

5.44 One respondent (an ad tech) submitted that Google continues to evolve its position on user privacy, including by advocating for recognition of PETs. It said that the CMA should 'proactively advise the ICO on the potential competition effects of its work and how data protection rules and PECR should apply to digital advertising and potential regulatory incentives to encourage the development and adoption of privacy-enhancing ad models'.

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[85] See the CMA's Search SMS case page.
[86] See the CMA's Google ad tech investigation case page.
[87] See the CMA's Google ad tech investigation case page.

The CMA's response

5.45 The CMA notes these points but considers they are outside of the competition concerns identified in the Privacy Sandbox Investigation. The CMA will continue to engage with the ICO as appropriate on matters where our responsibilities interact.

6. The CMA's reasons for releasing the commitments

6.1 Having carefully considered the stakeholder feedback in Chapters 4 and 5, this chapter explains the CMA's reasons for releasing the Commitments.

Google no longer intends to pursue the conduct which gave rise to the CMA's competition concerns

6.2 The CMA's original investigation concerned the proposals by Google to replace TPCs and other functionalities in Chrome with a range of changes known as the 'Privacy Sandbox'.[88] The basis on which the CMA opened the Investigation was that the CMA had reasonable grounds for suspecting that Google had infringed the Chapter II prohibition in relation to its Privacy Sandbox Proposals by virtue of a suspected abuse of dominance in web browsers in the UK.[89]

6.3 The CMA's original competition concerns are captured in the February 2022 Decision (as summarised in paragraphs 2.5 to 2.7 above) and are to be read in light of the scope of the Investigation. In the February 2022 Decision, the CMA took a two-part approach to outlining its competition concerns, in line with the Competition Appeal Tribunal's (CAT) judgment in *Royal Mail* v *Ofcom*.[90] Three of the CMA's concerns related to Google's (future) end conduct, whereas the CMA's fourth concern related to certain announcements and implementing steps made by Google.

6.4 Two announcements from Google, in 2024 and 2025, and related engagement with Google, have required the CMA to reflect on its competition concerns from the February 2022 Decision.

6.5 First, on 22 July 2024,[91] Google announced in a blog post a new approach to the Privacy Sandbox. Instead of deprecating (removing) TPCs, Google would introduce a new prompt giving Chrome users a choice of whether to maintain or restrict TPCs. Compared to the previous approach of full TPC deprecation, the new standalone prompt was likely to result in some Chrome users maintaining TPCs.

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[88] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 1.2.

[89] The February 2022 Decision, paragraph 2.58, states that Google's position in the supply of web browsers is central to the Investigation.

[90] See the judgment in *Royal Mail plc* v *Office of Communications*, [2019] CAT 27, 12 November 2019.

[91] See Google's announcement A new path for Privacy Sandbox on the web, 22 July 2024 (accessed on 15 October 2025).

6.6 The CMA considered that this standalone prompt was within the scope of the Investigation - it was still a form of withdrawal of TPCs, even though it was conditioned on a user choice rather than being applied generally by Google. The CMA indicated in September 2024 that competition concerns remained under Google's revised approach.[92] The CMA's next quarterly update report, published in November 2024,[93] indicated that the CMA was discussing with Google: (i) the implications of the revised approach for its competition concerns; and (ii) the changes that would be required to the Commitments to address them. Any such changes to the Commitments would have been achieved through the acceptance of varied/substituted commitments under section 31A(3) of the Act.

6.7 Second, on 22 April 2025,[94] Google announced that it no longer intends to proceed with introducing a standalone prompt giving users a choice whether to maintain or restrict TPCs. Google's April 2025 announcement expressly stated that 'we've made the decision to maintain our current approach to offering users third-party cookie choice in Chrome, and will not be rolling out a new standalone prompt for third-party cookies'.[95] As a result of this announcement and related engagement with Google, the CMA's attention then shifted to potential release, rather than variation/substitution, of the Commitments. The test for release of commitments is to be found in section 31A(4) of the Act. Since the publication of the Notice, Google stated in October 2025 that it has decided to retire various Privacy Sandbox technologies.

6.8 A consultation respondent has queried whether the wording of Google's announcement of 22 April 2025 supports the CMA's reasoning to release the Commitments as explained in the Notice. It is apparent from the Notice that the CMA had also taken account of correspondence with Google as part of its assessment. The CMA sent questions to Google regarding its plans for the Privacy Sandbox on 11 April 2025. In its response of 16 April 2025, Google stated that it has no plans to 'make any material changes to the TPC settings for Chrome users or to introduce a standalone browser-level prompt offering a user choice to restrict or limit TPCs, for users browsing in Chrome's

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[92] See the CMA's Privacy Sandbox investigation case updates.
[93] See the CMA's Q2/Q3 2024 update report, paragraph 2.
[94] See Google's announcement Next steps for Privacy Sandbox and tracking protections in Chrome, 22 April 2025 (accessed on 15 October 2025).
[95] See Google's announcement Next steps for Privacy Sandbox and tracking protections in Chrome, 22 April 2025 (accessed on 15 October 2025).

standard/default mode (Standard Chrome)'.[96] Google also stated that it has 'no plans to make any amendments to public-facing choice architecture that could lead to a materially increased proportion of Chrome browsers with restrictions on TPCs in Standard Chrome'. [97] Together with Google's announcement, the CMA interpreted these responses as meaning that Google 'no longer plans to take any other action which would materially reduce the availability of TPCs'.[98]

6.9 These developments mean that Google no longer intends to pursue the conduct which gave rise to the CMA's competition concerns. The competition concerns which were in scope of its investigation, and are reflected in the February 2022 Decision, were predicated on Google's plan to remove TPCs in Chrome.

6.10 Where the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that the competition concerns it identified in its investigation (here Case number 50972) no longer arise, the CMA may release the relevant commitments.[99]

Concern 1

6.11 The CMA's first concern was that without sufficient scrutiny and oversight, the Privacy Sandbox Proposals would allow Google to distort competition in the market for the supply of ad inventory in the UK and in the market for the supply of ad tech services in the UK, by restricting the functionality associated with user tracking for third parties, while retaining this functionality for Google.

6.12 The CMA was concerned that the new tools being developed through the Privacy Sandbox Proposals would not be effective substitutes for the functionalities provided by TPCs and other information deprecated by the Privacy Sandbox Proposals.[100] The CMA had also heard concerns from third parties that, if the Privacy Sandbox tools did not prove to be effective substitutes for the deprecated functionality/information, that would distort competition in digital advertising markets since Google would retain the ability

[96] Google's response of 16 April 2025 to CMA questions of 11 April 2025.
[97] Google's response of 16 April 2025 to CMA questions of 11 April 2025.
[98] See the Notice, paragraph 3.6(a) and paragraph 1.12.
[99] The CMA's Procedural Guidance, paragraph 10.30, is also relevant in this regard and applies the above test to both limbs of section 31A(4) of the Act.
[100] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.40.

to carry out the functionality affected through its advantageous access to first-party data.[101]

The CMA's assessment

6.13 Google no longer intends to pursue the conduct which gave rise to the CMA's competition concerns, and so the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that the concern that Google would be able to abuse its dominant position by restricting functionality available to rivals through deprecation of TPCs and other information (or the introduction of a standalone prompt) no longer arises.

TPCs

6.14 At the time of the February 2022 Decision, the central means by which the Privacy Sandbox Proposals would have allowed Google to distort competition was by deprecation of TPCs.[102] Deprecation of TPCs would have meant that publishers, advertisers and ad techs reliant on Chrome (accounting for around half or more of all page views by users)[103] would have been forced to stop using TPCs and use the Privacy Sandbox tools instead. If the Privacy Sandbox tools were not an effective substitute for the functionality provided by TPCs, this would likely have distorted competition as Google would have retained such functionality via its advantageous access to first-party data.

6.15 The CMA's view is that Google neither intends to remove TPCs from Chrome, nor to introduce a standalone prompt giving users the choice whether to maintain or restrict TPCs. This is based on the wording of Google's announcements and the correspondence set out at paragraph 6.8 above. Taken together, these changes to Google's approach mean that the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that the concern it had identified in the February 2022 Decision no longer arises.

6.16 As regards concerns about the effectiveness of replacements for TPCs, the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that such concerns no longer arise in the absence of deprecation of TPCs (or the introduction of a standalone

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[101] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraphs 3.39 and 3.50.
[102] The February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.34 states that, 'the Privacy Sandbox Proposals aim to replace TPCs with alternative solutions … TPCs are currently the principal means of achieving common identification of web users on web pages …'
[103] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 2.51.

prompt), since advertisers, publishers and ad techs will not be forced by Google to use the Privacy Sandbox tools instead of TPCs. Since the publication of the Notice, Google has also confirmed that third parties will not be required to use the Privacy Sandbox tools that remain available for the purpose of selling ad inventory or ad tech services for users of Chrome.

6.17 With regard to Google's data advantages, the discussion in the February 2022 Decision was of the main data sources which Google could use for the purpose of user-tracking if TPCs were deprecated and replaced with the Privacy Sandbox tools, and the competitive advantage it could gain relative to its rivals, which would be reliant on the Privacy Sandbox tools.[104] Given that Google no longer intends to deprecate TPCs (or otherwise restrict TPCs through a standalone prompt), the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that these concerns no longer arise. This is not to say that Google does not still have data advantages as a general matter, given its ownership of a very wide range of domains and user-facing services, as well as the extensive reach of user and business facing products and services. However, the relevance of such advantages in the specific context has fallen away, as Google will no longer benefit from this data advantage by restricting the access of its rivals to functionalities associated with user tracking by deprecating TPCs.

Other information

6.18 As some consultation respondents pointed out, some elements of the Privacy Sandbox are not direct replacements for the functionality of TPCs, but involve other changes to, or reductions in, signals used by third parties.[105] These elements include UA-CH, Privacy Budget, IP Protection and Federated Credential Management ('**FedCM**').[106] However, any concerns relating to these broader functionalities/other information were predicated on Google's plan to remove TPCs in Chrome (or otherwise restrict TPCs through a standalone prompt), which Google is no longer planning to carry through. See paragraphs 4.28 to 4.33 and paragraphs 4.41 to 4.43 above.

6.19 In any case, Google abandoned Privacy Budget in 2024, such that the CMA already had reasonable grounds for believing that any concerns about Privacy

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[104] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.54 et seq.
[105] See, for example, the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.11.
[106] In some cases (such as FedCM) the Privacy Sandbox tools involve expansions in functionalities achievable through TPCs. Insofar as the publishing and ad tech ecosystems adopt these tools, this does not represent any limitation of the functionalities available to Google's rivals in the open display market.

Budget no longer arise, even before the April 2025 announcement was made.[107]

6.20 With regard to UA-CH, all of the information which was available in the User-Agent String is still available through UA-CH, though more than one request may be needed to obtain it. Furthermore, there are other ways in which publishers can optimise their online content to a user's device. See paragraphs 4.31 to 4.32 above.

6.21 With regards to concerns raised by stakeholders about Google nudging users towards Incognito mode or extending IP Protection and Script Blocking in general browsing, the CMA has responded in detail to these submissions in paragraphs 4.36 to 4.38 and 4.41 to 4.43 above. In any case, the CMA is not aware of any plans on the part of Google to expand privacy features or restrict tracking signals in this way, so these concerns are hypothetical. Google has moreover stated that it has decided to retire IP Protection.[108] In addition, Google has told the CMA that it 'does not have plans to amend its public-facing choice or information architecture in such a way that could lead to a materially increased proportion of user browsing activity taking place in Incognito mode'.[109]

6.22 Finally, even if Google were to reduce the availability of other signals which can be used for tracking in Incognito mode, in the CMA's view this is unlikely to have an anti-competitive effect because this would only affect a very small fraction (less than 10%) of browsing activity in Chromium-based Chrome.[110] See paragraphs 4.41 to 4.43 above.

Concern 2

6.23 The CMA's second concern was that without sufficient regulatory scrutiny and oversight, the Privacy Sandbox Proposals would allow Google to self-preference its own ad inventory and ad tech services by transferring key functionalities to Chrome, providing Google with the ability to affect digital

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[107] See Google's Q1 2024 progress report, page 46 (accessed on 15 October 2025).
[108] Google's submission of 10 October 2025.
[109] Google's response of 16 April 2025 to CMA questions of 11 April 2025.
[110] See Google's Q2 2025 progress report, page 4 (accessed on 15 October 2025) and see also the Notice, footnote 20 which states 'Incognito mode only affects a very small fraction of browsing activity. In each of the UK and the EEA, Chrome Incognito mode represents less than 10% of navigations on devices running on the Android operating system; and less than 10% of navigations on devices running on the Windows operating system. These metrics refer to navigations only on Chromium-based Chrome in the UK and EEA.'

advertising market outcomes through Chrome in a way that cannot be scrutinised by third parties, and leading to conflicts of interest.

6.24 The CMA's concern was not about any and all forms of self-preferencing which could affect digital advertising. The focus of this concern was conduct in Chrome, and this concern was predicated on Google's plan to remove TPCs in Chrome, such that the Privacy Sandbox tools would become important inputs to ad tech and ad inventory businesses' ability to compete.

The CMA's assessment

6.25 As TPCs are not going to be deprecated (or otherwise restricted through a standalone prompt) as identified above, the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that this concern no longer arises.

6.26 Consultation respondents have suggested that there are several ways in which Google could self-preference its own ad tech businesses in the ongoing development of the Privacy Sandbox tools. Even if Google has the ability to amend the Privacy Sandbox tools to treat its own ad tech businesses preferentially, in our view this would be unlikely to produce anti-competitive effects in the absence of TPCs being deprecated. Current evidence suggests that the tools are unlikely to be sufficiently important inputs to ad tech and ad inventory businesses' ability to compete, absent Google's conduct to restrict TPCs. This is because, in their current state of development, the CMA expects TPCs to more effectively support outcomes for the ad ecosystem, and that the Privacy Sandbox tools will not be materially valuable complements to TPCs.[111] Stakeholders did not provide any evidence to the contrary in response to the consultation. Moreover, Google's decision to retire several Privacy Sandbox tools further emphasises that they are unlikely to be material to competition in digital advertising. These considerations give us further grounds for believing that the CMA's concerns no longer arise.

Concern 3

6.27 The CMA's third concern was that in the absence of sufficient regulatory scrutiny and oversight, Google could exploit its likely dominant position by denying Chrome web users substantial choice in terms of whether and how

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[111] See the CMA's Summary of Privacy Sandbox Testing Results and third-party analysis which show that uptake of the tools has been modest over the last year (for example, fewer than 20% of sites have adopted PA API auctions. PA API facilitates on-device auctions for remarketing and custom audiences, without relying on TPCs). See also footnote 20 above.

their personal data is used for the purpose of targeting and delivering advertising to them.

6.28 This concern was predicated on Google's plan to remove access to TPCs in Chrome, since the CMA had been informed by Google that it had not decided whether Chrome users would have the option of enabling TPCs in Chrome after Google's removal of TPCs. In addition, as Google intended to replace TPCs with the Privacy Sandbox tools, the CMA also was concerned that Chrome web users could have little or no control with respect to whether and how their personal data is used by the browser to provide the functionalities envisaged in the Privacy Sandbox Proposals.[112]

The CMA's assessment

6.29 As explained in paragraph 3.6(c) of the Notice, following Google's announcements as outlined above, the CMA considers that Google's revised plans no longer involve unilaterally changing how personal data is used for the purposes of targeting and delivering advertising to users. In its announcement of 22 April 2025, Google stated that 'we've made the decision to maintain our current approach to offering users third-party cookie choice in Chrome'.[113] The CMA takes this to mean that, under Google's current plans, users will retain similar options to control how their data is used in the Chrome browser as existed before the Privacy Sandbox Proposals addressed in the Decision. These include the ability for users to allow or restrict TPCs in Chrome settings.

6.30 In relation to prompts specific to the Privacy Sandbox tools (for Topics API, PA API and ARA – all being retired), although there is room for improvement, the CMA's process has provided oversight to ensure that the prompts currently available provide users with effective choices on how API callers use their data. Further, Google will still be required to comply with UK data protection law.

6.31 Additionally, as in relation to the CMA's second concern, the CMA expects relatively low uptake of the Privacy Sandbox tools now that TPCs are not being deprecated (or otherwise restricted through a standalone prompt) in Chrome, meaning that a smaller proportion of user data would be affected than originally envisaged. This is because TPCs will more effectively support

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[112] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.83.

[113] See Google's announcement Next steps for Privacy Sandbox and tracking protections in Chrome, 22 April 2025 (accessed on 15 October 2025).

outcomes for the ad ecosystem, and the Privacy Sandbox tools will not be materially valuable complements to TPCs. Stakeholders did not provide any evidence to the contrary. Moreover, Google has recently stated that it has decided to retire several Privacy Sandbox tools, meaning that the relevance of the tools to users is likely to be limited in future. This gives us further grounds for believing that the CMA's concerns no longer arise.

The Privacy Sandbox announcements

6.32 The CMA was concerned that Google's announcements prior to the June 2021 Notice had caused uncertainty in the market as to the specific alternative solutions which will be available to publishers and ad tech providers once TPCs are deprecated. It said that Google's 'announcements and actions prior to issue of the June 2021 Notice showed (and created the expectation) that Google was determined to proceed with changes in the relevant areas, including by deprecating TPCs within two years of the announcements, in ways which advantage its own businesses and limit competition from its rivals.'[114]

6.33 In this respect, the CMA considered that the concerns that market participants had expressed to it regarding the impact that the Privacy Sandbox Proposals were likely to have on competition reflected in part:

(a) the asymmetry of information between Google and third parties regarding the development of the Privacy Sandbox Proposals, including the criteria that Google would use to assess different design options and evidence relating to their effectiveness against those criteria; and

(b) a lack of confidence from third parties regarding Google's statements concerning its intentions in developing and implementing the Privacy Sandbox Proposals. The CMA understood that this lack of confidence in part reflected the commercial incentives that Google faced in developing the Privacy Sandbox Proposals and the lack of independent scrutiny of the Privacy Sandbox Proposals and the process for their development.

The CMA's assessment

6.34 This concern was about announcements which showed (and created the expectation) that Google was determined to proceed with changes, including

[114] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.100.

by deprecating TPCs within two years of the announcements, in ways which could advantage its own businesses and limit competition from its rivals. The CMA's concern was therefore predicated on Google's plan to remove TPCs in Chrome. Since TPCs will not be deprecated (or otherwise restricted through a standalone prompt), the basis for this concern has fallen away. This means that the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that this concern no longer arises.

6.35 A consultation respondent suggested that Google's announcement of 22 April 2025 (specifically Google's reference to future announcements, and its future roadmap changes) 're-raise the CMA's original concern about asymmetry of information'. However, in the Decision, the CMA was only concerned about announcements prior to the issue of the June 2021 Notice which 'caused uncertainty in the market as to the specific alternative solutions which will be available to publishers and ad tech providers once TPCs are deprecated' and 'showed (and created the expectation) that Google was determined to proceed with changes in the relevant areas, including by deprecating TPCs within two years of the announcements, in ways which advantage its own businesses and limit competition from its rivals'.[115] Since Google will not deprecate TPCs (or otherwise restrict TPCs through a standalone prompt) and replace them with the Privacy Sandbox tools, Google's announcement of April 2025 and any future announcements relating to the Privacy Sandbox fall outside the CMA's competition concerns.

6.36 Regarding asymmetry of information and lack of confidence from third parties, the CMA considered it important to ensure greater transparency in relation to the process for developing the Privacy Sandbox Proposals and regarding the effectiveness of the Privacy Sandbox Proposals themselves to ensure that Google could not gain a competitive advantage from its likely dominant position in browsers. The concern that Google may gain such a competitive advantage over rivals was based on Google's plans to deprecate TPCs and replace them with the Privacy Sandbox tools. Since Google no longer plans to deprecate TPCs (or otherwise restrict TPCs through a standalone prompt), the CMA considers that Google can no longer gain a competitive advantage as originally envisaged in the Decision. As such, the basis for the transparency requirements contained in the Commitments also falls away, and the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that the concern regarding

[115] See the February 2022 Decision, paragraph 3.6.

asymmetry of information and a lack of confidence from third parties no longer arises.

Overall assessment

6.37 In summary, in the context of Google's decision not to deprecate TPCs (or otherwise restrict TPCs through a standalone prompt), the CMA has reasonable grounds for believing that its concerns arising from the Investigation, as outlined in the February 2022 Decision, no longer arise.

6.38 Although consultation respondents suggested that the CMA should not rely on what they regarded as 'transient conditions', the CMA has applied the test in section 31A(4) of the Act as circumstances stand at the current time. At this moment in time, Google no longer intends to pursue the conduct which gave rise to the CMA's competition concerns. For the avoidance of doubt, the applicable test is not whether similar concerns could ever arise again.

6.39 In the event that the CMA considered that adverse competition effects might result from Google's ongoing development and implementation of the Privacy Sandbox tools, or related design choices that affect the availability of signals that enable functionalities for user tracking, renewed scrutiny under the Act and/or the DMCCA may be appropriate.

Appropriateness of releasing commitments

6.40 As explained above, the CMA considers that it has reasonable grounds for believing that its competition concerns no longer arise. As section 31A(4) of the Act and paragraph 10.30 of the Procedural Guidance make clear, release of commitments is discretionary where this is the case.

6.41 Having considered the consultation responses, the CMA considers it appropriate to release the commitments under section 31A(4) of the Act, rather than to retain or seek to vary/substitute them under section 31A(3) of the Act.

6.42 Although the CMA had been discussing potential variation/substitution of the Commitments in the period between Google's announcements of July 2024 and April 2025, the catalyst for such discussions was that Google was at that time planning to introduce a standalone prompt that could have restricted the access to TPCs in a way that could have raised concerns within the scope of the Investigation. Now that Google no longer intends to introduce such a standalone prompt, the rationale for potential variation/substitution of the Commitments has fallen away. Together with the conclusion that Google does

not intend to proceed with the conduct which gave rise to the CMA's competition concerns in the February 2022 Decision, there is no material benefit from retaining or varying the Commitments. It is therefore not justified to maintain the burden on Google, the CMA and other stakeholders associated with the compliance and monitoring of the Commitments.

6.43 The CMA considered whether it would be appropriate to retain or vary the commitments in case its original competition concerns would re-emerge if Google reversed its decision on TPC deprecation, or if it were to restrict access to TPCs in other ways in future which would be within the scope of the Investigation. At this stage Google does not plan to take any such action, and so the CMA remains of the view that it is inappropriate to maintain the compliance and monitoring burden on Google, the CMA and other stakeholders associated with retaining or varying the Commitments.

6.44 Instead, the CMA considers it appropriate to release the Commitments and keep under review information relating to the exercise of its functions, including under the Act and the DMCCA. In the event that the CMA considered that adverse competition effects might result from Google's ongoing development and implementation of the Privacy Sandbox tools, or related design choices that affect the availability of signals that enable functionalities for user tracking, renewed scrutiny under the Act and/or the DMCCA may be appropriate.

6.45 Some stakeholders suggested that the CMA's commitments should remain in place until the remedies arising from the US Department of Justice's litigation in respect of Google Search are implemented, including the potential divestment of Chrome. However, actions taken by the Department of Justice in the US and the CMA in the UK involve separate processes by separate authorities in separate jurisdictions under separate legal frameworks.

6.46 Finally, the scope of the Commitments could not be expanded to capture concerns stakeholders raised in relation to Android and Ads, as these issues fall outside the scope of the Investigation.

7. The CMA's Decision

7.1 For the reasons set out above, the CMA considers that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the competition concerns it identified from the Investigation no longer arise and that it is appropriate to release the Commitments.

7.2 Accordingly, the CMA has decided to release the Commitments by means of this Decision.

Signed:



Will Hayter

Senior Responsible Officer and Executive Director, Digital Markets

For and on behalf of the Competition and Markets Authority

Date: 17 October 2025