

## COMMITTEE ON THE MEDICAL ASPECTS OF RADIATION IN THE ENVIRONMENT

110<sup>th</sup> meeting, Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015  
BMA House, London

Present	<i>Chairman:</i>	Professor Alex Elliott	
	<i>Members:</i>	Dr Jane Barrett Dr Paul Darragh Dr Frank de Vocht Professor Wil Evans Dr Brenda Howard Professor Stephanie McKeown Professor Munira Kadhim Dr Tom Nunan Dr Mark Pearce Mr Ian Robinson Professor Roger Taylor Professor Richard Wakeford Professor Peter Warwick Professor Catharine West	
	<i>Assessors:</i>	DECC DH DHSSPS-NI EA FSA HSE NDA PHE SEPA WG	
	<i>Secretariat:</i>	Dr Jill Meara Dr Simon Mann Dr Emma Petty Ms Kim Stonell	(PHE) (PHE) (PHE) (PHE)

## COMARE 110

### OPENING ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman opened the 110<sup>th</sup> meeting and advised members of the private nature of the meeting and that papers should remain confidential. Members were asked to declare any interests during the meeting.

The Chairman advised members that this would be his last meeting. It was also the last meeting for Professor Kadhim whose term of office ends in May. The Chairman thanked Professor Kadhim for her input to the committee and noted that she would continue to sit on the DXA subcommittee.

The Chairman also noted that, following a restructure at PHE's Centre for Radiation, Chemical and Environmental Hazards (CRCE), Dr Simon Mann is replacing Dr Jill Meara on the secretariat. The Chairman thanked Dr Meara for her substantial contribution to the work of the committee, both as assessor for HPA and PHE, and as the lead secretariat during the last year. The Chairman welcomed Dr Mann to his first meeting.

The Chairman also advised members there was a new ONS assessor for the committee, who unfortunately needed to send apologies for this meeting.

#### Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Professor Marsden.

Apologies were also received from the assessors for ONS, ISD, DCLG, and MoD. The Chairman reminded members that substitutes are welcome.

The Chairman noted the emailed comments from the MoD assessor regarding representation at meetings and clarified the status of tier 1 and tier 2 assessors for members.

With regard to additional comments on agenda items, the SEPA assessor clarified that Dalgety Bay was not being dealt with under a regulatory remit and therefore SEPA was not leading on this. The Chairman asked that the minutes reflect that, in terms of Dalgety Bay, the MoD is freely undertaking the current work in partnership with SEPA and Dalgety Bay land owners. The MoD is not acting under a regulatory remit and is not accepting liability.

#### ITEM 1 Minutes of the 109<sup>th</sup> COMARE meeting

1.1 Corrections to the minutes were agreed by the committee.

[ACTION: Secretariat]

#### ITEM 2 Matters arising

##### i) COMARE membership

2.1 The Chairman advised members that the committee was currently advertising for five vacancies. The deadline for applications was 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015. The DH assessor advised members that one application has been received.

2.2 The Chairman further advised that the deadline for applications for the post of Chair was today. The DH assessor advised members that two applications had been received and DH would be reviewing these in the first week of April.

##### ii) COMARE matters, indemnity and website

2.3 The Chairman advised members that in addition to the restructuring at CRCE mentioned previously and the change in lead secretariat, Ms Janet Humphreys would step down from the administration duties for the committee. The Chairman thanked Ms Humphreys for her work, particularly with regard to managing the committee's expenses. Dr Mann advised members that Ms Humphreys' replacement would be confirmed in due course.

2.4 The Chairman raised concerns that the committee had not been notified on the recent formal restructuring at CRCE. It was made clear to the committee that key CRCE staff, who have provided important work for COMARE reports, are leaving the centre. Dr Mann explained the reason behind the restructuring and the focus of the changes.

2.5 Members discussed the need for a review of the remit of the committee and the resources that would be made available, particularly with CRCE. The Chairman suggested that the incoming chair is provided with organisational structures of CRCE, past and present, and would write to DH to request this. A review of the remit of the committee would also be requested. The DH assessor agreed to report back at the next meeting.

[ACTION: The Chairman]

[ACTION: DH]

2.6 The Chairman reminded members that the minutes of the previous three meetings are on the main COMARE page on gov.uk. The secretariat has been informed that the policy is for a maximum of four sets of minutes on gov.uk web pages and committees are being advised to consider using 'box' accounts to allow for older minutes to be publicly accessible, although this system will not be archived. Committee reports are available on a separate page, which is archived. The secretariat will look into options for handling access to minutes.

[ACTION: Secretariat]

2.7 Members were advised that the Chairman attended the joint workshop for the Whitehall Policy Profession and Science (Advisory) Profession on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2015 and were provided with an official précis of the meeting. It was noted that there was no time available to address the concerns of SAC Chairs at the workshop.

2.8 The Chairman reminded members that he was tasked with writing to DH and the DAs to seek clarification on the issue of indemnity and the responses from DH and the DAs had been circulated. Members raised concerns about retirees and those members who were self-employed. The DH assessor advised that for the advice provided by the committee in their reports, indemnity lies with the government. The Chairman agreed, with the approval of the DH assessor, to write to Sir Mark Walport setting out the committees concerns, as it was a generic issue across government and not just a DH issue.

[ACTION: The Chairman]

2.9 The Chairman advised members that at the end of February the BBC Inside Out programme for the West Midlands included an item on sunbeds and cancer risk. The series editor was provided with a copy of the recommendations from the 13<sup>th</sup> report. A reply of thanks was received, but the programme was not edited as it had already been recorded.

### iii) COMARE remit and work programme

2.10 The Chairman drew members' attention to the proposal for the activities of AGIR and AGNIR to be incorporated into COMARE. There had been discussions regarding the committee's workload and how this work would be handled by COMARE. Members discussed the similarities of the activities of AGIR and AGNIR to those of COMARE. Clarification was given on how the groups functioned and who they advised. Members agreed that the transfer of AGIR and AGNIR activities to COMARE was appropriate. It was agreed that the Chairman would write to DH seeking clarification on how the activities of AGIR and AGNIR would be incorporated into the committee's work and what additional resources and funding would be provided to support this.

[ACTION: The Chairman]

2.11 Members were informed that the current COMARE work programme would be published on the website in due course.

[ACTION: Secretariat]

2.12 The Chairman re-iterated the committee's role in providing advice to all government departments and the committee's involvement in external meetings, such as providing evidence for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Skin (for sunbeds) and advising DECC's CSA.

**iv) COMARE funding**

2.13 Members recalled that this issue was discussed at the previous meeting. The Chairman advised members that a requirement of the triennial review of an advisory committee is the provision of members' expenses for the previous 5 years and COMARE will be asked for this when it is reviewed in due course. It was considered prudent to address this issue now and so that the incoming chair is clear about the resources at the committee's disposal.

2.14 Members discussed the funding history for COMARE and the concerns regarding the funding and resources available to the committee at present. It was noted that the committee's work has been delayed recently from lack of available funding. Members requested assurances, where possible, that resources would be made available in the future. The Chairman agreed to write to DH seeking clarification on the funding and resources available to the committee, particularly with regard to work required for reports that needs to be outsourced, and also the additional work being incorporated from AGIR and AGNIR.

[ACTION: The Chairman]

2.15 The Chairman expressed thanks to Dr Ursula Wells (DH) for her support in facilitating the additional work being undertaken for the 17<sup>th</sup> report.

**v) Data access and ONS consultation**

2.16 The Chairman drew members' attention to the consultation by ONS on the approved researcher scheme. Members are asked to consider the proposals from ONS and the associated data access issues facing the committee.

2.17 Members considered each of the proposals in turn and made recommendations. The Chairman would prepare a response to the ONS consultation based on the comments from members.

[ACTION: The Chairman/Secretariat]

2.18 The Chairman advised members of recent issues encountered with obtaining data for the 17<sup>th</sup> report. It was noted that a number of issues, such as access to databases and the Data Protection Act (where individuals have the right not to put details on a national database), are affecting the availability of data required for the committee to fulfil its remit.

2.19 Members asked for reassurance that the transfer of the pre-1985 data from CCRG onto the national database had taken place. The Chairman would write to Dr Rashbass to confirm this.

[ACTION: The Chairman]

2.20 Members also asked for reassurance that the data from the DAs is transferred appropriately onto the database. The Chairman would write to DH seeking confirmation and setting out members concerns on data access.

[ACTION: The Chairman]

2.21 Members discussed concerns from the workforce in the nuclear industry on use and consent issues with respect to data, particularly with how long consent is valid for if research projects take longer to complete than initially envisaged.

### ITEM 3 Working group reports

#### i) Contaminations Working Group

- 3.1 The Chairman advised members that the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the CWG took place yesterday and drew members' attention to the particle updates considered by the CWG, noting that a further low level particle had been detected on Sandside Beach.

#### *Dounreay*

- 3.2 Sandside Beach is giving a yield of particles not significantly different to previous levels and a watching brief is being maintained. PRAG(D) will be producing a report in May/June interpreting the particle recovery programme. Five particles were detected on the Dounreay foreshore following a large gale in January this year. Members were advised that following these finds, the area was resurveyed a number of times and there were no further finds. The Chairman reminded members that the Dounreay foreshore is closed to the public.

#### *Sellafield*

- 3.3 The EA assessor provided members with a brief summary of the report circulated to the CWG. Updates were given on the beach monitoring programme. The introduction of the improved Synergy 2 detection system led to an initial increase in the number of finds, but this has now levelled off and the annual average rates have fallen.
- 3.4 A lab-based trial was carried out in February by Sellafield Ltd (SL), looking at detection limits for different depths of particles and with water covering the surface of sediment. Alternative detection techniques are being explored for Sr-90-rich particles. Analysis is continuing on the unusual beta-rich particle.
- 3.5 Members were advised of a draft three year work plan by the Sellafield Particles Working Group (SPWG). The CWG had agreed with the proposed key areas. The 2015/2016 beach monitoring programme will focus on these areas. Members agreed that the key areas identified by the SPWG should be priorities.
- 3.6 Members were informed that a single stone had been found in the Workington Harbour. Previous work is being re-evaluated to try to better understand whether contamination is on the surface of the stone finds. The Chairman advised members that the BPO for the disposal of the old sea-line was discussed at the CWG meeting and it included consideration of particles.
- 3.7 The NDA assessor responded to the action from the previous meeting relating to storms data. Members were advised to consult the SL annual report on particles and forward work programme published in August last year for full details and a description.

#### *Dalgety Bay*

- 3.8 The SEPA assessor reminded members that the MoD is taking forward a long term management plan on a voluntary basis and that the MoD contractors are driving these works. The physical works are on track to be completed by the end of 2017. Once completed, the future management of the works will be adopted by the local authority and SEPA will monitor that the remediation remains effective. SEPA is content with the progress. In the intermediate period, the MoD contractors continue to recover finds, but the find rate is similar to that previously seen.

#### ii) Authorisation Working Group

- 3.9 Professor Evans advised members that no requests have been considered by the working group since the last committee meeting in November.

#### ITEM 4 Requests for advice

##### i) DXA scanning

- 4.1 The Chairman advised members that a formal request has now been received from DH asking the committee to provide advice on medical radiation dose issues associated with DXA scans for sports performance assessments (SPA) and other non-medical practices. Professor Evans has agreed to chair the subcommittee. The membership of this group is still being considered and clarification is required on representation from various organisations.
- 4.2 Professor Evans provided members with a précis of the scope of the report. Members briefly discussed DXA use in research and Professor Evans clarified that it is already regulated under the scope of the IR(ME)R regulations.

#### ITEM 5 COMARE publications

##### i) COMARE – 15<sup>th</sup> Report

- 5.1 The Chairman informed members that SEPA had provided an update on Dalgety Bay and other historic sites of radium contamination at the CWG meeting. The SEPA assessor reminded members that SEPA is the lead regulator in Scotland on contaminated land regulations. Following the recent seminar to local authorities, SEPA is receiving an increasing number of requests for advice on monitoring protocols. SEPA intends to publish a guidance note on the minimum acceptable methodology. The Chairman noted that, at the SEPA seminar with local authorities, the adoption of the detection values stated in COMARE's 15<sup>th</sup> report as the standard of monitoring required by SEPA was agreed as a practical way forward.
- 5.2 The formal response from the Scottish Government (SG) to Recommendation 6 of COMARE's 15<sup>th</sup> report had been circulated to members. It was confirmed the position set out by SG had been discussed and agreed by DECC, Wales and Northern Ireland. Some scoping work regarding additional guidance had been undertaken by DECC, but no formal work has been commissioned at this stage. There is a commitment for all four DAs to work jointly in responding to this. The Chairman agreed to write to SG asking to be kept updated on progress regarding follow-up of the recommendation of the report.  
[ACTION: The Chairman]
- 5.3 Members discussed the SEPA update and the information available on historic sites. The emailed comments from the MoD assessor regarding the availability of records of past activities were given to members. It was commented at the meeting that there are good records for civilian luminising sites, but a lack of information on former MoD sites disposed of before the land quality assessments were implemented. The Chairman added that in recent years the MoD has been excellent in terms of remediation of sites prior to selling them, but agreed that it is the older sites that are the problem. Members commented that direct discussion with the MoD on this subject would have been beneficial.
- 5.4 The Chairman advised members that the MoD has been asked to provide the detailed remediation plans to the CWG when they are available.

##### ii) COMARE – 16<sup>th</sup> Report

- 5.5 The DH assessor advised members that submission of the working party report will be after the elections, once the new government is in place. The Chairman thanked DH for the work undertaken by the working party and the short time frame for its completion.

#### ITEM 6 COMARE publications in progress

##### i) COMARE – 17<sup>th</sup> Report – Sellafield and Dounreay Review

6.1 Dr Pearce reminded members that there were two outstanding pieces of work for the report, but funding had been made available to complete these. Both projects are in progress. Members discussed additional hypotheses that would be considered in the report. The Chairman was hopeful that an updated report would be available by the July meeting.

[ACTION: SDRS]

6.2 Members discussed whether analysis of tree rings was thought to be of any use and if it was possible to get environmental measurements, this may be worth pursuing. This could be considered as a recommendation of the report. Dr Howard agreed to investigate.

[ACTION: Dr Howard]

6.3 The Chairman reminded members that a pre-publication summary and briefing on the report for stakeholders had been agreed to.

[ACTION: The Chairman]

ii) **COMARE – 18<sup>th</sup> Report – Interventional Radiology Review**

6.4 The Chairman advised members that this work was on hold while the 17<sup>th</sup> report was completed. The membership of the group needed to be reviewed. The Chairman would continue to chair the subcommittee for this report.

**ITEM 7 Any other business**

7.1 The Chairman advised members that the 2013 RIFE report (RIFE-19) was published in December and is available to download from the gov.uk website.

7.2 The Chairman drew members' attention to an article regarding the direction of the US Department of Energy and the National Academy of Sciences to assess the current status of US and international research on low-dose radiation. It was agreed that the new Chairman may wish to forward relevant COMARE reports to the DOE and National Academy of Sciences for their consideration.

[ACTION: New Chairman/Secretariat]

7.3 The Chairman reminded members that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2015 at Wellington House, London. He thanked members for their work with the committee and wished them well. He closed the meeting at 2.45pm.