

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

111<sup>th</sup> meeting, Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2015  
Wellington House, London

**Present**

*Chairman (acting):* Professor Wil Evans

*Members:*

- Dr Paul Darragh
- Dr Frank de Vocht
- Professor Stephanie McKeown
- Professor Peter Marsden
- Dr Mark Pearce
- Mr Ian Robinson
- Professor Roger Taylor
- Professor Richard Wakeford
- Professor Peter Warwick
- Professor Catharine West

*Assessors:*

- DECC
- DH
- EA
- FSA
- HSE
- NDA
- ONS
- PHE
- SEPA
- WG

*Secretariat:*

- Dr Simon Mann (PHE)
- Dr Emma Petty (PHE)
- Ms Kim Stonell (PHE)

## COMARE 111

### OPENING ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman opened the 111<sup>th</sup> meeting and welcomed members. He noted that he was acting as Chair for this meeting, as no permanent appointment had been made. He 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 welcomed the new ONS assessor, the new NDA assessor and the new FSA assessor to their first meetings. The Chairman welcomed the substitute assessors from HSE and DECC and the observer from FSA.

The Chairman also welcomed the new assessor from DH.

### Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Dr Brenda Howard, Dr Tom Nunan and Dr Jane Barrett.

Apologies were also received from the assessors for MoD, SG, DH, ISD, DHSSPS-NI, DCLG, DECC and HSE. The Chairman reminded assessors that substitutes may attend the meeting and requested that departments ensure representatives are present at the meetings to comment on items relevant to them.

### ITEM 1 Minutes of the 110<sup>th</sup> COMARE meeting

1.1 Corrections to the minutes were agreed by the committee.

[ACTION: Secretariat]

1.2 The Chairman reminded members that the minutes of the meeting will be published on the COMARE website.

### ITEM 2 Matters arising

#### i) COMARE membership

2.1 The Chairman advised members that interviews were held for the post of Chair in April, but that no appointment was made. The post has been re-advertised together with five member vacancies. Interviews have been held for three of the member positions.

2.2 The DH assessor advised members that the three positions have been filled by four new members to ensure the necessary skill mix is covered. The two remaining posts will be re-advertised. Members were urged to circulate the link regarding the vacancies to interested parties. The Chairman noted that the closing date for the Chair vacancy is Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July at midday. The closing date for the remaining two member vacancies is Friday 9<sup>th</sup> October. The member vacancies are for a cancer geneticist and diagnostic radiologist.

#### ii) COMARE matters

2.3 The Chairman reminded members that the previous Chairman received an action to write to Sir Mark Walport to raise the committee's concerns regarding indemnity. The reply received states that *'based on assurance from legal advisers at DH, the liability provisions in place are sufficient to cover the committee'*. The Chairman advised members that this response has been circulated to the DH SAC secretariats and discussed at a recent teleconference. Members agreed they were content with Sir Mark Walport's response.

- 2.4 The Chairman reminded members that an action was also placed on the previous Chairman to write to DH on a number of issues, regarding the remit of the committee and the available resources. The DH assessor advised members that this has been taken forward with PHE by DH. A number of issues have been discussed, but a further meeting needs to be organised, so there is no formal response as yet.
- 2.5 Members raised concerns on a number of ongoing issues regarding the transfer of information to PHE and the integrity of national databases. The DH assessor noted that DH and PHE are working together on this. Members also reiterated comments from previous meetings about the importance of access to the data for the work of the committee.
- 2.6 The Chairman reminded members that the secretariat had been tasked with investigating options for putting multiple sets of minutes on the COMARE webpage. A 'box' account has now been set up with a folder that contains the current and archived minutes. A link to this has been put on the committee webpage.

**iii) Cancer incidence publications**

- 2.7 The Chairman drew members' attention to two recently published papers on 'breast cancer mortality near Bradwell nuclear power station' and 'cancer near Trawsfynydd nuclear power station'. These two journal articles involve a reworking of data from two studies originally analysed and published some years ago. Several assessors have contacted COMARE regarding these papers and have been directed to the statements formerly made by COMARE when requested by EA to review the original studies. These COMARE statements can be found on the archived web pages on the National Archives site:

- COMARE Statement on Trawsfynydd (5 October 2006)
- COMARE Final Statement on Childhood Cancers in North Wales (18 August 2006)
- COMARE Statement on Childhood Cancers in North Wales (30 March 2005)
- COMARE Statement: Cancer mortality around the Bradwell Nuclear Power Station, Essex (18 March 2003)

- 2.8 Professor Wakeford provided members with a brief history about CERRIE, who also considered the Bradwell study in great detail. The Trawsfynydd study was published after CERRIE was disbanded. The main methodological flaws of the two studies were summarised for members. The choice of journal for publication was also questioned by the committee. The Chairman concluded there to be nothing new in these papers, therefore the committee maintains its current approach that the original statements stand.
- 2.9 Members noted that previous COMARE statements are difficult to find and it would be beneficial to make the statements more prominent. The secretariat agreed to establish a 'box' folder to hold PDF files of the statements, accessed via a link from the main COMARE webpage.

**[ACTION: Secretariat]**

- 2.10 The Chairman drew members' attention to a recent WHO IARC paper that appears to show a linear relationship between a risk of death from leukaemia and radiation dose. The conclusion is that risk factors for leukaemia are the same for protracted low dose as for high dose, i.e. that the present risk coefficients are broadly correct. A reference to this study has been included in the Sellafield and Dounreay report. The PHE assessor commented that the study follows up on evidence already obtained. The recommendation is that more research is carried out in this area. Members discussed the study, noting it is the most powerful worker study to date and that the power of the study comes from including those countries that studied early workers.

### ITEM 3 Working group reports

#### i) Contaminations Working Group

- 3.1 The Chairman drew members' attention to the particle updates considered by the CWG. There has not been a meeting since March. The next meeting is planned for November 2015.

#### *Sellafield*

- 3.2 The EA assessor provided members with a brief summary of the report circulated to CWG. Updates were given on the beach monitoring programme. The emphasis of the 2015/16 programme is on Sellafield beach. The overall find rate to date was found to be lower than the average for last year. However, a higher than normal Cs-137 activity particle was found and PHE advised that dose rate analysis should be undertaken on that particle. EA is waiting for the final report on the beta-rich strontium particle detected in June last year and will then seek PHE's advice on the next steps.

- 3.3 Following workshop-based trials to look at detection capabilities for Sr-90, the preliminary report indicates a good detection capability. Repeat trials may need to be carried out to rectify any issues with the original trials. An update will be provided to the CWG at the meeting in November. SEPA and EA will also be witnessing trials of the new detection system for Sr-90 during the summer

[ACTION: EA]

- 3.4 PHE has completed a more detailed assessment for the risk of consuming seafood that may contain radioactive particles. A report is due to be published in the near future. The risk is deemed to be low. FSA was significantly involved in the report.

- 3.5 The EA assessor responded to questions from members on the update.

#### *Dounreay*

- 3.6 The SEPA assessor advised members that current finds were included in the particle updates for the CWG. Finds on the foreshore are largely connected with storm events offshore. Sources continue to be found at Sandside Beach, although activity is still quite low. The monitoring programme will be reviewed in spring 2016.

- 3.7 Members were advised that particles stored on site are disposed of in an intermediate waste facility. As an aside, SEPA has a PhD programme looking into measurement techniques for skin contact of particles. Some of the retrieved particles may be used for that work.

#### *Dalgety Bay*

- 3.8 The SEPA assessor reminded members that work at Dalgety Bay is undertaken by the MoD on a voluntary basis. The contractors continue to recover sources from the beach. The MoD is developing a long term management plan for the site. The physical works are on track to be completed by the end of 2017, at which point, Fife Council will adopt the future management of the works and SEPA will adopt routine monitoring to ensure the measures remain effective. Members discussed the disposal of the recovered sources.

- 3.9 The Chairman reminded members that an action was placed on EA at the previous meeting to report back to the CWG regarding the planning application for the capping of the vaults at Drigg. The EA assessor understood that LLWR Ltd has submitted a revised planning application. EA is aware that COMARE is keen to see this resolved, but no further update is available. The funding for the programme was discussed. Members welcomed further updates on this issue.

**ii) Authorisation Working Group**

- 3.10 The Chairman advised members that one consultation is currently being considered on the response by EA to an application by LLWR Ltd under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010 to carry on radioactive substances activities at the LLWR near Drigg. COMARE responded last year to the consultation on the application itself. The closing date for responding to the current consultation is 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2015.

**ITEM 4 Requests for advice**

**i) DXA scanning**

- 4.1 The Chairman reminded members that DH has formally asked COMARE to provide advice on medical radiation dose issues associated with the use of DXA scanning in non-medical applications. The Chairman is chairing the subcommittee. Membership is still being considered and a further update will be provided at the next meeting.

[ACTION: The Chairman]

**ITEM 5 COMARE publications**

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

- 5.1 The Chairman reminded members that at the last meeting an action was placed on the previous Chair to write to the Scottish Government requesting an update on the response to the recommendations from the 15<sup>th</sup> report. The following response has been received:

*“Scottish Government and DECC are currently leading discussions with PHE on behalf of RSPG<sup>1</sup> to determine the potential timing and scope of work to identify and promulgate best practice on the implementation of contaminated land legislation.”*

- 5.2 The DECC assessor advised members that this work is ongoing. The SEPA assessor noted that SEPA's guidance is working well to clearly identify whether there is a need for the regulator to intervene. The PHE assessor added that PHE is in discussion with DECC and a draft proposal is being considered.

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

- 5.3 The DH assessor advised members that the Working Party has submitted a report to DH, but this cannot be submitted to the minister for publication until later this year. It is hoped that approval will be given for the report to be published following the submission.

**ITEM 6 COMARE publications in progress**

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

- 6.1 The Chairman drew members' attention to the draft Sellafield and Dounreay Review report and reminded them it was hoped to have a final draft of the report for their approval at this meeting.
- 6.2 Dr Pearce advised members that substantial progress has been made, but the two outstanding pieces of work on thyroid analysis and changes in population mixing were not quite finished. The interpretation of the studies needs to be completed and it was important that this was done correctly.

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<sup>1</sup> the Radioactive Substances Policy Group

6.3 Professor Wakeford added that unexpected difficulties had been encountered, with some peculiar patterns in the data. Professor Elliott is in discussion with PHE to get some additional data to understand these patterns. This would give added confidence in the interpretation of the results.

6.4 Members discussed the coverage of population mixing in the report. Professor Wakeford noted that Professor Kinlen's paper using the data presented at a Chilton seminar has now been accepted for publication in the BMJ. Dr Pearce suggested that confirmation was required from PHE as to whether the additional data was available to explain the findings.

[ACTION: PHE]

6.5 The DH assessor acknowledged the new challenges, but urged work to be progressed as quickly as possible. This was agreed by members, but the committee was not in a position to approve the report at the meeting and it was suggested the work be allowed to develop over the summer. It was also suggested that further literature checks would probably be required. The consideration of providing pre-publication information and briefing to stakeholders, particularly in relation to the report's recommendations was noted. It was also suggested that the conclusions should note that although there is an emphasis on large-scale construction sites for population mixing, other situations are also relevant.

6.6 Members recalled that Dr Howard was going to look into environmental monitoring and suggested this might also feed in. Professor McKeown proposed the rewording one of the recommendations and would send amendments to the secretariat. Additional amendments were provided to the secretariat.

[ACTION: Professor McKeown]

[ACTION: Secretariat]

6.7 The Chairman acknowledged the comments and asked members to submit any further drafting comments to the secretariat.

[ACTION: Members]

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

6.8 The Chairman advised members that no further meetings have taken place. Additional external expertise is still being sought and the secretariat would advise members on this. The next meeting of the subcommittee will be arranged once full membership is in place.

[ACTION: Secretariat]

## ITEM 7 Any other business

7.1 Members questioned whether any progress has been made with the review of COMARE's remit. The Chairman advised that a response was awaited from DH and PHE. The DH assessor replied that a response would be available at the next meeting.

[ACTION: DH]

7.2 The Chairman reminded members that the next meeting would take place on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2015 at Skipton House, London. He closed the meeting at 12.35pm.