

Science Advisory Council

Governance of Defra science advisory bodies: bovine TB and badgers

Summary of initial work and proposed terms of reference

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ACTION REQUIRED:

Agree proposed terms of reference and work plan for this sub-group.

Background

1. At the Science Advisory Council (SAC) meeting in October it was agreed that a sub-group should be convened to consider bovine TB and badgers, to focus on investigating the process underpinning the delivery of evidence and science advice in this area (see paper **SAC(04)23** paragraphs 6.4 to 6.6).
2. It was agreed that the sub-group would be led by Professor Gaskell.
3. The sub-group has now been formed and has convened once for an initial planning meeting. This paper sets out the proposed terms of reference for the sub-group, summarises work so far and provides an outline plan for future work.
4. Members of the sub-group are:
 - Professor Chris Gaskell (Chair)
 - Ms Anna Bradley
 - Professor Philip Lowe
 - Professor Thomas Meagher

The sub-group's initial thoughts

5. At the sub-group's planning meeting on 18th November the issue of science advice and TB was considered. It was noted that the Independent Science Group on TB (ISG) that reports to the Minister was due to be wound up following completion of the reactive badger culling trial (likely to be during 2006). Defra had recognised an on-going need for science advice on bovine TB and was seeking to develop a framework for establishing a new advisory body. This body would need to be in place before the ISG's work was completed to ensure continuity and allow ISG the time to finish its research.
6. It was agreed that, as there was an opportunity to help Defra plan for its long-term science advice needs on TB, the sub-group would initially focus on this area. However, it would also work to develop generic best practice on the science advice process that could be used in future **across** Defra, using TB advice as a worked example.
7. The sub-group agreed that it would examine how Defra secures science advice to underpin policy, considering governance and process issues rather than the science itself. The sub-group would be forward-looking. It would not attempt to second guess Defra's legacy systems, but would need to learn from the experience of past and existing arrangements—recognising that they had been established according to the conditions that prevailed at the time.
8. The sub-group proposes the following terms of reference for its work:

Proposed terms of reference

9. To consider Defra's long-term science advice needs on bovine TB and badgers, to ensure that the science advice process is fit for purpose, robust and trusted by stakeholders. The sub-group will:
 - consider whether and/or what type of advisory body is required
 - consider issues such as advisory body terms of reference, composition, reporting lines, how best to bring together different perspectives, and **processes** that might be used to identify gaps in science that need to be filled to underpin policy.
10. More generally, the sub-group will examine the role and position of science advisory bodies—taking into consideration the new Defra advisory structure with the Chief Scientific Adviser and the Science Advisory Council in place—and will develop a generic best practice model for securing science advice for future use across Defra.

Initial work

11. The sub-group was invited to make an initial comment on Defra's plans to develop a new TB strategy for Great Britain.
12. In its response, the sub-group noted that the SAC was helping the Chief Scientific Adviser to consider options. If it is agreed that a new science

advisory body on TB is required then the SAC (through the SAC-G sub-group) will provide advice on reporting channels, advisory body composition and terms of reference etc. as outlined above. The sub-group also highlighted that links between any such science advisory body and the Chief Scientific Adviser and Chief Veterinary Officer (and any other planned policy advisory bodies) should be made clear and be agreed from the outset.

13. The sub-group is now considering additional background material on the existing network of internal and external groups advising Defra on TB science and policy issues.

Future work

14. The sub-group plans to meet again on 27th January 2005. Discussion topics and stakeholders to be invited to this meeting are being considered.
15. John Bourne (Chair of the Independent Science Group on TB), the Chief Scientific Adviser and Chief Veterinary Officer will be approached in due course to discuss issues as part of the sub-group's work. The sub-group will also consider examples of existing arrangements for science advice across government that are considered to be most effective and will meet with individuals involved in this work as appropriate.
16. It is hoped that a final report from the sub-group will be available for presentation to the SAC at its meeting on 12th April 2005. As noted above, this report will focus on generic issues, however the sub-group will also provide specific input relating to TB science advice as Defra's TB strategy is developed during the spring.

SAC Secretariat