Committee on the Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment - Preface 2021

In this guide

Head and shoulders Image of Prof Alan Boobis, standing in front of a patterned background. Prof Boobis is wearing half framed glasses and a light-coloured striped shirt.

It is 30 years since the COT issued its first report, also joint with COC and COM. In that time a lot has changed, but not the core function of the Committee, which remains to provide advice on the safety-in-use and on the potential adverse effects of chemicals in food, whether added intentionally or present incidentally.

At the beginning of year, Dr Sarah Judge, Newcastle University, became vice-chair of the Committee, for which I would like to thank her very much.

The Committee met on seven occasions during 2021, undertaking a busy and varied programme of work. The continuing COVID pandemic meant that the COT again held its meetings virtually but was able to successfully adapt to this new way of working to function effectively over the year. However, we look forward to being able to meet in person again as soon as that becomes possible.

The Committee has commenced a review of contaminants and other chemicals in support of the risk assessment of the maternal diet now being undertaken by the

Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN). A number of topic areas were considered including environmental contaminants, excess nutrients and food supplements and the priority compounds identified; reviews of vitamin D, iodine and ginger were then started. The Committee also continued to work on another ongoing programme of work, on biologically based food contact materials - considering chitosan and bamboo composites as part of this.

Other topics discussed by the Committee this year have covered a wide range including variable lifetime exposure to chemicals, the combined effects of mycotoxins, , biomonitoring, oral exposure to microplastics, and the final EFSA opinion on titanium dioxide. Several previously reviews, including electronic nicotine delivery systems (e-cigarettes) and novel heat-not-burn tobacco products, have been updated along with cannabidiol where information on non-oral exposure was added to the position paper on CBD.

The Committee also discussed a roadmap setting out the way towards achieving the regulatory acceptance of New Approach Methodologies. These new techniques, including *in silico* modelling and *in vitro* assays, provide an important opportunity to not only reduce the use of laboratory animals but also have the potential to provide approaches that are faster, cheaper and more tailored in risk assessment. This was followed up in a virtual workshop which took place in October 2021. The FSA and COT are taking a UK lead on this important area.

The Committee also contributed comments to a number of public consultations from EFSA including on non-monotonic dose response and a draft protocol for the assessment of phthalates.

COT and COC Members along with other experts have been collaborating in a Working Group examining the Synthesis of Epidemiological and Toxicological Evidence (SETE). The resulting report was published in the Spring of 2021 and is an excellent example of the really valuable work that can be done by collaboration between the different Scientific Advisory Committees.

A joint Working Group has been set up between the COT and SACN colleagues to undertake a benefit- risk assessment of plant-based drinks consumed as an alternative to cows’ milk. It is hoped this will report in 2022.

This year, the Committee said goodbye to Professor Faith Williams. On behalf of all Members, I would like to express the COT’s sincere thanks to her for all her invaluable contributions to the work of the Committee over the years.

We welcomed new Members Professor Shirley Price from the University of Surrey, Professor Thorhallur Ingi Halldorsson from the University of Iceland and Dr Simon Wilkinson from Newcastle University to the Committee and look forward to working with them.

Next year it is expected that the work of the Committee will begin to change as it starts to oversee and assure the risk assessment of regulated products, which were previously assessed in Europe. To that end, three Joint Expert Groups (JEGs) have been established as part of the FSA Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) structure and these JEGs will advise the FSA on regulated products; along with other SACs, the COT will oversee the work of these Groups and the Committee looks forward to working with them.

I would like to thank my fellow Committee Members for their commitment and invaluable contributions to the work of the Committee in very challenging circumstances. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Secretariat who, despite the many difficulties they faced with the virtual meeting format and an evolving regulatory environment, continued to provide first class support for the Committee.

Professor

Alan Boobis (Chair)

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