



Scientific Advice Mechanism

Minutes of the seventeenth plenary meeting of the European Commission's Group of Chief Scientific Advisors

(Brussels, 22 and 23 March 2019)

Brussels,

Brussels, 14/05/2019

Minutes

17th ordinary plenary meeting of the European Commission's Group of
Chief Scientific Advisors
22-23 March 2019, Brussels

1. Approval of the agenda and of the minutes of previous meeting

With the addition of one agenda item for the election of the Chair and deputy-Chair for the current year, the agenda was adopted. The minutes of the previous meeting (12 and 13 January 2019, London, UK) had been adopted by written procedure and published on the Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM) website (<https://ec.europa.eu/research/sam/>).

2. Nature of the meeting

The meeting was not held in public. The meeting took place at the Commission's premises in Brussels.

3. List of items discussed

Election of Chair and Vice-Chair of the European Commission's Group of Chief Scientific Advisors

Rolf Heuer and Pearl Dykstra were re-elected as the Advisor's Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively, until November 2020 included.

Impact of published scientific opinions: Cybersecurity in the European Digital Single Market – feedback from Roberta Viola, DG CNECT

Director-General for Communication Networks, Content and Technology, Roberto Viola informed the Advisors about the impact of the scientific opinion '*Cybersecurity in the European Digital Single Market*', established on request by Vice-President Ansip and Commissioner Oettinger and handed over end March 2017.

European Council Conclusions of June 2017¹ and the Cybersecurity Strategy "Resilience, Deterrence and Defence: Building strong cybersecurity for the EU"² of September 2017 recognise the opinion as one of the main reference points for the future of EU policy making on cybersecurity. The opinion emphasised the need to address the issue of cybersecurity at European level in order to protect the EU against cyber threats. DG Viola also provided the Advisors with an overview of future initiatives planned by DG CNECT regarding research and development activities for capacity building in this area and policy initiatives. Important questions to be tackled include identity management, and how to make the next generation internet more human centric and environment-friendly in terms of energy consumption.

¹ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/06/23-euco-conclusions/>

² <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/10101/2017/EN/JOIN-2017-450-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>

High-value data sets for society were discussed as a possible follow-up to the previous scientific opinion on Cybersecurity. The candidate topic '*Data Governance*' was discussed and further relevant information will be exchanged between services.

Exchange with Theodorus Vermeire, Chair of the Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks (SCHEER), and Marco Vighi, Member of SCHEER

Theodorus Vermeire presented the SCHEER, its mandate and way of working, including information about current and planned projects. Rolf Heuer informed Theodorus Vermeire and Marco Vighi about the work of the Scientific Advice Mechanism as well as ongoing and future topics.

Participants underlined their interest in cooperation between SCHEER and SAM. They agreed that this should include regular information exchange about ongoing and planned projects, mutual consultation on preliminary opinions, involvement in each other's workshops and hearings, and in the identification of emerging risks/ new topics. Through DG SANTE, the Chief Scientific Advisors could also ask questions to SCHEER. SCHEER will co-operate with SAM on the SAM Topic '*Climate Change and Health*'. Other possible areas of cooperation include gene editing and pesticides.

Exchange with Sierd Cloetingh President of Academia Europaea, Chair of SAPEA Board

Sierd Cloetingh informed the participants about plans for an amendment request for the SAPEA project and provided updates on the work on various ongoing evidence reviews as well as plans for two new candidate topics: '*Data Governance*' for which a scoping workshop is planned in Berlin on 6 June and '*Energy Transition – The Pathway Towards a Low-Carbon Europe*' for which a joint workshop is planned in October.

Ongoing topics and updates on recently completed topics

- Pearl Dykstra and Janusz Bujnicki informed about progress on the topic *Transforming the Future of Ageing*. The SAPEA Evidence Review Report (ERR) will be published in May 2019. The Advisors tasked the SAM unit to further develop the policy context of this topic in cooperation with the relevant Commission services and to propose a draft structure of the scientific opinion for the next plenary Group meeting.
- Following introductory remarks by Deputy Director General Signe Ratso (on behalf of Commissioner Moedas) welcoming the Commissioner Vella to the meeting and by Rolf Heuer, Nicole Grobert outlined the main recommendations which were taking shape as the work of the Advisors on the *microplastics* opinion neared completion. In responding, Commissioner Vella welcomed the preview of the Opinion. He pointed out the importance that policy action taken in this area be scientifically justified and respond to public expectation in a proportionate manner, without diverting attention from other important issues. Possible ways to follow-up on some of the points raised in the Opinion, particularly with regard to improving scientific knowledge and coherence/ coordination in science-based policy at the global level were discussed.

- The Advisors discussed the format of the upcoming sounding board meeting for ‘*Making Sense of Science under Conditions of Complexity and Uncertainty*’ and framed questions intended to guide the discussion with the experts, mostly senior-level practitioners of science for policy and policymakers in a number of areas of particular relevance for the development of the opinion. The use of case-studies was considered useful.
- The Advisors discussed the concept for the April 2 event on *gene editing* for agricultural applications with a keynote speech by Rolf Heuer and Janusz Bujnicki and tasked the SAM unit to proceed, together with the think-tank Re-imagine Europe, with its preparations.
- Discussion on the ‘*Authorisation Processes for Plant Protection Products*’ was postponed to the next plenary meeting in May.

Candidate topics

- The Advisors discussed the implementation of the work on ‘*Towards an EU Sustainable Food System*’. The selection of a Working Group chair and members by SAPEA is currently ongoing.
- Elvira Fortunato and the SAM unit informed the Advisors about a meeting with Commission services and the European Academies Science Advisory Council (EASAC) at which their draft report was presented. The Advisors discussed the draft scoping paper ‘*Climate Change and Health*’, which had been established by the SAM unit in consultation with the relevant Commission services. They tasked the SAM unit to carry out a few changes for further clarification, after which the scoping paper would be agreed in writing. It was agreed that Nicole Grobert and Carina Keskitalo together with Elvira Fortunato will be the main responsible Advisors for this topic. In view of ample relevant evidence provided by recent reports of EASAC, WHO, IPCC, The Lancet and US Federal agencies, it was agreed to build the scientific opinion on a synthesis of these reports. The SAM unit was instructed to organise an expert workshop for gathering complementary evidence and for identifying the sub-questions to be addressed by the scientific opinion.

4. Conclusions/recommendations/opinions

- The Advisors will continue to develop the opinion on *microplastics* in view of the handover foreseen on 30 April 2019.
- The SAM unit will circulate the refined questions to the experts in view of the upcoming Sounding Board meeting for ‘*Making Sense of Science under Conditions of Complexity and Uncertainty*’.

- The SAM Unit will continue to organise follow-up meetings between the Scientific Advisors and relevant Commissioners (or their services) concerning the scientific opinions and explanatory notes already published, in order, to monitor their impact on EC policy-making. As follow-up to the meeting with Roberto Viola, Director General for Communication, Networks, Content and Technology, the SAM unit will exchange information with his services in view of a possible follow-up to the scientific opinion ,*Cybersecurity in the European Digital Single Market*’, and the candidate topic ,*Data Governance*‘.
- Concerning the candidate topic ‘*Climate Change and Health*’ the SAM unit will carry out the changes in the draft scoping paper as requested by the Advisors and submit the adjusted document to the Group for their written agreement. The agreed scoping paper will be shared with the European Commission through European Commissioner Carlos Moedas. Together with SAPEA, SAM unit will organise an experts’ workshop. Through DG SANTE, the SAM unit will involve (a) Member(s) of SCHEER.
- The SAM unit will develop the policy context in cooperation with other Commission services for the scientific opinion ‘*Transforming the Future of Ageing*’ and develop a draft structure for the next meeting of the Advisors.
- The SAM unit will continue preparing the event on gene editing in agriculture to take place in the European Parliament on 2 April and check the availability of a SCHEER Member for participating.

5. Next steps

As above

6. Next meeting

The next plenary meeting of the Group of Chief Scientific Advisors will take place in Brussels on 14 and 15 May, 2019.

7. List of participants

Group of Chief Scientific Advisors

Rolf-Dieter Heuer, Chair;
Pearl Dykstra, Deputy Chair;
Janusz Bujnicki, Member (day 2);
Nicole Grobert, Member;
Carina Keskitalo, Member;
Sir Paul Nurse, Member;

SAPEA (Science Advice to Policy by European Academies)

Sierd Cloetingh (President Academia Europaea), Chair of SAPEA board (agenda items 2 and 5);
George Griffin (President FEAM) (agenda items 3 and 4);

Rudolf Hielscher, SAPEA Coordinator (agenda items 2 – 5);

Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks (SCHEER)

Theodorus Vermeire, Chair (agenda items 3 and 4);

Marco Vighi (agenda items 3 and 4);

European Commission

Karmenu Vella, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
(agenda item 3);

Helena Braun, Cabinet of the First Vice President Frans Timmermans (agenda item 3);

Andrew Bianco, Cabinet Vella, European Commissioner for Environment, Maritime
Affairs and Fisheries (agenda item 3);

Keith Sequeira, Cabinet Moedas, European Commissioner for Research, Science and
Innovation (agenda item 3);

Robert Schröder, Cabinet Moedas, European Commissioner for Research, Science and
Innovation (agenda item 3);

Roberto Viola, Director-General of Communication, Networks, Content and
Technology (agenda item 2);

Signe Ratso, Deputy Director-General for Research and Innovation (agenda item 3);

Kestutis Sadauskas, Director for Environment (agenda item 3);

Johannes Klumpers, DG RTD, Head of Unit 0.2 Scientific Advice Mechanism;

Jeremy Bray, DG RTD, Deputy Head of Unit 0.2 Scientific Advice Mechanism;

Sigrid Weiland, DG RTD, Unit 0.2 Scientific Advice Mechanism, Manager of the
Group of Chief Scientific Advisors;

Annabelle Ascher, DG RTD, Unit 0.2 Scientific Advice Mechanism;

James Gavigan, Unit 0.2 Scientific Advice Mechanism;

Several members of Unit 0.2 Scientific Advice Mechanism, depending on the
respective agenda item