

Minutes of the 2nd Lead Ammunition Group meeting

28 May 2010

Defra offices – London

Attendees:

Mr John Swift - British Association of Shooting and Conservation (Chair)

Dr Mark Avery - RSPB

Mr John Batley - Gun Trade Association

Mr Stephen Crouch - National Game Dealers Association

Mr Adrian Gane - Country Land and Business Association

Mr Robert Gray - Countryside Alliance

Prof. Len Levy - Institute of Environment and Health

Dr Deborah Pain - Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

Dr Stephen Tapper - Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust

Secretariat

Mr Tim Andrews - Defra (Secretary)

Ms Lucy Munro - Defra

1. Apologies, welcome and introductions

1.1 Apologies were received from Dr James Kirkwood of the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare.

2. Review and discussion of published minutes of the 26 April

2.1 The Chair raised one member's point that the Terms of Reference effectively ask members of the Group to have a 'triple-hatted' role (providing personal expertise in the light of their own organisation's views while reflecting wider views of others in their sector of interest).

2.2 The Group recognised the difficulty of finding a phrase that encompasses everyone's position, and for some, to formally represent a spectrum of the views [of organisations in their sector] is almost impossible. It was agreed that members of the Group would strive, beyond providing personal expertise, to represent science-based and objective view points from their sector but were

not expected to represent the full spectrum of views that might be held and expressed within their sector.

2.3 It was asked why FSA officials were not in attendance and it was explained that since the Group is an independent group government officials would only attend by invitation.

3. Review of Actions from last meeting and sign off of revised Terms of Reference (ToR)

3.1 It was advised that the Group's Terms of Reference are published in their final form on the website. (The Group formally ratified these later).

3.2 The Group discussed decision making and it was suggested that if the Group's aim is working towards consensus on a topic it could be more representative if each sector represented in the Group had one vote, rather than each Group member having one vote. This was because some sectors have greater representation than others.

3.3 Following discussion it was agreed that the Group's role is advisory. The aim is to be able to provide advice based upon the consensus view. It was difficult to see the relevance of voting. The Chair gave his reassurance that both minority and majority views would be recorded and any significant minority views would be included alongside any recommendations that might be eventually made by the Group. This was because any future policy would be decided by government and minority views would be needed to inform any political decisions involved.

3.4 The Group noted that an action from the last meeting (Action 1.1) had been for all Group members to consider who should be involved in subgroups. Following discussion it was concluded that discussion about involvement of people in subgroups was premature because consideration was still being given to gathering primary evidence. Only when the primary evidence had been gathered and the risk assessment process decided upon could the Group take a view about who from outside the Group might best be involved in the risk assessment. Suggestions were invited. Discussion about subgroups dealing with the outcomes of risk assessment would come after that.

3.5 The Group discussed the research the Food Standards Agency was commissioning into the consumption of game meat and venison (see inaugural meeting) and the relevance of such research to the Group's work. Defra was requested to liaise with FSA to find out the timeframe for this research (Action 2.1 Defra/FSA).

3.6 It was suggested that if this research was not commissioned soon its conclusions might not be any help to the Group. The Group reflected on the need for such research to involve deer management and gamekeeping interests. It was also noted that the European Food Safety Authority scientific opinion on lead included comprehensive risk assessment based on a large amount of game consumption data provided by EU Member States.

3.7 The Group expressed its wish to discuss the design and evidence base being considered for the FSA research with them. This was because of its possible relevance to the work of the Group. It was agreed that Defra contact FSA with a view to inviting them to the next meeting for this purpose (Action 2.2 Defra/FSA).

3.8 The Group was reminded that there are some UK-specific research results already available from work done by the WWT and RSPB - [post meeting note: Potential Hazard to Human Health from Exposure to Fragments of Lead Bullets and Shot in the Tissues of Game Animals.]

3.9 The availability of unpublished data from an internal membership questionnaire survey conducted by BASC was raised again (see inaugural meeting) and it was noted that the question of its availability would be considered by BASC's Research Advisory Committee.

3.10 The Chair closed this agenda item by asking the group whether the ToR could be formally signed off. All agreed.

4. Discussion of Group Website and communications (All)

4.1 The Group expressed gratitude to Lee Selvester of BASC for producing an excellent website. Very positive feedback was received from members of the Group – they felt the site was easy to follow and is well presented and will help ensure that those with an interest in the Group's work can keep up to date. The Group agreed that the website will provide one excellent tool for engaging with those with an interest in the debates surrounding the Group's work.

4.2 The Chair reported that he had received a response from a person who had visited the website to say that the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association should be involved in the LAG process. The Chair contacted the correspondent to explain the situation and how there would be opportunities for involvement as the process develops.

5. Progress on 'Primary Evidence' gathering

5.1 The Group noted that several members of the Group (see inaugural meeting minutes) across different sectors had engaged in email correspondence on the gathering of the primary evidence.

5.2 The Group reconfirmed that the primary evidence is the evidence that can directly inform the assessment of potential risks of lead ammunition for wildlife, human health and the environment.

5.3 One of the conclusions of this exchange had been that the various sources of primary evidence need to be categorised.

5.4 The Group agreed that primary evidence might come from three sources:

1. Peer reviewed and published papers from recognised and established journals (to include those which have ISBN numbers and those published by accredited organisations and expert bodies.)
2. Unpublished reports of recognised quality such as internal reports that have been commissioned but not necessarily published (to perhaps include unpublished proceedings of technical or scientific conferences, workshops and seminars).
3. Articles from other journals or other sources that contain evidence of recognised quality and relevance but not falling within the other two categories i.e. “grey literature”.

5.5 The Group discussed the significance of the geographical origin of research and agreed that the primary need is for its relevance to any risk assessment in the United Kingdom to be clear. For example a report citing shot densities in Spain would probably not be relevant due to its special location but medical or veterinary research into the physiology or clinical effects of lead on animals or people could be relevant wherever it had been conducted.

5.4 The Group noted that the gathering of key references was under way and that use of some of this is not cost free.

5.5 The Group was reminded that the Peregrine Fund’s Idaho conference proceedings provide freely published information and the link has been circulated to those who have expressed an interest. Caution was expressed that such proceedings also include contributions in the form of abstracts whose conclusions could not be checked.

5.6 The Group noted that it would be difficult to make available some scientific papers on the LAG website (due to journal copyright restrictions) and the Group accepted that this would not be so much of an issue so long as the references themselves are clearly set out so that those with an interest could access them.

5.7 It was queried which category the papers already referenced on the website fall into. The FERA report for example was considered to fall into category 2 above i.e. the category of other reports not peer reviewed. Caution was expressed that by appearing on the website such publications might attract undue prominence. It might appear that the group endorses specific conclusions when this is not the case. It was agreed nonetheless that these papers are important as they have contributed to driving the Lead Ammunition Group process and, as such, they should be publicly available. The Group agreed that papers published on the website in this way should carry a disclaimer to explain that they are reports which the group is looking at along with other information yet to be gathered. The Group has taken no position on any conclusions expressed in any of the reports on its website.

Action 2.3 Defra to supply wording for this which will be discussed at the next meeting.

5.8 The Group agreed that the Primary Evidence Subgroup might filter the evidence presented by supplying tags to identify a report's geographical focus and also its "applicability". It was noted that FSA's remit covers Scotland but Defra's remit does not. Defra will however keep devolved counterparts informed. It was agreed that applicability should be judged for the whole UK.

5.9 The Group discussed in further detail the use and applicability of research from sources outside the UK. Examples of research, influencing factors and considerations from biological, human health and veterinary fields were considered. The Group concluded that research and primary evidence would have to be judged carefully as to its relevance. If necessary appropriate scientists can be invited to address the Group and it was stressed that evidence will not be accepted or dismissed uncritically.

5.10 It was re-iterated that judgements as to relevance will have to be on a case by case basis but it will be helpful if the Primary Evidence Group sees it as part of its remit to give assessments where this may not be clear.

5.11 The Chair asked if there were other instances where overseas research might be particularly applicable or irrelevant. It was suggested that geographical origin was immaterial in the context of ballistics and research into non-lead ammunition.

5.12 It was suggested that site-based research and research on species not found within the UK might be irrelevant. It was accepted however that while caution was appropriate such evidence may shed light on principles relevant to the Group's work and future advice.

5.13 From this, it was determined that research in the fields of physiology, human and veterinary health and in the technological fields such as ballistics might be especially relevant whatever its origin. Care would always have to be exercised when assessing relevance to potential risks in the UK. This is because local factors such as diet may be influential.

5.14 The Group considered research stemming from the REACH regulations (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemical substances) and whether it might be relevant. The Group was given to understand that some studies will not be finalised until September and that the information would be internationally focussed. It was suggested that it would be worth speaking to the REACH group in due course but no immediate action point was raised.

5.15 It was suggested that links be put on the Group's website to reports and publications that are freely available (i.e. can be accessed at no cost). The following were suggested for inclusion:

- The Peregrine Fund 2008 Lead Ammunition Conference information[1]
- The EFSA scientific opinion on lead [2]
- [post meeting note: further detail on two particular reports has been provided][3]

The Chair asked if publications that are not cost-free, such as those from certain journals, could be summarised and referenced for the website. It was said that this would require a lot of work and was therefore not practical.

5.16 The Group briefly discussed when new information should be published on the website and agreed that it could be made available as soon as a form of words had been agreed to reflect the fact that inclusion of material on the website did not imply that the group endorsed its conclusions, simply that it was among information being considered (see 5.7 above).

5.17 Concerns were raised that conclusions in published abstracts may be unreliable. Reference to the full published report should be given and if appropriate it was suggested by the Chair that reports might carry an explanation from the Primary Evidence Subgroup. It was agreed that full references should be posted along with the primary evidence base.

5.18 The Group then formally agreed that the Primary Evidence Subgroup be established to include Dr Debbie Pain, Dr Steven Tapper, Dr John Harradine and Prof. Len Levy. The Chair asked if there were other names as this would not be regarded as a closed group and could be enlarged if necessary.

5.19 The Group invited Prof. Len Levy to chair the Subgroup and Prof. Levy said he was willing to do so but would rely heavily on the other members.

5.20 The Group tasked the Subgroup to prepare a report on the primary evidence base and provide a summary of key research so as to inform the Group and any subsequent subgroups in due course. The Group concluded that the Subgroup will be responsible for finalising its own criteria and guidelines along the lines discussed above. It will advise the main Group of these in due course. Its aim will be to prepare a list of research together with the criteria for selection and any commentary on reliability or relevance. It was also agreed that the Subgroup will also make recommendations to the main Group as to what form any risk assessment might take.

5.21 The Group noted that many of these issues are being discussed in other countries and that there are international considerations and influences. It was agreed that a separate page on the website should be created to set out relevant legal obligations and agreements. The group agreed to request that Defra provide information on relevant national and international legal obligations and agreements (see 7.2 below). Action 2.5 PES and Webteam.

6. Subgroups i. Structures (JS) ii. Recommendations for chairs (All)

6.1 The Group received a preliminary oral report from John Batley whose sector of interest concerns the gun and ammunition trade in which field his knowledge lies. His report outlined his personal thoughts in respect of some wider considerations.

6.2 Mr Batley said that the economic, employment and other impacts of any recommendations on ammunition would need to be considered. There needs to be balance drawn on the facts, figures and assessments on the implication for the trade and related matters.

6.3 Mr Batley continued that many believe that no effective alternative to lead ammunition has yet been found. Game shooting is economically important to rural economies. Virtually all game shooting is on private land and it supports many small local businesses. Game shooting takes place in the low season for the hotel and other trades and a substantial part of the rural economy is reliant on it.

6.4 Mr Batley offered to lead a subgroup to consider such wider considerations for example economic impacts of possible future recommendations on shotgun cartridge manufacturers, airgun pellet manufacturers, sporting agencies and target shooting organisations. He invited the Group's thoughts and discussion.

6.5 The Chair thanked Mr Batley for his report and his offer and invited the Group to consider whether this area of work might be taken up by such a formal subgroup. He reminded the Group that that the first purpose of subgroups is to gather reliable and best possible information to inform the Group's work.

6.6 One view was that subgroups should not stray into looking at the business impacts at this stage.

6.7 It was suggested that such a subgroup might be premature as risk assessment has not yet been done. The Group has not reached any conclusions about what advice to give and the emphasis should be on a step by step approach.

6.8 One member said here that there are four or five alternatives to lead ammunition and from this stage it should be considered how these are presented to the shooting world. In response it was pointed out that the stepwise approach means the Group should not discuss solutions before it has decided what the problem really is.

6.9 Another member added that the shooting interest is not the only group the Group has to consider and another added that the Primary Evidence Subgroup needs to get underway with collecting the data so that context for other specialist subgroups is provided.

6.10 The Chair summarised that the Primary Evidence Subgroup will provide the platform for the risk assessment. Such wider possible impacts and considerations could be relevant to consideration of the primary risks which that Group had been asked to advise on. Lack of good information and fears among affected stakeholders, whether justified or not, could be risks in themselves.

6.11 The Chair proposed that John Batley continue his work with a view to setting out a concise proposal with a clear remit and who might be involved for the next meeting. The focus should be on gathering quality information to inform the work of the Group in its primary tasks.

6.12 John Batley was invited and accepted to work on such a proposal and asked to circulate some possible terms of reference etc for consideration by the Group at the next meeting. Action 2.6 JB

6.13 It was suggested that it would be useful if the remit of the proposed group included progress in other countries where changes in legislation may have incurred economic impacts. This suggestion was supported by other Group members and it was noted that even where there are geographical differences lessons can be learned.

7. Project Planning – review of suggested timetable / milestones provided by Secretary

7.1 It was proposed that the Group set an aim within its timeframe for all Group members to achieve a good understanding and perspective of the evidence base. This was endorsed and will be essential for the stepwise approach in drawing evidence bases together so that risk assessment is rigorous. It was suggested that a layman-friendly overview of recent key research would be valuable and that one might be provided at the next meeting.

7.2 The Group asked Defra to pull together all the regulations, guidelines and Directives which are relevant to the Lead Ammunition Group. Action 2.7 Defra.

7.3 Tim Andrews gave an overview of the gantt chart/project plan produced for the Group's work. He indicated that this was a living document and would be amended as the work progressed. The Group discussed key milestones and TA agreed to amend the chart in light of these.

Action 2.8 Primary Evidence Subgroup will prepare a presentation summarising information in selected key information sources by the end of June (for the Group meeting on 6 July).

Action 2.9 Primary Evidence Subgroup will endeavour to provide a list of references for key evidence sources which the Group will consider (on 6 July) and have it finalised by the middle of July.

Action 2.10 Primary Evidence Subgroup will then pass this final list to the website team for publication by the end of July.

7.4 It was considered that the risk assessment process might be started in September/October 2010 and any outputs from the process (risks) made available for consideration by sector/specialist

subgroups in the first quarter of 2011. It was identified that preparation of the Group's progress report to DEFRA/FSA would require the attention of the Group as a whole and a provisional target for the progress report was set as July/August 2011.

7.5 Defra was tasked with providing examples of the form the progress report might take. It was said that a range of reports could be provided for the group to consider.

Action 2.11 Defra and FSA

7.6 It was suggested that a draft consultation period in advance of the production of a final recommendations report should be provided for in the Gantt chart.

Action 2.12 TA

8. Next Steps (All)

8.1 It was agreed the Primary Evidence Subgroup will continue its work under Professor Levy and work towards reporting back to the group by the end of June and for the website by the end of July.

8.2 John Batley will continue his work and bring a firm proposal to the 6 July meeting. He may make preliminary contact with organisations who may be able to help him such as:

- CPSA (Clay Pigeon Shooting Association)
- NGO (National Gamekeepers Organisation)
- BDS (The British Deer Society)
- The Deer Initiative

8.3 The Chair asked if any further organisations are being put forward at this stage for this subgroup. The NRSA (The National Small-bore Rifle Association) was suggested.

8.4 It was suggested that the next meeting take place on 6 July pm. This was agreed.

It was requested by the Group that the Chair invites the FSA to the next meeting.

Action 2.13 Chair

8.5 The main points that the Group would like information on concerns FSA's current position on what they intend to do and also what research they already have accessible in this area. One member said that the Group needs to know where the FSA stand on the health issue relating to lead.

Action 2.14 FSA

9. Any other business

9.1 In the previous minutes it was mentioned that there were a small number of reports where lead had turned up in animals. It was requested that these cases be referred to in the next publication of minutes.

Action 2.15 Defra/FSA to establish what these reports are and reference them for the minutes.

Summary of Action points arising from this meeting

Action 2.1 Defra to liaise with FSA to find out what timeframe for their aforementioned research.

Action 2.2 Defra to contact FSA with a view to inviting them to the next meeting.

Action 2.3 It was agreed that the papers published should carry a caveat/disclaimer to explain that these are reports which the group is looking at along with other information. Defra to providing wording for this for the group to consider.

Action 2.5 The Primary Evidence group and webteam to set up a separate page on the site for legal obligations and agreements.

Action 2.6 John Batley to circulate a proposal with draft terms of reference for his proposed sub group.

Action 2.7 Defra to pull together all the regulations, guidelines and Directives which are relevant to the Lead Ammunition Group.

Action 2.8 Primary Evidence Subgroup to give a presentation to the main group on selected key information sources (6 July).

Action 2.9 Primary evidence subgroup to provide a list of references of the key evidence which the group should consider by the middle of July.

Action 2.10 Primary evidence subgroup should pass this list of key references to the website team for publication by the end of July.

Action 2.11 Defra and FSA were tasked with providing a model of what this report should look like. It was said that a range of reports could be provided for the group to consider its output format.

Action 2.12 TA to amend Gantt chart for sign off at next meeting

Action 2.13 The Chair to invite the FSA to the next meeting.

Action 2.14 FSA to provide information on their current position on what they intend to do [in reference to lead ammunition] and also what research they already have accessible in this area.

Action 2.15 FSA to provide background information on the cases referred in the first set of minutes whereby they were made aware of a small number of incidents where animals have ingested spent lead ammunition leading to animal welfare and food safety concerns. [It was requested that this information should be published with the latest minutes.]

[1] http://www.peregrinefund.org/lead_conference/2008PbConf_Proceedings.htm

[2] <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/scdocs/doc/1570.pdf>

[3] Pain DJ, Cromie RL, Newth J, Brown MJ, Crutcher E, et al. (2010) Potential Hazard to Human Health from Exposure to Fragments of Lead Bullets and Shot in the Tissues of Game Animals. PLoS ONE 5(4): e10315. DOI:10.1371/journal.pone.00103

Hunt WG, Watson RT, Oaks JL, Parish CN, Burnham KK, et al. (2009) Lead bullet fragments in venison from rifle-killed deer: Potential for human dietary exposure. PLoS ONE DOI:10.1371/journal.pone.0005330.]