

The Advisory Committee for Social Science

Climate Change and Consumer Behaviour Working Group

1. Summary

1.1. This paper expands on the discussion at the ACSS closed meeting on 15th October 2020 and outlines potential next steps for scoping activity for a potential working group on climate change and consumer behaviour.

2. Background

2.1. In July 2022 the Climate Change Committee (CCC) will publish its 3rd report risk assessment setting out the most recent thinking on possible impacts of climate change on a range of issues including food and agriculture. Ahead of this, next summer, the CCC will publish an independent evidence report, which will inform the risk assessment report.

2.2. Global survey data¹ suggests that in 2019 around half of adults in Great Britain made changes to the food that they buy due to concerns over climate change. Additionally, FSA research² found that 68% of UK adults were concerned about the environmental impact of food choices.

2.3. Climate change can therefore be viewed as key consumer concern, with findings of the CCC evidence report likely to shape consumer behaviour and habits.

2.4. Possible areas of consideration include:

- Consumer awareness of how the food system will change over the next decade, and any subsequent impact on consumer behaviour (e.g. emerging preferences for 'more sustainable' food.)
- Consumer perceptions of sustainability
- Climate change as a motivation for changes to individual diets (e.g. to a plant based diet) and how this will impact the food industry and demand for different foods;
- The impact of potential rising food prices and food scarcity on consumer behaviour

¹ IPSOS, (2019), Climate Change and Consumer Behaviour, World Economic Forum, <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2020-01/global-advisor-climate-change-consumer-behavior.pdf>

² Food Standards Agency, (2019), Public Attitudes Tracker Wave 2 (November 2019), <https://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/biannual-public-attitudes-tracker>

2.5. Whilst not a direct policy area for FSA, evidence on how climate change influences consumer behaviours has been identified as a strategic evidence need, with both the Science Council and ACSS considering working groups in this area.

2.6. The complexity and breadth of the topic area leads to difficulties in determining a specific working group question. To ensure the working group is impactful, and that activities do not duplicate work undertaken by the Science Council or other government departments, careful scoping is needed.

3. Proposed Scoping Activities

3.1. Stakeholder mapping

The Secretariat to undertake a stakeholder mapping exercise to better understand stakeholders' relationships to each other and the topic of climate change within the FSA's remit.

3.2. Engagement with the Science Council

The Science Council is examining the feasibility of a working group designed around the UK's 2050 net zero carbon target. The ACSS Secretariat will engage with the Science Council and associated secretariat to determine where possible complementary activity could result and overlaps between research interests.

3.2. Engagement with other government departments

The Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy is the stakeholder for the 2050 target for net zero carbon emissions (excluded imported products) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is likely to have an interest in work undertaken by the ACSS working group. The Secretariat proposed further engagement with these other government departments to investigate potential collaboration.

3.3. Engagement with wider research community

A key part of undertaking an evidence based decision on the topic will be having access to the latest and most relevant research available. As part of the scoping, the Secretariat would engage with the wider research community to examine relevant research and uncover probable trends.

3.3.1. Engagement with the FSA's Chief Scientific Advisor (CSA) and across the FSA Science Directorate.

Internal engagement will facilitate a coordinated, focused approach that meets FSA strategic needs.