Welcome to this *vox pop* report from the sixth Helsinki Chemicals Forum. This annual gathering of chemicals safety and regulatory compliance professionals, in the home city of the European Chemicals Agency, has become an essential point of the year, one in which companies can take stock of their thinking on the big picture issues, hear from experts and give and take home their own insight on topics to help them in their work.

This is not a formal report because this annual forum is not an official session, its participants are not all experts on the topics discussed and its conclusions do not represent a consensus. Instead, it offers a reference point for policymakers, companies, academics and others – presenting the voice of the people in the room about the important topics discussed.

At this year’s Helsinki Chemicals Forum there were nearly 200 people from 40 countries in the room. Around half were from regulatory authorities, including the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), while the rest included companies, NGOs, academics and journalists from several countries.

This report is prepared by independent news service *Chemical Watch* and does not tie itself to any agenda other than to further understanding and discussion. We have not taken sides or judged comments on their accuracy, veracity or fairness.

Three of the debates clearly had opposing arguments. For these, the agreements and disagreements between participants are reported as we saw them and we attempt to sum up the strongest feelings on each topic under the “mood in the room” sections. Two of the debates were more informational in nature and for these we sum up the key directions of the debate.

The last two pages of the report present a selection of raw, unedited, live comments submitted through Twitter and the Helsinki Chemicals Forum Message Wall during each debate and workshop.

*Mamta Patel and Carmen Paun, Chemical Watch*
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The writing on the wall
Raw, unedited comment posted on the message wall during the forum

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HCF Panel Debate 1: The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations – impact on innovation and regulatory processes

**Panellists:**
Björn Hansen (European Commission), Hubert Mandery (European Chemical Industry Council), Baskut Tuncak (Center for International Environmental Law), Michael Walls (American Chemistry Council).

**Context:**
Concluding the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) would create the largest bilateral trade deal in the world. With the fifth round of trade negotiations winding up as delegates arrived in Helsinki, the stage was set for a vigorous debate on the likely impacts of the agreement – what might be won and what could be lost.

**The Debate**

**Agreement:**
- The size and regulatory nature of this deal make it different to previous deals;
- Strong laws are needed to ensure proper chemicals management;
- Both the EU and US share the aim to protect human health and the environment;
- Both face the challenge of accommodating the needs of growing populations;
- The chemicals management framework in the US is not up to the job of handling the number of chemicals on its market;
- The chemical industry is an important contributor to both the EU and US economies.

**Disagreement:**
- TTIP could make regulatory processes more efficient for regulators and industry without lowering the standards in the EU or the US;
- Neither the US or EU has an ambition to harmonise the two regulatory systems;
- The level of transparency of the negotiations is adequate;
- TTIP would add value above that already being achieved through co-operation between the two countries on a technical level at the OECD;
- Consultation between the US and EU on prioritisation of chemicals for assessment would make the process more efficient;
- Regulatory co-operation between the two sides will not affect standards or stall development of further rules;
- The agreement is detrimental to the health and environment and favours industry;
- TTIP is negotiated and agreed upon in a democratic way.

**Mood in the room – key take home messages**
- Increased transparency around the talks, especially by US negotiators;
- TTIP negotiators should make clear whether it is too late for stakeholders to achieve substantial changes at this stage of the talks;
- Negotiators need to make clear what the added value of TTIP would be for the protection of human health and the environment!
Fracking

HCF Panel Debate 2: Chemicals used in fracking – is the political controversy justified?

Panellists:
Sylvain Bintein (European Commission), Stuart Kemp (Halliburton), Joanne Lloyd (UK Chemical Industries Association), Mariann Lloyd-Smith (International POPs Elimination Network, Australia).

Context:
Pressure on energy resources in Europe is leading several countries, including the UK, Poland and Romania, to explore options of extracting gas from shale gas fields. But there is much that worries people about the technology, just one important aspect of which is the risks of the chemicals used in hydraulic fracturing, impacts of the agreement – what might be won and what could be lost.

The Debate

Agreement:
» The safe use of chemicals in the process of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) is an important aspect for public acceptability of the process;
» Transparency and providing relevant information to the public are crucial;
» Many chemicals used by some companies in fracking are substances of concern;
» Chemical industry suppliers are responsible for communicating how to use their chemicals safely in fracking, while users must ensure that risk management measures are applied;
» More work is needed to harmonise methods for estimating environmental risks of fracking;
» Regulators need to have enough information to assess safety and ensure safe use.

Disagreement:
» There is enough information on the identity and properties of chemicals to assess their risk;
» Disclosing the identity of chemicals used in fracking is necessary;
» Disclosing the identity of chemicals used in fracking hinders innovation;
» There is enough transparency about fracking operations and incidents;
» Exposure scenarios for chemicals used in conventional oil and mining activities can be applied to fracking;
» There is a need for well-by-well risk assessments including reasonably expected accidents and spills, as opposed to wider assessments for geological formations;
» Enough is being done to minimise the risks of chemicals used in fracking;
» Coal bed methane gas and shale gas and oil extraction can be done safely.

Mood in the room – key take home messages

» Conclude whether the exposure scenarios for conventional oil and mining are the same as for extraction of shale oil and gas;
» Assess chemicals coming out of fracking operations, not just what goes in;
» Better information and tools to assess the risks of chemicals used and released in fracking are still needed.
EDCs

HCF Panel Debate 3: Endocrine Disruptors – do we need special controls?

Panellists:
Ninja Reineke (CHEM Trust), Peter Smith (European Chemical Industry Council), Jack de Bruijn (European Chemicals Agency), Bob Diderich (OECD).

Context:
Addressing the risks of chemicals that may have endocrine disrupting properties (EDCs) is an issue that has been discussed for more than two decades and much still needs to be learned about their toxicological modes of action while legislators and companies attempt to identify them and control their risks.

The Debate

Agreement:
» There is a good scientific basis to confirm that certain chemicals have endocrine disrupting properties and that their risks need to be controlled by regulatory and voluntary action;
» We need to complete the battery of standardised test guidelines to identify endocrine disruptors; the OECD conceptual framework is a sound basis for further test development and prioritisation;
» We need more research particularly to understand better the modes of action and mechanisms of these chemicals and the extent and nature of human and environmental exposure to them;
» We do not need to wait for absolute certainty before taking action to control the risks of certain chemicals but we do need sufficient information to ensure the action is right;
» Weight-of-evidence approaches should be used to arrive at conclusions about the hazards and risks of each chemical;
» For industrial chemicals, pesticides and biocides, we do not need new regulations specific to controlling the risks from endocrine disruptors but we need to make sure existing regulations are implemented better;
» Endocrine disruption is a type of mode of action, not an endpoint. It is not possible to use the current classification system to capture all such chemicals.

Disagreement:
» There is no one universally accepted and applicable definition of EDCs;
» In the EU, the ongoing delay by the European Commission in drawing up criteria to define endocrine disruptors for regulatory purposes is preventing EU regulators from tackling the risks of EDCs now and will inevitably lead to more national action within the EU;
» Within these criteria, a category approach could be used to denote potential, suspected and confirmed endocrine disruptors, based on weight of evidence;
» Safe thresholds of exposure can be determined for endocrine disrupting chemicals.

Mood in the room – key take home messages

» There is a good scientific basis for regulatory and voluntary action on EDCs;
» Scientific research is needed to better understand their modes of action and exposure;
» Existing regulatory mechanisms are sufficient to control the risks of endocrine disrupting chemicals, but need to be implemented more effectively.
Chemicals management

HCF Panel Debate 4: Chemicals Management Around the World – Are we all in the same boat?

Panellists:
Klaus Berend (European Commission), Jun Ho Lee (Korean Testing Research Institute), Jake Sanderson (Environment Canada), Dmitry Skobelev (Commonwealth of Independent States Center, Russia), Louise Halpin (Chemicals Inspection and Regulatory Service, China).

Context:
After a simplified tour of each country’s legislative framework for chemicals management, speakers followed up with a comparison of similarities and differences with other countries’ regimes. They highlighted the political aims at top level and gave useful comparisons of the similarities and differences of their regulatory requirements compared to other countries.

The Debate

» Yes, to an extent, we are all in the same boat: at a top political level, each country’s aim is to achieve safer chemical products for its citizens and for its environment throughout their life cycle;
» Given that products are traded internationally, no country can achieve these aims alone;
» There are differences in the risk assessment methodologies, including the way chemicals are prioritised for assessment. There are good reasons for these, to do with the specific health and environmental needs, culture, other economic development needs, regulatory institutional infrastructure and experiences and the size and influence of the chemical industry in each country. We need to agree to disagree on these differences;
» Whether or not countries are members of the OECD, speakers acknowledged the considerable value of its expertise and consensus building on data collection formats. However, in some countries eg China, the level of acceptance by regulators of these formats is still unclear. More work needs to be done to explore further harmonisation by different regimes at this technical level. This effort would enable regulators to leverage maximum benefit from projects like the Adverse Outcome Pathways (AOP) Knowledge Base being developed by regulatory scientific bodies across the world;
» A personal idea from Mr Lee for a Global Risk Assessment Centre that could collect and disseminate data while paying due regard to intellectual property rights and confidential business information, sparked positive comments from the audience. One comment resurrected the idea of a global framework chemicals convention that could lead to harmonisation and efficiencies;
» If there seemed to be consensus that we are all in the same boat and acceptance of the potential to harmonise efforts at least at a technical level, there was perhaps disagreement over the speed at which this happens. Some are rowing, others are sailing, and a few are motoring their way to more complete knowledge about the properties and impact of chemicals on their markets but this is dictated by legal and political complexities and technical capacity issues that are difficult to influence.

Mood in the room – key take home messages

» We can and should benefit from finding ways to work together at a technical level, without compromising the development needs and political priorities of each country.
Sound chemicals

HCF Panel Debate 5: Raising the baseline – what path to choose in promoting sound chemicals management?

Panellists:
Anne-Sofie Andersson (ChemSec), Rogerio Correa (INMETRO Brazil), Kaj Madsen (Unep), Somsri Sumanjaras (Department of Industrial Works, Thailand).

Context:
All countries in the world, from the least to the most developed, are exposed to impacts from chemicals in industrial operations or through products. Panellists explained the baseline for chemicals management in their countries, learned about Unep frameworks to characterise and help countries to put chemicals management frameworks in place, and about ChemSec’s vision to guide companies and governments to substitute hazardous chemicals with safer ones.

The Debate

- Chemicals management is essential for all countries to protect their inhabitants, but the enacting of such policies depends on the development priorities of each government;
- An efficient chemical management system includes elements such as clear division of responsibilities between authorities and industry, as well as close and balanced co-operation between all stakeholders in each country;
- Regional and global co-operation is very helpful in bringing countries with little chemical management experience in line with those more experienced: the former can use data made available by the latter and neighbouring countries can work together for the same purpose, by, for example, prioritising chemicals for hazard and risk assessment;
- Myths have to be dispelled: building chemical management policies in developing countries will not hinder the development of their chemical industry;
- Industry needs to get more involved in advocating for a proper chemicals management plan in their country, and the starting point is the formation of an industry association;
- Voluntary programmes such as those of the International Council of Chemicals Association (ICCA) can make a difference, but have limitations where there is no industry association, as is the case in many countries in Africa;
- Even so, delegates in the room could not agree on whether ICCA’s programmes are enough to help countries come up with chemical management plans and whether a global code of good practice for chemical companies providing a minimum standard is still needed;
- Delegates also disagreed over EU REACH being a good model for other countries to follow, some arguing it would be too burdensome, others saying it has all the necessary elements of a proper chemicals management policy;
- Education concerning chemical risks is paramount to developing the capacity of countries to implement chemicals management policies both at expert university level and as part of the overall education of the general public.

Mood in the room – key take home messages

- The focus needs to be on capacity building in Africa;
- The effectiveness of the chemical industry’s initiatives to capacity build and voluntarily promote chemical product safety is not clear;
- The international community needs to have a clear organisation and plan to continue efforts towards the sound management of chemicals after 2020, which is the timeframe for the current focus of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (Saicm).
The Writing on the Wall

Panel 1 – TTIP

» Without seeing the draft TTIP provisions, we would just be shouting over each other’s heads.
» There is an unfortunate track record of US - with some other countries - having first watered down global chemicals safety initiatives by using its negotiation power - and then not getting its act together to ratify and implement the jointly agreed instruments. Would the TTIP be different?
» The panel is not addressing the key concerns raised which is that EU standards will be lowered and processes slowed down
» What is the added value of TTIP? For chemicals management in EU and US? For the protection of health and environment? For SMEs?
» On TTIP - should not the starting point for harmonisation between US and the EU be the ratification and implementation of existing international chemical conventions and systems such as PIC, POP and GHS?

Panel 2 – Hydraulic fracturing

» It is claimed that REACH adequately controls the chemical risks from fracking. But polymers are exempt, and they can thermally degrade downhole to yield toxic monomers (e.g. polyacrylamide degrading to acrylamide). Surely the risks from these chemicals in the flowback water have been overlooked?
» Innovators need access to chemical info to develop safer solutions, including access to #fracking formulas #ChemicalsForum
» What level of data does industry have regarding GRAS chemicals?
» The standard information requirements from REACH may be insufficient. What is industry doing to identify, assess and address the scientific uncertainties regards the specific releases into the subsoil environments?
» Would it not make sense to develop a common guideline that MSs should use to carry out their risk assessment for each individual well?
» CIA [UK Chemical Industries Association] Director tells international chemical audience in Finland “we support fracking and safe use of frack fluid chemicals” #ChemicalsForum
» No proof hazards are real, says industry of fracking. Signs exist, we need to study more, calls NGO. #ChemicalsForum

Panel 3 – Endocrine disruptors

» Should we really spend much of our (limited) resources on EDCs? Why not use existing endpoints (Repr, Carc) and supplement with delayed Neurotox + amphibian metamorphosis + reprotoxicity in fish; depending on tonnage band.
» Swedish government today has decided to bring the issue of lacking criteria for EDCs to court
» The US is taking a risk-based approach to management of EDCs and is against the hazard approach of the EU. Will this hinder progress? What about TTIP?
» Is the science really there in moving to adversity based on presence of endocrine activity - when does an endocrine modulating chemical lead to an adverse outcome? How do we know which endocrine modulating chemicals are the ones to take action on? Clearly some lead to adverse effects but many foods also modulate endocrine activity. Does the science allow us to focus?
Panel 4 – Are we all in the same boat?

» Encouraging to hear Russia works with OECD even if nonmember.
» Worldwide regulations are far from being in the ‘same boat’. Some authorities (Nicnas, Canada) are pragmatic and consider exposure. If only the EU would do the same, rather than concentrating on Hazard!!
» China focuses on hazards of new chemicals rather than their problems with the existing ones? #ChemicalsForum #REACH #ECHA
» Do we need a China-OECD TTIP to get GLP studies accepted in China? #ChemicalsForum
» Should the objective be harmonised regulatory systems (ie legislation) OR that the data, assessment results, and knowledge is shared to avoid double work at implementation level (ie Technical level convergence)?
» Of course, the missing voice is that from USA with the TSCA situation.
» Interesting concept of Global Risk Assessment Center presented by Korean Jun Ho Lee from KTR during #ChemicalsForum
» International chemicals conventions (and GHS) could be the basis for any national chemicals management and chemicals policy – at the end chemicals do not know borders as they are traded globally and transported also via articles and environment. International conventions would help having more alignment between countries and regions. Could a global framework convention on chemicals safety help here or is it utopia?

Panel 5 – Raising the baseline

» Don’t the different regulatory approaches create a business disadvantage for EU industry because of the more ambitious REACH regulation, with the risk of relocation outside of EU or collapse of SMEs until other countries catch up?
» The GPS initiative started by industry does not really find a strong support to provide reliable data on chemical substances. Can ICCA explain the reasons for this as it seems to be in contradiction with the ICCA statements
» The Global Charter for Responsible Care is such a code of good practice, and it has been endorsed by ICCA. As a matter of fact, ICCA goes beyond...
» Industry could create a global voluntary code of good practice for sound chemicals management – all international companies should commit to follow it as a minimum, whatever the level of capacity of the specific country is. Current ICCA activity is not enough!
» Disagree with the statement that REACH is the “only model” for chemicals management. There are other functioning models that are valid options for countries developing their chemical management frameworks.
» World free of hazardous chemicals – how is this possible when many naturally occurring chemicals are highly hazardous?