

Summary Report of BCA/ Defra Teams call on UK ICO membership

Meeting was convened and chaired by BCA in order to both update members on the first 18 months of UK's membership of ICO (post EU) and obtain guidance on future developments.

Defra attended the meeting and gave their perspective on ICO operations and potential for future engagement.

Defra

Charlotte Whittle of Defra opened discussions with a summary of Defra's view on ICO membership to date. It was noted that progress on issues was slow with the Council procedures quite bureaucratic. There was a need to see more value being added but it was still unclear what role the UK could or should play in that. It was felt that there was a need for better direction and a more dynamic leadership from within the organisation to help establish priorities.

The issues of funding were noted, including a number of producing countries being in arrears. From a Defra perspective there was a need to be able to demonstrate value for money (including to Ministers) but it was recognised any withdrawal from ICO by the UK would have wider political implications and was therefore unlikely in the near future.

Defra felt that with current resourcing there was a need to ensure that engagement could be seen to deliver some level of progress, and, in turn, there was a need to understand from industry what the priorities were.

BCA

From a BCA perspective there continued to be a belief that ICO as a body was needed but many of the concerns voiced by Defra were shared by the wider industry. Along with other associations, notably ECF, NCA and SCTA, BCA had sought a higher profile from ICO on the current EU draft deforestation legislation. It had been felt ICO was the idea forum in which to bring both producing and consuming country concerns together. No real progress had been made however and producing countries had used other routes to deliver their concerns to EU MEPs and the Commission.

Whilst the revision of the Coffee Agreement (ICA) brought in representation from the private sector, it remained very unclear what this meant in practice both in terms of funding and voice. It was understood the Affiliate member Board reported to the Council and its opportunity for initiating issues was unclear.

The BCA view therefore remained supportive of ICO but recognising the need for significant progress in terms of work and output. BCA had approached another international organisation (IGC) which seemed to have a more agile approach and had suggested stronger coordination between international organisations might help to spread best practice.

Discussion

There was a general consensus from members present that continued support of ICO was important but the issues that had been highlighted were real and needed to be addressed. It was felt ICO had not moved with the times and needed to update its focus from the original minimum price agenda. It was felt this was part of the reason the US was unable to see the necessary business case for re-joining.

In looking at ways forward Defra indicated it would be willing to take forward appropriate issues/ questions etc. from the industry and push them through the Council – this could be regulated through ongoing contact between Defra and BCA. This could allow issues to filter down from the Council to the Affiliate Member Board – thereby minimising the need for Defra resource but ensuring relevant topics were brought to the table.

It was agreed this would be an appropriate way forward and would be something discussed further at the November BCA Executive.