



WEB CASTING OF SEAC MEETINGS

ISSUE

1. As part of a one year trial, SEAC 84, 85 and 86 have been broadcast live over the Internet (web cast) via the SEAC website with recordings also available to view. The trial was undertaken to assess the value of making committee meetings accessible via this medium. The trial was completed in March 2005. This paper provides information about the trial and a preliminary analysis of viewing figures. The paper is for information.

BACKGROUND

2. The decline of UK public trust in science and government has been widely documented. The handling of the BSE epidemic, the associated food safety risks and lack of transparency in the risk analysis process have contributed to this situation.
3. Public scrutiny of expert scientific advisory committees ensures that the risk analysis process and procurement of scientific advice by government are more open and transparent. Public meetings and making information available via new media to reach a wider audience contribute to improving public confidence in the way government procures scientific advice.
4. SEAC was one of the first scientific advisory committees to hold public meetings. There has been considerable public interest in the committee meetings, with between 20 and 50 people attending each meeting. Engagement of stakeholders via open SEAC meetings has limitations, public meetings are resource intensive and, as most are London based public access to meetings may exclude some stakeholders. Web casting improves stakeholder accessibility to the committee meetings. Following a successful bid for money from Defra's Challenge

Fund¹ in January 2004, a one-year trial of web casting SEAC meetings commenced on 1st April 2004.

Broadcasting the meetings

5. In consultation with Westminster Digital, the web casting facility providers, it was considered that both live and 'on demand' (archive) web casting would be the most effective approach to trial broadcasting meetings. This would give greater flexibility to viewers, who could watch the meetings live or after the event, when a copy of the meeting would be placed in an archive.
6. Westminster Digital set up, and maintain, a separate micro site annexed to the SEAC website where viewers could watch the web casting and browse the archives. Users register with Westminster Digital and choose a username and password enabling them to log into the site to view meetings. Technical help is also available from the Westminster Digital site. A test of the system was carried out at SEAC 82, when the meeting was filmed but not broadcast.
7. From September 2004, each SEAC meeting has been broadcast live on the Internet and a copy of the recording placed in the archive on a micro site.
8. Monthly statistics have been obtained from Westminster Digital, providing a summary of the number of viewers for each live meeting, their affiliation and country of origin, plus the number viewing the meeting archives.

¹ The Challenge Fund was set up to help get innovative ideas off the ground in Defra. Qualifying criteria for the fund were that a project had potential to build Defra's capacity to deliver showed a significant element that was new or innovative, incorporated details of how learning will be shared with others in Defra and would be unable to go ahead without CF funding

RESULTS

Marketing

9. Westminster Digital and the secretariat have been involved in marketing the web casting project, including providing information to other interested parties, contacting related web sites and asking them to provide links to the SEAC site. We have also ensured that the project has received coverage within Defra and the Food Standards Agency, via the use of internal publications. Annex 1 provides an example of the web sites and organisations that now provide a link to the web casting site. A press release was also issued.

Sound and Vision Quality and Ease of Use

10. The web casting is available to watch using either broadband or a dial-up connection. Statistics have shown that most people are using broadband, which provides a much faster service. We have received very positive feedback on the web casting project, with reports that both sound and vision were of a high quality. The table below shows how many viewers have watched the web casting so far.

No. of Viewers	SEAC 84 (Sep)	SEAC 85 (Nov)	SEAC 86 (Mar)
Live	7	14	17
Archive	26	95	28*

* March figures only. Other archive figures include months in between meetings.

11. As of March 2005, there are currently 133 registered users on the web casting site, both UK based and international. A range of organisations is represented, including universities, research institutions, consumer and media organisations, and government bodies.
12. Many viewers are based abroad. Web casts have been viewed in United States, France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand.
13. The meeting archives have attracted a much larger number of viewers than the live web casts. The on demand web casts are most frequently watched in the days subsequent to SEAC meetings. However, statistics have also indicated that registered

users have frequently viewed previous meetings from the archive as well as the most recent, suggesting that SEAC meetings are still of interest several months after the event.

After the One-year trial

14. In view of the relatively low number of viewers watching the live broadcasts, the SEAC Secretariat Steering Group has agreed to continue filming SEAC meetings and place the recordings in the archive for viewing after each event. No further meetings will be broadcast live.

MARKETING FOR THE WEB CASTING TRIAL

Some examples of links to the SEAC web casting from the following sites:

Scottish Executive

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk?Topics?Agriculture/animal-welfare/Latestnews/news>

BSE information

<http://www.bseinfo.org/Links.aspx>

TSE Forum (Germany)

http://www.tse-forum.de/tse_forum/englisch/oeffentlich/start_oeffentlich.htm

Vegetarian Source

<http://www.vegsource.com/talk/madcow/index.html>

World Veterinary Association

<http://worldvet.org/Article2388.phtml>

European Food Safety

http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/food/biosafety/bse/external_links_en.htm

National Farmers' Union

<http://www.nfu.org.uk>

(link in members area)

Federal Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations

<http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/en/health/bse/default.html>