

ET& C Perspectives

“Do pharmaceuticals present a risk to the environment and what needs to be done to answer the question?”

John P Sumpter (Convener)

“Although human pharmaceuticals are currently considered as emerging contaminants, many will have been present in the aquatic environment for decades. Two facts make the Pharmaceuticals in the Environment (PIE) issue of concern. One is that there are a few thousand different pharmaceuticals, and the other is that all of them are biologically active, at least in humans. These two facts lead us, in turn, to the two key unresolved issues in the PIE field: ‘how should we conduct a prioritisation exercise to identify those pharmaceuticals likely to be of the greatest environmental risk?’ and ‘are typical environmental concentrations of those pharmaceuticals anywhere close to the concentrations that produce adverse effects in ecotoxicity tests?’ This perspective addresses those two key issues.”