

Panel III: Using stakeholder consultation better

Systematic stakeholder consultation at various stages of EU policy development was a key innovation of the 2015 Better Regulation agenda. There is broad agreement that this new EU consultation system is one of the best and helps to gather evidence and opinions. However, speakers at the conference found that the system, while advanced, is not delivering to its potential and needs further refining.

Artur Runge-Metzger (European Commission, Climate Action DG) explained that stakeholder consultation is a powerful tool to gather views or solutions, even some that otherwise could be overlooked. It also helps anticipating reactions of legislators to proposals. Artur stressed that formal consultation is only the tip of the iceberg. Consultation happens at all stages of policymaking, even before designing individual proposals for legislation.

Adriana Bunea (University of Bergen) pointed to the challenge of reconciling the many possible purposes of consultation (engagement, collecting opinions and evidence) in an appropriate consultation strategy and using its results in a balanced and transparent way. In particular, the issue of non-response to consultation or incomplete replies needs more careful analysis.

Sile Lane (Sense about Science) stressed the need for clarity of intent and of questions when designing the consultation strategy. The design needs to adapt to the objectives of the consultation. When consulting, the number of participants is not key, but reaching those stakeholders that matter. Sile also emphasised the need for honesty in treating the results of consultations.

Petra van Nierop (ICF Brussels) developed the need for an appropriate consultation design further by pleading for a balanced combination of open and targeted consultations. The aim should be to make consultation findings more representative and complete, including at Member State level. Big data can usefully complement more traditional ways of collecting evidence.