

THE EUROPEAN  
INFORMATION  
SOCIETY GROUP

EURIM



**Brief report of the planning meeting of the Personal Identity Group on RFID, held 17 November 2006 in Room 'T', Portcullis House, 1000 – 1200**

Chairman: Roger Till (GS1);  
Rapporteur: Dave Wright (EURIM)

**1. Introduction**

1.1 The purpose of the meeting was to determine whether there is sufficient Industry support (funding and resource) to launch a programme with the following objectives:

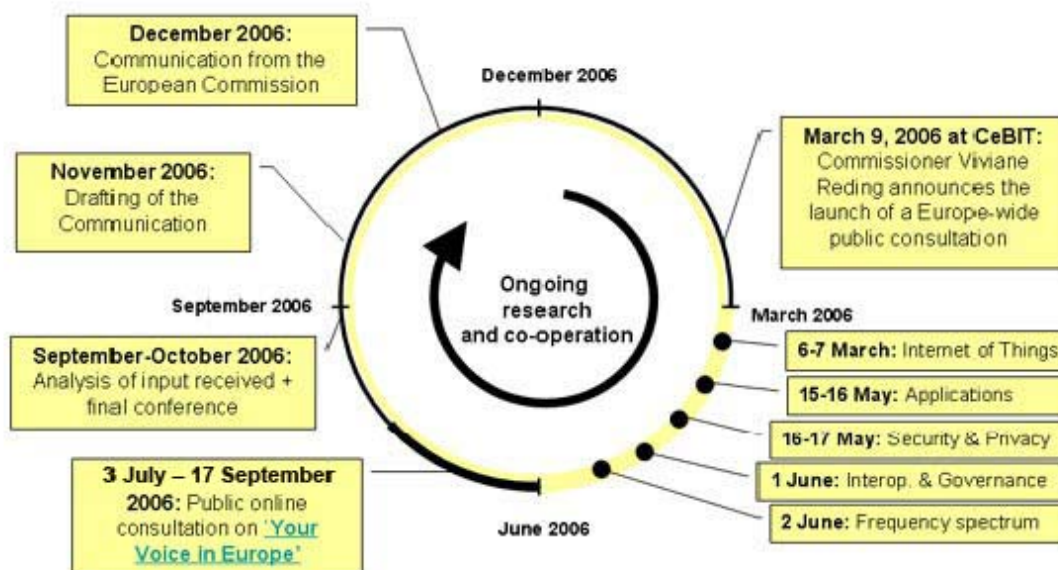
- to help ensure that current EU proposals on RFID privacy do not put the UK/EU at a competitive disadvantage vis a vis the rest of the world (including the USA and Far East);
- to secure political and public support for the use of RFID in the supply chain that conforms to global standards of operation, with privacy safeguards;
- to bring together a range of key stakeholders to review the Center for Democracy and Technology's best practice report with a view to amendment and adoption in the UK;
- to help resolve differences in approach to privacy issues globally, including between the EU and USA.

**While it was agreed that RFID is a key business technology with the potential to transform the global economy, and that the objectives were necessary and timely, it was emphasised at the outset that without sponsorship or additional funding from industry, there is no budget for future work by EURIM in this field.**

1.2 The Chairman gave an overview of the issues currently surrounding adoption of RFID technology. The Powerpoint presentation used in the overview is attached to the email carrying this report, and should be read in conjunction with it.

1.3 The roadmap below shows the activity undertaken by the European Commission from launch in March at CeBIT through to the end of 2006.

## Roadmap: Towards an RFID Policy for Europe



1.4 The EC will present a Communication on EU RFID policy by the end of the year that will set out the main options for action. The Commission is also considering setting up working groups to facilitate dialogue between stakeholders and to enable a consensus on the best policy options. Details may be found at [www.rfidconsultation.eu](http://www.rfidconsultation.eu)

1.5 Privacy and security are at the heart of the debate, with open standards, harmonisation of spectrum and consumer education/awareness other key issues. The European Parliament is quite involved in the debate and seems constructive and pragmatic. Clear labelling and the possibility to disable the tag are important elements that the EC will consider, along with provision of an effective legal framework. There is a clear preference for an opt-in as opposed to an opt-out approach.

1.6 In relation to spectrum frequencies, there is a consensus on the need for harmonisation but the industry should not continue to deliver contradictory messages as to whether or not more spectrum is needed.

## 2. Discussion

2.1 The RFID industry has much to learn about the impact of ill-considered schemes and bad publicity, however inaccurate, on public perception. For example, the use of RFID sparked outrage when the media reported that 'electronic spy chips have been surreptitiously planted in household wheelie bins by many councils'. This fed through to politicians, and one MP told The Sun: "I don't think even the old Soviet Union made such an intrusion into people's personal lives. It's Big Brother gone mad."

2.2 In view of the media attention to failures and problems, more needs to be done to raise education and awareness, and to identify where there are clear benefits to the citizen/consumer, e.g. through better provision of better local services, fresh food, patient safety, authentication and security etc. **Important issues that EURIM could consider with benefit include the need for open standards, traceability, and improved efficiency and effectiveness.**

2.3 Use of RFID technology should be as transparent as possible, with no secret tags or readers. Consumers should know about the implementation and use of any RFID technology, including tags, readers and storage of personally identifiable information (PII) as soon as they engage in any transaction that utilizes an RFID system.

2.4 There are a number of potentially competing codes of practice already – e.g. from Electronic Product Code™ (EPC), RFID UK, the Center for Democratic Technology – and possibly EURIM! There is a clear need to avoid creating multiple codes of practice. DTI are coordinating the work of different Knowledge Transfer Networks active in this field through a task force.

2.5 The extent to which RFID devices can be linked to PII, the tracking of an individual's location, RFID raises important privacy questions. However, the main threat to security is from unauthorised access to databases, not tags.

2.6 The use of a unique number for RFID tags, as in bar codes, should help defeat attempts at tagging counterfeit products as economies of scale reduce technology costs.

2.7 The RFID debate should not be focused on privacy issues to the detriment of its economic importance to the EU. Rather, stakeholders should argue effectively against alarmist reports and inform policymakers and opinion formers of the benefits to citizens and business. RFID should be set in the context of the Lisbon Agenda, promoting its potential to confer greater efficiency and enhance competitiveness.

2.8 In tandem with recognising legitimate concerns about privacy, we should focus on business values, demonstrate that the business processes do not present a threat to PII, and stimulate consumer confidence in order to encourage the demand-led growth of RFID technology. This is best done through transparency of practice and by creating, embracing and enforcing a widely-adopted code of practice. But who will administer the code?

### **3. Actions**

3.1 Dave Wright, using a list of names to be provided by DTI, will contact potential industry sponsors to seek funding from those likely to benefit from the proposed programme of action and objectives.

3.2 If formed, the main objectives of the EURIM RFID Group will be to:

- counter recent media hype and ill-judged press releases from the industry by communicating a positive message about the potential benefits of RFID to Parliamentarians, politicians in local Government and consumer groups, using all the channels available to EURIM, in order to inform policymaking, educate citizens and raise awareness;
- balance this with proposals for how the sector should be regulated, with information about existing and potential problems, current practice and solutions, and the development of a recommended Code of Practice for the industry, in collaboration with the Office of the Information Commissioner.

### **3. Date of next meeting**

3.1 The next meeting was provisionally set for 25 January 2007.