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Adopted minutes

European Food Safety Authority

ADOPTED Minutes

NINTH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

HUNGARIAN FOOD SAFETY OFFICE (HFSO), BUDAPEST

8 JUNE 2004

Members of the Advisory Forum

Chair: Geoffrey Podger, Executive Director, EFSA

Austria	Dieter Jenewein	Ireland	Alan Reilly
Belgium	Charles Cremer	Italy	Paolo Aureli
Cyprus	Michael Constantinos	Lithuania	Stanevicius Zenonas
Czech Republic	Klara Zuzankova	Luxembourg	Felix Wildschutz
Denmark	Hans Peter Jensen	Netherlands	Willem De Wit
Finland	Jouko Tuomisto	Portugal	Isabel M Meirelles
France	Monique Eliot	Slovakia	Jan Stolc
Germany	Andreas Hensel	Slovenia	Marusa Adamic
Greece	Nikos Katsaros	Sweden	Leif Busk
Hungary	Peter Biacs	UK	Judith Hilton
	Zsolt Horvath		
	Mattyasovszky Pal		
	Katalin Szabo		
	Forgacs Toth Eszter		

Observers and Invitees of the Executive Director

Iceland	Elin Gudmunsdottir	Switzerland	Vincent Dudler
Norway	Kristin Faerden	European Commission	Jeannie Vergnettes

Staff of the European Food Safety Authority

Jan Bloemendal	Ingela Soderlund
Antoine Cuvillier	Anja Van Impe
Anne-Laure Gassin	Katty Verhelst
Herman Koeter	Victoria Villamar

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1. Welcome by the Hungarian Authorities

1.1 Dr. Tibor Szanyi, State Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, welcomed the Advisory Forum members and observer to Hungary on behalf of the Hungarian government and expressed his appreciation that they had chosen to come to Budapest. He further stated that all the new member states were very ambitious and for Hungary's part a lot of progress had been made in the context of food safety and the administrative structures needed to support their policies. The Hungarian Food Safety Office, established in 2003 had its basic structures in place and was looking forward to starting work on a European scale. Dr Szanyi especially welcomed the debate on GMOs and recognised the work done by the Authority on these issues.

1.2 The Chair thanked Dr Szanyi for attending the opening of the meeting and his words of welcome.

2. Introduction by Geoffrey Podger and the adoption of the agenda (Doc AF 08.06.2004 – 1)

2.1 The Chair thanked the HFSO on behalf of the Forum for the hospitality, the dinner and the organisation of the meeting.

2.2 The agenda was adopted.

3. Minutes of the meeting 6 April in Helsinki and matters arising (Doc AF 08.06.2004 – 2)

3.1 The Chair apologised for the fact that the draft minutes of the Advisory Forum meeting of 6 April in Helsinki had been erroneously distributed to the Forum. The Authority would internally review the minutes and would send out the revised version in the near future.

3.2 The Chair updated the Forum on the issue raised by the UK in the meeting of 6 April on the current reviews of coccidiostats. The Chair confirmed that the Authority and the Commission were well aware of the difficulties and that the matter would need to be further discussed.

3.3 The Chair informed the Forum that the Authority did not have further information on the topic raised by Norway on the possible publication of an article in Science on fish oil supplements that may contain flame retardants.

4. Update by Geoffrey Podger on progress at EFSA including move to Parma

4.1 The Chair informed the Forum of a useful meeting with the FDA in Brussels. The objective of the meeting was to see how both organisations could build good relationships and inform each other of early warnings of issues which are about to break. The Authority would, in turn, inform the Advisory Forum on any such alerts.

4.2 The Chair updated the meeting of the discussion in the Management Board of 27 April in relation to the new clause which suggests that the European Commission could review any scientific opinion from the Authority or take action if the Authority failed to deliver an opinion. Both the Authority and the Board were strongly opposed to the new clause

which undermines the independence of the Authority. Stuart Slorach, Chair of the Management Board, would write to the European Parliament, Council and Commission to withdraw the clause.

4.3 The Chair stressed the importance of meeting timeframes but not at the expense of giving advice which was not satisfactory. He further explained that the Authority had a good record in meeting deadlines but that it was essential to negotiate realistic and achievable timeframes.

4.4 The Chair updated the meeting as to where the Authority was in relation to its move to Parma. Good progress was being made with the Italian authorities and the Authority should begin the move towards the end of 2004. Since the staff members would move over a period of one year, the Authority would have to work from two places during that time. The move should be completed in autumn 2005.

4.5 At the request of the Management Board, the Authority, in cooperation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Scientific Committee, had started to identify the steps on how to make the Authority's risk assessment more transparently harmonised with risk assessments in the MSs. The Authority would draft a note to address a set of issues, such as the need of a guidance document which would explain the criteria that should be addressed in all risk assessments. For this purpose, the Authority would consider establishing a working group.

4.6 The Authority had organised its first colloquium and had invited experts in the field to participate in an interactive exchange of expert views regarding methodologies and principles for setting tolerable intake levels for dioxins, furans and dioxin-like PCBs. The meeting would take place on 28-29 June 2004 in Brussels. The Authority had accepted 65 experts in the area from EU member states, the US, industry representatives, amongst others. The Advisory Forum would be briefed on the outcome.

4.7 Herman Koëter updated the meeting on the code of conduct which had been adopted late 2003 for the experts of the Scientific Committee and Panels and the Authority's senior staff members. The paper had been changed to a guidance document and explained in more detail what was meant by financial and intellectual interest. The text of the paper was being discussed by the Scientific Committee and Panels and would be shared with the Advisory Forum as soon as it became available. The Chair further explained that the Authority would provide legal protection of individuals and experts working in the framework of EFSA were challenged in European or national courts, except where in case of misconduct or negligence on the part of individual, in which case the Authority would withdraw its protection.

5. Information paper on the Stakeholder meetings of the GMO and FEEDAP panels (Doc 08.06.2004 - 3)

5.1 Herman Koëter updated the meeting on sessions of the Scientific Panels with stakeholders:

- The Panel on additives and products or substances used in animal feed (FEEDAP) had invited national competent authorities and stakeholders including consumer and industry associations and their members to meet with the Panel in an open public session in the context of its 10th plenary meeting from 5 to 7 May in Barcelona.

- The Panel on genetically modified organisms (GMO) had invited interested parties to send EFSA their comments before the adoption of the guidance document on GM plants. On 25 May 2004, a stakeholder consultation had been held to discuss the comments received. The outcome of this consultation would be taken into account during the final adoption of the guidance document.
- Reports of both meetings would be shared and would be part of the minutes as an annex and available on the Authority's website. Although the meetings had been different in character they had been opportunities for the Panels to listen to stakeholders. Other Panels might also meet with the stakeholders.

6. Exchange of information on the initiative of setting up an EFSA extranet (Doc 08.06.2004 – 4, Doc 08.06.2004 – 4a & Doc 08.06.2004 – 4b)

6.1 The Chair updated the meeting on the work done in the Working Group on IT. Following its establishment in November 2003, the Working Group had met on 19 April to discuss the development of an an EFSA extranet. The members of the Working Group had stressed the importance of clearly defining user requirements in order to ensure that the IT tools developed would be effectively utilized by the members. Following discussions regarding user requirements in the context of the meetings of the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications and interviews conducted with future users, the Authority now had a sufficient understanding of the needs and requirements which would need further discussion with the national authorities in order to use the system in time of a food crisis.

6.2 The Advisory Forum agreed with the Chair's proposal to install such a system for a trial period of 12 months at the Authority's cost. The IT tool would require the involvement of national authorities in defining the specifications for the extranet and testing the extranet features.

7. Advisory Forum Event in Berlin

7.1 The Advisory Forum had decided to make its work more publicly known to the stakeholders by organising an event between 8-10 November in Berlin.

7.2 It was agreed that the Advisory Forum event would be immediately be followed by a separate one-day-stakeholder event. The Forum event would be open to all interested parties whereas the stakeholder event would be of a slightly different format and by invitation only.

7.3 The Forum event would cover various themes such as a round table discussion on the relationship between the Authority and the national authorities, and on risk benefit analysis. The stakeholder event would be a more participative event with attendance from consumer representatives, industry representatives, academics, amongst others.

7.4 The Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung (BfR) in Berlin would be the venue for both events. The Chair encouraged the national authorities to invite whomever they judge to be appropriate with a good representation of different views from inside and outside the EU. The Scientific Committee and Panel experts would be invited as well.

7.5 The Authority would distribute the draft programme for the two events to the Forum in

July.

8. Document on the assessment of the current image of the European Food Safety Authority: outcome of the interviews conducted by Frederic Paeps (March-April 2004) (Doc AF 08.06.2004 – 5 & Doc AF 08.06.2004 – 5-1)

8.1 The Chair introduced the meeting on the Authority's activity in the area of assessing the current image and performance of the Authority in order to outline a clear vision for the future. The Authority's Management Team and Frederic Paeps, from the consultancy agency FPA, had conducted interviews with the Authority's key stakeholders and other interested parties in order to obtain preliminary feedback on EFSA's image and performance to date. The immediate response to the report would need to concentrate on improvements or developments which could be undertaken within the legal constraints of the existing Regulation.

8.2 The Chair stressed that this study was not a substitute for the legal requirement under article 61 of the Authority's Founding Regulation which required a formal review of the Authority, assess the working practices and the impact of the Authority.

8.3 Following a discussion in the Advisory Forum, it was agreed that:

- the Forum would have an initial discussion on the work approaches of the Committee, the Panels and their Working Groups and how the work could be done in an efficient way in order to cope with the increasing workload,
- a working group would be set up in relation to how the national authorities could have an input into the Panels' work within the terms of the overall regulation. The Forum was invited to inform the Chair on their interest in participating. The working group participants would be selected to try and balance geographic and size factors,
- the Authority had not experienced problems with missed deadlines. The report however did reflect fears from the Commission that reports would not in future be delivered on time. It was essential to negotiate timeframes which corresponded with reality,
- the Authority had not sought a high profile in the member states, at the expense of the national authorities but would rather work together with national authorities to communicate messages,
- the Forum would need to further discuss the grey zones between the three components of the risk analysis process.

9. Exchange of information on the setting up of a database on zoonoses and pesticides residues data by DG Eurostat in collaboration with DG SANCO

9.1 Herman Koëter updated the meeting on the Authority's activities in the field of zoonoses data collection and Eurostat's project on food safety statistics. In April 2004, the Authority had published an invitation to tender for scientific and technical assistance relating to the collecting, analysing and reporting of the data on zoonoses, in order to

assist the Authority in the preparation of the annual summary report[1]. The call had closed on 14 June 2004. An update on the evaluation of the call would be provided in the next Advisory Forum meeting.

9.2 The Task Force on zoonoses data collection, with participation of all member states, the Commission and the Community Reference Laboratory for zoonoses, had established two working groups which would consider the need to review the presentation of the report and the reporting system.

9.3 Herman Koëter informed the Forum of the Eurostat project to create food safety statistics with a global database and statistical indicators for food safety. While Eurostat had an agreement on cooperation in this field with DG SANCO, initial contacts have been established between the Authority and Eurostat and both parties agreed to cooperate and coordinate their activities in the field of zoonoses data collection in order to avoid overlap and duplication.

10. Update on the call for scientific experts

10.1 The Authority had received around 240 applications following a call for expression of interest for membership to its Scientific Panels. Following the evaluation by the Authority's scientific staff members, a shortlist of desirable candidates had been sent to the Management Board and Advisory Forum around mid-May. The final list would be presented to the Board for approval in its meeting of 22 June.

10.2 The Chair and the Forum agreed to have an initial discussion in a future Advisory Forum meeting to identify the topics the Forum wished to raise in relation to the composition of the Panels, the expertise required, amongst others. Another meeting with Prof. Silano would be held to discuss these topics in more depth. The Authority would let the Committee and Panels experts know that the Forum is discussing these matters and that they would be invited to give their views and insights.

11. Communication on methylmercury in fish: recent developments (Doc AF 08.06.2004 – 6, Doc AF 08.06.2004 – 6-1, Doc AF 08.06.2004 – 6-2, Doc AF 08.06.2004 – 6-3 & Doc AF 08.06.2004 – 6-4)

11.1 The Chair raised the issue of methylmercury in order to give the Forum an update on the progress on the issue, and to identify any areas for improvements.

11.2 Following a discussion, the Forum concluded that:

- any food safety related issue should be identified as early as possible,
- it is extremely important that the Authority, the Member States and the Commission cooperate closely together in relation to communicating messages which are consistent, coherent and scientifically accurate,
- the Authority should be invited to meetings held between the Commission and the Member States in relation to food safety issues, particularly where topics related to

[1] With the new Directive 2003/99/EC on zoonoses, the Authority is assigned a task to examine the annual reports on trends and sources of zoonoses and antimicrobial resistance submitted by the member states and to publish an annual summary report.

EFSA's risk assessment are considered,

- the Authority would organise a crisis scenario exercise in the near future which should streamline the procedure and work out how to work closer together with the member states and the Commission

12. First draft proposal for the Management Board on EFSA's animal welfare policy (Doc 08.06.2004 – 7)

12.1 Following the request from the Management Board in its meeting of 27 April to develop a policy on risk assessment methods on animal testing, the Authority had prepared a document on the subject to be considered at a future Board meeting.

12.2 Herman Koëter explained that the Authority's current animal welfare considerations were routinely part of the Authority's many tasks and activities. However, apart from the development of opinions on questions related to food producing animals, the approach was more reactive than proactive. In particular in the area of investment in food science a pro-active approach seemed desirable and feasible. While recognizing that animal testing could not be eliminated, the Authority should make every effort to stimulate, and participate in, the development of new food and feed assessment approaches that would minimize the use of experimental animals and would reduce to the extent possible the level of suffering of those animals that are still needed.

12.3 Following a discussion, it was agreed that the paper would be presented to the Management Board in order to adopt the animal welfare policy which suggested :

- an active cooperation with other (inter)national organizations, in particular those that develop methodology for safety assessment (such as OECD and OIE) and those that are involved in the validation of alternative methods (such as EC.JRC.ECVAM). Such cooperation would include frequent communication on data needs and requirements and providing support for, and participating in projects aimed at the development of novel approaches for hazard and risk assessment
- the development of in-house expertise on alternative methods to animal testing. This expertise would be useful to: (i) stimulate the use of alternatives, where possible, in hazard characterization, (ii) to assist the various expert Panels in assessing the justification for animal testing as part of risk assessment dossiers, and (iii) develop guidance document(s) on the use of experimental animals and alternative methods for consideration by expert Panels and applicants
- the initiation of activities including the organization of scientific discussions (as the Authority's colloquia) as a means to stimulate new research activities in the field of alternatives to animal testing.

13. Integrating new member states in the work of EFSA (Doc 08.06.2004 – 8)

13.1 At the meeting of the Management Board on 27 April 2004, members of the Management Board had shown great interest in ensuring that new Member States would be integrated into the work of the Authority as quickly as possible. It was noted that these new Member States were already included in the work of the Advisory Forum and that experts from some of these countries were already part of some EFSA Scientific Panels.

13.2 The Chair concluded that the new Member States were ready to participate in the Forum even though there might be resource challenges. The Chair invited the new Member States to let the Authority know if there was anything that could be done to facilitate their participation, such as formally inviting a member to participate in a Working Group.

13.3 The Chair would report the conclusions back to the Management Board in its meeting on 22 June.

14. Standing Matters

14.1 Anne-Laure Gassin informed the Forum on the 4th meeting of the Working Group on Communications which would take place on 14 and 15 June in Parma. The Working Group would use the meeting to have in-depth interviews with users of the extranet and to show the functionalities of the tool. The 3rd meeting of the Working Group on 22 April had covered an overview of the move to Parma, how the communication of semicarbazide had taken place, including an exchange of information on the different strategies and approaches followed by AF-members, and the perspective of Commissioner Byrne's spokesperson, Beate Gminder, on food safety crisis communications in Europe taking into account her experience in addressing issues such as BSE and dioxins. Following a suggestion from the UK, the group decided to update members at each meeting on key issues and topics addressed at country level. EFSA will distribute a template to facilitate reporting on these issues at each meeting of the Communications Working Group.

14.2 Anne-Laure Gassin further updated the meeting that the input from the members of the Working Group on Communications was requested with regard to the crisis scenario planning exercise to be conducted at the AF meeting in September.

14.3 Following a request from Belgium, it was agreed that invitations of AF Working Groups meetings would be copied to the AF members themselves. Similarly, the templates on country key issues would be circulated to the AF members.

14.4 The Forum members, who have not yet done so, were urgently requested to submit details to the Authority with respect to the national authorities of the member states within the framework of Regulation (EC) 1829/2003[2] on genetically modified (GM) food and feed.

14.5 Herman Koëter informed the meeting that the Panel on contaminants in the food chain (CONTAM) had been requested to collect data on the formation of furans, following the note that was sent out by FDA on the presence of furans in certain food stuffs.

14.6 Herman Koëter updated the Forum members for Semicarbazide as a blowing agent. While an exchange of information between the Authority and the Commission was continuously taking place, the Authority had not received any data from the Member States which indicated whether or not the level was higher than measured before.

14.7 France reported that AFSSA's work plan up to 2007 has been published and would be communicated through their website (www.afssa.fr).

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[2] Regulation (EC) 1829/2003 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 September 2003 on genetically modified food and feed. Official Journal of the European Communities L 268: 1-23.

14.8 Ireland raised the possibility of discussing the scientific basis for the draft Commission regulation on microbiological criteria for food stuffs. Ireland would welcome the risk assessment of some of these criteria by one of the Authority's Scientific Panels. The issue would be checked with the Commission for putting on the agenda of a future Forum meeting.

15. AOB

15.1 The Netherlands raised the possibility of having Forum documents distributed earlier prior to meetings in order for the members to have more time to discuss and prepare the items at national level. The Chair agreed that the Authority would try to produce and distribute the papers earlier, except when the Forum's view were needed as a matter of urgency e.g. prior to going to the Management Board or in the event of a topical issue.

15.2 Following a discussion on the duration of a Forum meeting, the Authority would look into the possibility and logistics of organising longer meetings.

16. Close of meeting

16.1 The Chair closed the meeting by thanking the members and observers for their positive and constructive approach, the interpreters, the Authority's team and the Hungarian Food Safety Office for their hospitality and for having organised the meeting.

12.2 The next meeting would take place on the afternoon of 30 September and continue with a morning session on the first of October; the details for this meeting would be communicated as soon as possible.