



**ADOPTED Minutes**

**TENTH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY FORUM**

**INSTITUTO SUPERIORE DI SANITA, ROME**

**1 OCTOBER 2004**

**Members of the Advisory Forum**

**Chair:** Geoffrey Podger, Executive Director, EFSA

Austria	Roland Grossgut	Enrico Garaci
Belgium	Ariane Van der Stappen	Luciano Gramicci
Cyprus	Michael Constantinos	Arnold Knijn
Czech Republic	Klara Zuzankova	Romano Marbelli
Denmark	Hans Peter Jensen	Dace Santare
Estonia	Hendrik Kuusk	Darius Remeika
Finland	Jorma Hirn	Felix Wildschutz
France	Martin Hirsch	Willem De Wit
Germany	Andreas Hensel	Marian Sygit
Greece	Nikos Katsaros	Isabel M Meirelles
Hungary	Maria Szeitzne Szabo	Jan Stulc
Ireland	Alan Reilly	Marusa Adamic
Italy	Paolo Aureli	Maria Neira
	Antonella Colucci	Leif Busk
	Claudio Di Benedetto	Andrew Wadge
	UK	

**Observers and Invitees of the Executive Director**

Iceland	Elin Gudmundsdottir	Switzerland	Michael Beer
Norway	Kristin Faerden	European Commission	Jeannie Vergnettes

**Staff of the European Food Safety Authority**

Thierry Beniflah	Christine Majewski
Jan Bloemendal	Filomena Siravo
Anne-Laure Gassin	Ingela Soderlund
Anita Janelm	Anja Van Impe
Herman Koeter	Katty Verhelst
Djien Liem	Victoria Villamar

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The Advisory Forum meeting in Rome was divided into two different parts. The Forum held a Crisis scenario exercise on the afternoon of September the 30<sup>th</sup>, at which also the RASFF was presented briefly by the Commission to the Members of the Advisory Forum. On the second day of the meeting, 1 October, the ‘regular’ Advisory Forum issues were addressed. These minutes relate to the second part of the meeting.

**1. Welcome by the Italian Authorities**

- 1.1 Dr. Garaci welcomed colleagues in the Instituto di Sanita and presented the developments at the Italian national food agency, its mission, principles, objectives and structure. He also informed the Forum that the Ministry of Health is setting up an office in Parma for veterinary health and food safety, which will help liaison with EFSA.
- 1.2 Dr Garaci further expressed his satisfaction at holding an Advisory Forum meeting in Rome which once again shows the commitment of Italy to the success of EFSA, its support for EFSA’s move to Parma and the practical support to the work carried out by the Authority.
- 1.3 Cesare Cursi, Undersecretary of the Italian Ministry of Health, welcomed the Forum and the Authority to Rome, on behalf of the Minister of Health, Girolamo Sirchia. Mr Cursi stated that the enlargement with 10 new Member States offered an opportunity for Europe to collaborate in terms of scientific excellence and to develop new safety standards which could be used as a reference on an international level.
- 1.4 Prof. Silano, Chair of the Authority’s Scientific Committee, read out a letter from Minister Sirchia who expressed his gratitude for the work done by the Authority and who invited the Authority to have direct communications with his Ministry. A medal was presented to the Authority’s Executive Director.
- 1.5 The Chair thanked the Italian authorities for opening the meeting, their words of welcome and their support for the Authority’s move to Parma.

**2. Introduction by Geoffrey Podger and the adoption of the agenda (Doc AF 01.10.2004 – 1)**

- 2.1 The Chair thanked the Italian authorities on behalf of the Advisory Forum for their hospitality, the dinner and the organisation of the meeting.
- 2.2 The agenda was adopted.

**3. Minutes of the meeting 8 June in Budapest and matters arising (Doc AF01.10.2004 – 2)**

- 3.1 The minutes of the Advisory Forum meeting of 8 June in Budapest and 6 April in Helsinki were approved.
- 3.2 The minutes of both meetings would be published on the Authority’s website.

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

- 4.1 The Chair updated the meeting on the Authority's move to Parma. Thanks to the good progress made especially in terms of the temporary building, the move would occur as scheduled. A small administrative team would move in October and the first Panel (PPR) in November. Further moves, including the Executive Director himself, would occur in January 2005.
- 4.2 The Authority would provide the Forum with new administrative arrangements, such as contact details, in due time.
- 4.3 The main obstacle remained the provision of a direct air link between Brussels and Parma. This link would be needed, for the Authority's staff members, but most importantly for scientific experts. It was understood that the Italian authorities were conducting negotiations to seek an airline to practice this.

**5. Discussion note and discussion paper of the Scientific Committee on botanicals and botanical preparations (Doc 01.10.2004 – 3 and 3a)**

- 5.1 Dr Djien Liem from the Authority introduced a discussion paper of the Scientific Committee on botanicals and botanical preparations widely used as food supplements and related products. The Scientific Committee expressed concerns about quality and safety issues of botanicals and botanical preparations that had become widely available to consumers through several distribution channels in the EU. Since the market volume and the variety of products expanded, the Committee had identified the need for a better characterization of the range of botanicals and botanical preparations present on the market, and for the harmonisation of the risk assessment and consumer information approaches for these products. The Authority would like to take initiatives, with the involvement of the Advisory Forum, on health aspects associated with these products and intends to establish an efficient partnership and collaboration with all the stakeholders who have a role in this important sector.
- 5.2 Following the discussion, the Chair concluded that the inventory would be the first step and that further assessments and the definition of the main categories should be done at a later stage. The Forum agreed to proceed as set out in the paper and complete and return the questionnaire annexed to document 3 by 8 December 2004 to Dr Liem at the Authority.
- 5.3 Once the information has been collected, a report would be drafted, analysing and summarising Member States' current initiatives and activities on what is available, what has been done, etc. This report would be discussed first by the Scientific Committee and then be brought back to the Advisory Forum for a discussion on the following steps.

**6. Exchange of information on the setting up of an EFSA extranet/video conference project, etc. (Doc 01.10.2004 – 4)**

- 6.1 Thierry Beniflah from the Authority introduced the item by informing the Forum that the experimental extranet had been made available on July 20 to all members of the Advisory Forum, the WG Communications and the WG IT. So far, the extranet had been used at least once by 117 people for publishing and downloading documents, discussing meeting

agenda and project documents, and responding to online surveys such as the videoconference equipment survey.

- 6.2 The Forum was invited to send any questions on the extranet to the Authority.
- 6.3 In addition to the extranet, the Authority would be establishing a videoconferencing capability between the Authority, national agencies, and the Commission. The equipment and service agreement would be subject to a procurement procedure and would be available by the end of the year. Further development on the technical side would be being made in the WG IT.
- 6.4 The Chair noted the meeting that videoconferencing would never replace the usual face-to-face meeting, but that videoconference meetings could be also very useful in a crisis situation and for urgent exchanges as discussed and shown during the previous day's exercise. The Member States would also be welcome to use the tool for bilateral meetings subject to them carrying the additional cost.
- 6.5 The Chair concluded that the Forum was favourable towards the project and agreed to the financial arrangements.

  

7. **Preparatory discussion on the composition of the Panels and the profile of the experts required: identification of topics (see paragraph 10.2 of the minutes of the 9<sup>th</sup> AF meeting)**
  - 7.1 In its meeting of 8 June in Budapest, the Chair and the Forum agreed to have an initial discussion to identify the topics the Forum wished to raise in relation to the composition of the Panels, including, amongst others, the expertise required. The Chair introduced the discussion by stating that the purpose was to compile a list of issues raised by the Member States which could then be discussed with the Scientific Committee. The review of the Authority, to be launched in January 2005, would also provide opportunities if people had concerns about the selection procedure of experts.
  - 7.2 During the discussion, the following remarks were made:
    - the work of the Scientific Committee and Panels was greatly appreciated, however some Advisory Forum members raised questions about the principles behind the selection of experts and the Panel's composition;
    - the Authority favoured experts on the basis of gender and geography only if the candidates were of equal scientific value;
    - issues on confidentiality and the question to access of specialist expertise in the present system could be raised with the Scientific Committee;
    - alternative suggestions for selecting Panel experts, for instance by national nomination could be discussed in the context of the review of the Authority. The Chair pointed out that EFSA had given national authorities a greater role in the process than it was legally required to;
    - the Authority would capture its external experts' views in the context of the review;
    - the Authority could have a discussion with Prof Silano as Chair of the Scientific Committee in order to have his views on the current arrangements;

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- the number of opinions adopted by a Panel did not reflect the actual amount of work of undertaken by that Panel, as opinions could vary greatly in size and complexity.

**8. Update on the Advisory Forum event in Berlin (Doc AF 01.10.2004 – 5)**

8.1 Christine Majewski updated the Forum on the Advisory Forum event (8 and 9 November) and Stakeholder colloque (9 and 10 November) at the Bundesinstitüt für Risikobewertung (BfR) in Berlin. The programme for the event had been sent to the Forum for distribution to interested parties. The French proposal to take care of a lecture about evaluating and weighing risks and benefits with respect to GMO Food and Feed was highly appreciated.

8.2 The Advisory Forum event could accept up to 350 participants. Since the venue had space available near to the conference room, the national authorities were welcome to put up an exhibition stand to increase their visibility and to distribute brochures, annual reports, work programmes. The Forum was requested to provide the Authority with information on what they wish to do in terms of this exhibition.

8.3 Anne-Laure Gassin from the Authority thanked those national authorities who have put the Advisory Forum event on their website. She further informed the Forum that invitations would be sent to the Forum, including posters, for further distribution to interested parties. Information on the press pack and press conference would be communicated at a later stage.

8.4 In order to start the debate on the Advisory Forum round table discussion, the Chair would draw up an initial presentation flagging any possible issues. This presentation would be distributed to those who were to be on the panel.

8.5 While the Advisory Forum event was aimed at a wide range of participants, the stakeholder event was more limited and by invitation only. This event would take place immediately after the Forum event and would look at issues regarding the Authority's future development and stakeholder involvement. The main aim was to have an interactive and participative event with stakeholders such as consumer associations.

8.6 Reports on both events would be produced and shared with the Advisory Forum.

**9. Initial discussion about a WG on the input from national authorities into the work of the Panels**

9.1 The Chair informed the Forum that the Authority would need to do some more internal work and that the item would therefore be delayed. The Chair stressed that this did not mean that the matter had a low priority, but that it was important to bring forward comprehensive proposals.

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**10. Current state of advancement of the 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme and preparations of the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme – presentation by DG Research**

10.1 The Chair informed the Forum that DG Research would offer its planned presentation in the meeting on 3 and 4 February 2005 in Brussels.

**11. Initial discussion of the scientific basis for a draft Commission regulation on microbiological criteria for food stuffs**

11.1 Following Ireland's suggestion to raise the possibility of discussing the scientific basis for the draft Commission regulation on microbiological criteria for food stuffs, Herman Koëter updated the meeting on current activities of the BIOHAZ Panel in this area. The Panel was engaged in this subject as a self-task activity and had recently discussed and adopted the definitions of Food Safety Objectives (FSO's) and Performance Criteria (PC) as agreed earlier by the Codex Alimentarius. These concepts were part of a new approach for microbiological risk assessments, based on FSO's and PC, to cover the production process as opposed to microbiological criteria which only focus on the end product. However the Commission continues to develop a Regulation on microbiological criteria and, consequently, these need to be addressed as well. Some countries expressed their concerns that not all microbiological criteria were science-based.

11.2 The Authority would report any progress on this topic to the Forum.

**12. Preliminary exchange of thoughts on the Work Programme 2005 (Doc AF 01.10.2004 – 7, Doc AF 01.10.2004 – 8)**

12.1 Herman Koëter introduced the Work Programme 2005 to the Forum, highlighting the four main areas of science:

- Opinions in response to questions
- Assessment of regulated substances and risk-related factors
- Monitoring of specific risk factors and diseases
- Investment in food science

12.2 Following a discussion by the Forum, it was stated that:

- the Forum would indicate to the Authority by the end of October their priorities and where the Authority may need to add emphasis. In addition, the Forum would make suggestions for additional work and for changes for approaches of the work;
- self-tasking activities had been formulated as formal questions and were included in the Register of Questions;
- the Authority would look into the possibility of introducing the identification of new risks into the Work Programme;
- the Authority and the Member States would make an effort to find out what had been done in certain areas at national level. The Register, for instance, would in the near future allow Member States and other parties to provide input and data;

- harmonisation and standardisation, especially when it comes to monitoring of biological contamination, was identified as a priority area. The Authority confirmed that the monitoring of zoonoses had already started;
- the issue of obesity is currently being discussed with the Commission. The Authority is limited by the founding Regulation in this area to requests from the Commission and in nutrition and diet in general discussions with the Commission continue;
- the Authority would not look in detail into the possibility of national authorities undertaken work on ESFA's behalf. The Forum members would be requested to provide names and contact details of institutions which could assist EFSA with certain scientific activities. This was in the context of Article 36 of the Regulation.

The Advisory Forum expressed its support for the outline, main themes and targets of the Work Programme 2005.

### **13. Standing Matters**

13.1 Anne-Laure Gassin informed the Forum on the 4th meeting of the Working Group on Communications which had taken place on 14 and 15 June in Parma. The Working Group also took advantage of the meeting to have in-depth interviews with users of the extranet and to show the functionalities of the tool. In order to be better informed of the organisation of risk communications at national level, it was agreed to allow time in future meetings for 1-2 countries to present how risk communication is handled at national level, the risk communications environment as well as the principal themes and challenges. The 5th meeting of the Working Group on 7 October in Vienna would cover an analysis of the communication activities on semicarbazide in Europe, an exchange of information on key issues regarding risk communication and forward planning at national level. The WG would also be updated on the Extranet and videoconference projects, the Advisory Forum and stakeholder events and the outcome of the crisis scenario exercise.

13.2 Herman Koëter announced the 2nd Scientific colloquium of the Authority on 13 and 14 December 2004. The topic would be “Micro-organisms in Food and Feed– Qualified Presumption of Safety – QPS”. The colloquium would look at having QPS for a variety of bacterial and fungal species strains used in fermented foods, such as alcoholic drinks, butter cheeses and bread. Unlike micro-organisms used as feed additives or as plant protection products, these micro-organisms are not subject to Community regulation. The Authority had organised the colloquium in order to have an open scientific debate on the QPS approach and to explore options on how to develop QPS into a proposal for the regulatory community that is based on sound scientific principles. Information on the colloquium could be found on the Authority's website ([http://www.efsa.eu.int/science/colloquium\\_series/no2\\_qps/610\\_en.html](http://www.efsa.eu.int/science/colloquium_series/no2_qps/610_en.html)). The outcome of the discussion would be used as a starting point by the QPS Working Group of the Scientific Committee to further explore whether the proposed approach should be developed as an opinion to be adopted by the Authority.

13.3 Herman Koëter updated the meeting on coccidiostats for which the Authority has finalised all assessments. EMEA has also addressed coccidiostats independently from the Authority which could potentially lead to different opinions and assessments. Coordination with EMEA was currently progressing. A note on the publication on

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brominated flame retardants in salmon was distributed on 11 August and appreciated by the Member States.

13.4 Portugal stated that the question posed to the Authority by the French authorities on a reassessment of the BSE-situation in Portugal, was inappropriate and potentially wasted valuable resources. Since new data was available in their view, Portugal expected the embargo to be withdrawn soon and hoped that the risk assessment experts would discuss the matter quickly. Portugal stated that it hoped that the Authority would show its independence and responsibilities in the matter. The Chair confirmed that the Authority would take an independent approach and would neither be influenced by the politics surrounding the question nor by any third party. The Working Group would meet again on 15 November and a conclusion could be reached in the plenary meeting of 1 and 2 December.

13.5 The UK reported four outbreaks of salmonella in various parts of the country. A national outbreak control team was investigating the cause of these outbreaks. Preliminary research shows that the cause goes towards the consumption of lettuce in fast-food outlets.

13.6 Greece reported an increase of Cadmium in metallic water coolers. Greece would send a note with the appropriate information to the Authority and the Forum.

**14. Advisory Forum meetings in 2005 (AF Doc 01.10.2004 – 9)**

14.1 The dates for Advisory Forum meetings in 2005 have been set on:

- 3 and 4 February Lisbon, Portugal
- 7 and 8 April Sweden
- 2 and 3 June Luxembourg
- 29 and 30 September Cyprus
- 24 and 25 November United Kingdom

**15. Close of meeting**

15.1 The Chair closed the meeting by thanking the members and observers for their positive and constructive approach, the interpreters, the Authority's team for having organised the meeting and the Italian Instituto Superiore di Sanita for their kind hospitality.

15.2 The next meeting would take place on the afternoon of 3 February and continue with a full day session on 4 February 2005 in Brussels; the details for this meeting would be communicated as soon as possible.