



Brussels, 9 October 2003
EFSA/CONTAM/16 final

MINUTES OF THE 2ND PLENARY MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC PANEL ON CONTAMINANTS IN THE FOOD CHAIN (CONTAM) HELD ON 7 AND 8 JULY 2003 IN BRUSSELS

PARTICIPANTS

CONTAM panel:

Denis Bard, Christina Bergsten, Angelo Carere, Lucio Guido Costa; Jean-Pierre Cravedi¹, Alessandro Di Domenico, Roberto Fanelli, Johanna Fink-Gremmels¹, John Gilbert, Philippe Grandjean, Niklas Johansson, Agneta Oskarsson, Andrew Renwick, Jirí Ruprich, Josef Schlatter, Greet Schoeters, Dieter Schrenk, Rolaf van Leeuwen, Philippe Verger

EFSA

Djien Liem (Scientific Co-ordination Scientific Committee), Torben Hallas-Møller (Scientific Co-ordination AFC Panel), Hanne Pedersen (Administrative Secretariat Contaminants Panel)

European Commission

Achim Boenke (DG-Research), Taina Säteri (DG Health and Consumer Protection), Frans Verstraete (DG Health and Consumer Protection)

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The chair opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. Apologies for absence were received from Jan Alexander, Herman Autrup and Claudia Heppner. Djien Liem offered to replace Claudia Heppner for this meeting.

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The Committee agreed with the chair's proposal to defer agenda item 8 (managing of a food crisis) to the next meeting of the Panel. The proposed agenda was adopted with this modification and a re-ordering of a few agenda items.

¹ Present on 7 July

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no specific interests declared.

4. FEEDBACK FROM THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

The chair informed the Panel about the outcomes of the first meeting of the Scientific Committee (SC) which took place on 30 June and 1 July. Professor Vittorio Silano (I) was elected as Chair. Dr. Ada Knaap (NL) and Dr. Pierre Le Neindre (F) were elected as Vice-Chairs.

The SC discussed the flow of requests for scientific advice from the Commission to the Scientific Committee and Panels of the EFSA, ways to ensure a good interaction between the Scientific Panels and the Committee, the role of the EFSA Secretariat and possible issues for further consideration by the SC in the area of harmonisation of risk assessment approaches, challenges in the area of food safety and a number of issues that may fall within the competence of more than one Panel. It also intends to consider in more detail the issue of qualified presumption of safety, how to handle a food crisis, the need for animal experimentation, ways to improve the communication of risks to the consumer and other stakeholders. The SC agreed to form joint working groups, composed of experts from different Panels, dealing with issues in the area of exposure assessment, quantitative risk assessment, and non-conventional products not considered as foods. The creation of other working groups will be considered at the next plenary meeting.

A more detailed discussion of a list of possible issues, including those suggested by the Panels, would be considered at future plenary meetings. Panels are asked to provide input. The Executive Director agreed with the SC Chair's proposal to organise a press conference or briefing in the autumn of 2003 to present the plans of the Scientific Committee once it has been adopted.

The Committee asked for advice from the Panels on a general format for opinions expressed by the EFSA Panels and Committee (an EFSA proposal was tabled as room document) and on other possible issues to be addressed by the Scientific Committee. It also wished to involve the Panel members on a practical guidance to be provided by the EFSA about how to handle declarations of interest. The views and needs expressed by the members of the Panels will be taken into consideration in the preparation of a guidance document on declarations of interest. It is foreseen to discuss this EFSA proposal at the next plenary meeting of the SC on 27/28 August. The Secretariat informed the Panel that the Scientific Committee will have monthly meetings from the end of August onwards. The Secretariat intends to provide regular updates of the work programme of the EFSA Panels and Committee in order to improve the interaction between the Scientific Panels and Committee.

The chair and the Secretariat will convey the comments expressed by the members of the Panel to the Scientific Committee for further discussion.

5. GENERAL INFORMATION FROM EFSA

The Committee was informed that the Management Board discussed but not adopted a [proposal](#) on access to documents at its meeting on the 18th of June 2003. The Commission services reported that it already received a few requests for access to documents forming the background of an opinion of the SCF. In case of a working document prepared by an expert, the expert or institution will be approached if it is permitted to allow access to the concerning document.

6. MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the inaugural meeting of the Scientific Panel held on 21 May 2003 were adopted subject to incorporation of a few changes proposed by the Panel.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

7.1 Mandate of the panel

The Panel noted issues in the mandate of the Panel (see ²) that might need some clarification. It wished to interpret its mandate as follows: “Contaminants, associated and undesirable substances, such as natural toxicants, mycotoxins and residues of non-authorised substances, not covered by another Panel, in food and feed.” The legislative services of the Commission emphasised that the Contaminants Panel should also deal with evaluations of the animal health aspects of the contaminants to be considered.

7.2 Official work program received from the European Commission

The Secretariat was requested to circulate the Terms of Reference for each of the questions included in the official work programme received from the Commission.

² The mandate as specified under Article 18 of the Decision concerning the establishment and operations of the Scientific Committee and the Panels, adopted by the Authority's Management Board on 17.10.2002.

7.3 Progress report on non-dioxin-like PCBs

The chair of the working group on non-dioxin-like PCBs informed the Panel about the status of the joint EC/WHO project on non-dioxin-like PCBs. This project was started in June 2002 with a kick-off meeting with key experts from the US, Canada, Japan and Europe to define a strategy for the evaluation of this class of substances. The project was set-up in such a way that the efforts put into this subject worldwide would be used to create a scientific basis for a risk assessment of these compounds, i.e. to avoid duplication of efforts and to benefit from data collections and evaluations carried out in the US/Canada, Asia and Europe. There is currently a need to reconsider the original design of the project because of difficulties encountered in the US evaluation of the non-carcinogenic effects of PCBs. The chair will meet with Commission and EFSA officials on the 9th of July to review the options to proceed in this PCB project and to identify a suitable way to maintain the contacts with the developments in and outside Europe.

The PCB working group will consist of members of the Panel (i.e. Rolaf van Leeuwen (chair), Alessandro di Domenico, Roberto Fanelli, Philippe Grandjean, Niklas Johansson, Andrew Renwick, Greet Schoeters and Dieter Schrenk), and a number of other experts with proven expertise in the area of PCBs (names to be confirmed at the next plenary meeting).

7.4 Progress report on organotin compounds

The chair of the Organotin Working Group informed the Panel about the progress in the work carried out by this Working Group. A number of working documents in the area of human health effects have already been prepared. For the exposure assessment, the results of a recent scientific co-operation (SCOOP) task can be used, the report of which has recently become available. The Panel agreed to have a discussion of a first draft comprising a compilation of the contributions for the toxicological assessment at its next plenary meeting. Panel members Alessandro di Domenico and Lucio Guido Costa offered to join the Organotin Working Group.

7.5 Organisation of a working group and prioritisation of the work program related to the review of undesirable substances in animal feed

The Commission services informed the Panel on the background of the request. The mandate includes the remaining issues that could not be finalised by the former Scientific Committee on Animal Nutrition (see the [opinion of the SCAN](#) on undesirable substances in feed, as adopted on 20 February 2003 and updated on 25 April 2003).

The Panel members noted that for most cases it might be an evaluation of the risks of carry-over of substances from feed into food rather than a detailed risk assessment.

The chair expressed his appreciation on behalf of the Panel that Johanna Fink-Gremmels accepted the task to chair a new Joint Working Group composed of experts of the Contaminants Panel and the Panel on additives, products or substances used in animal feed. The first task of this working group will be to develop a template on how to proceed. The Commission services were requested to provide their priorities as to the different items in this evaluation programme. Jean-Pierre Cravedi, Agneta Oskarsson and John Gilbert offered to join the proposed working group. Niklas Johansson offered to join this working group on ad-hoc basis.

7.6 Potential upcoming requests

The Panel was informed by the EFSA Secretariat that the Contaminants Panel may receive requests for scientific advice on the following subjects: review of mycotoxins in food, mercury and methyl mercury, lead, cadmium, nitrate and acrylamide. For each of these cases, it is foreseen that the Commission will request a scientific basis for a revision of existing legislation or for the development of risk management measures. The Panel discussed the background for each of the proposed subjects and a possible strategy for handling of the question. It came to the following conclusions:

- Acrylamide. The Panel took note of the various developments at EU level. The Secretariat informed the Panel that the issue was recently discussed at a meeting of the Advisory Forum of the EFSA (4 July). The EFSA was requested to take the lead in the co-ordination of research on acrylamide. The Advisory Forum agreed with a [proposal](#) of the Authority consisting of the following elements:
 - to host a meeting - an international conference/symposium - organised by the EFSA with assistance national authorities in 2004.
 - that the EFSA Scientific Panel on Contaminants in the Food Chain, in close collaboration with the Commission services will discuss the timing of a reappraisal of the research data collected taking into consideration scientific advice provided by other international scientific advisory bodies (e.g. JECFA's re-assessment of the FAO/WHO's report of June, 2002).
 - that EFSA will co-ordinate research into exposure to acrylamide and risk assessment, in close collaboration with the members of the Advisory Forum and with colleagues from DG's SANCO, JRC and DG Research. Information on the collaboration between DG

Research and EFSA as well as results of the 1st call for proposals in general and related to heat-induced toxicants have been provided.

The Panel expressed its agreement with EFSA's proposal and the timing of the proposed events. It also expressed its appreciation for the work put into the SANCO/EFSA database that was made available on the [Contaminants-website](#) of DG SANCO.

- Nitrate. The Panel was informed on an evaluation to be carried out by a Joint working group of the AFC and BioHaz panels. In view of the possibility that the evaluation might also touch issues related to nitrate as contaminants, it was proposed that a Panel member would join this working group, whenever it is considered necessary. The Secretariat will wait for the Terms of Reference to be provided by the Commission and will then decide on further actions.
- Mercury, lead and cadmium. The Commission services informed the Panel that the background of these questions is formed by new information on occurrence in foods resulting from scientific co-operation tasks and/or by the Commission's need to have an update of the scientific opinions which were expressed many years ago. The Panel took note of recent JECFA evaluations and ongoing studies in the area of methylmercury. The Panel wished to wait for the Terms of Reference of the Commission before it will decide on the ways to proceed, i.e. whether it is needed to create separate working groups or not. In relation to methylmercury, the panel members have been informed about an on-going European research project by DG Research.
- Review of mycotoxins in food. The Panel will be requested to review the current situation based on updated information on their health effects and on new occurrence data. It was decided to wait for the proposal on how to proceed with the evaluations of undesirable substances in feed, before the Panel will define further steps to be taken in the framework of this mycotoxin review. The panel members have been informed about the coming mycotoxin-cluster-information day on the 8th October 2003 which will be held in close link with the ochratoxin A and *fusarium* toxin fora on the 9th and 10th October 2003. Participation of members from the panel as been recommended by the chair.

The Panel also discussed potential other subjects that may fall within the competence of the Contaminants Panel that were not raised by the Commission. The Panel agreed to apply the same requirements for possible future issues as for issues raised by the Commission, i.e. to determine whether the proposed issue should be put on the work programme of the Panel or needs to be allocated to another Panel/Committee. This decision should be based on a discussion of a

background in which the subject is presented accompanied with a clear scientific argumentation. These proposals should be sent to the Secretariat for further distribution prior to the meeting at which a decision on further acceptance will be made. The Panel expressed the opinion that this kind of exchange of views may be helpful to identify priorities for future work. It was noted that it might be needed to have a general guidance from the Scientific Committee on how to set priorities.

It has also been agreed that information on European Research Projects supported by the European Commission, DG Research relevant to this panel will be provided to the secretariat for distribution to members for information and consideration.

7.7 EFSA proposal on format for opinions

The Panel discussed the proposed format for the expression of EFSA opinions. Comments of the Panels will be collected by the EFSA secretariat and brought forward to the meeting of the Scientific Committee on 27 and 28 August. The Panel expressed the common view that EFSA opinions should be considered as a collective consensus opinion rather than an opinion provided by a group of individuals. On those occasions there may be different views within the Panel arising from scientific uncertainties, and these views and the uncertainties should be reflected in the opinion. In cases when an opinion is adopted based on the views of the majority of the members of the Panel, but a consensus cannot be reached, then the nature and basis for the lack of a consensus should be defined and the names of Panel members dissociating themselves from the majority view should be given

8. Discussion on managing a food crisis

This agenda item deferred to one of the next plenary meetings once the EFSA has prepared a document on its role in the case of a food crisis.

9. Potential dates for Panel and Working Group meetings in 2003/2004

The members agreed to keep the following additional dates in 2004 reserved for plenary meetings (1.5 days each, starting at 13:30 hrs on the first day) of the Contaminants Panel:

3-4 February, 6-7 April, 1-2 June, 7-8 September and 9-10 November.

10. Any other business

There was no other business.