



EFSA CODE OF GOOD ADMINISTRATIVE BEHAVIOUR

THE MANAGEMENT BOARD,

Having regard to the Treaty of the European Union, and in particular Articles 21 and 195 thereof,

Having regard to Article 41 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights,

Having regard to Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 January 2002 laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Safety Authority and laying down procedures in matters of food safety¹,

Having regard to the own-initiative inquiry of the European Ombudsman into the existence and the public accessibility, in the different Community institutions and bodies, of a Code of good administrative behaviour for agents or other servants in their relations with the public,

Having regard to the proposal from the Executive Director,

WHEREAS the Amsterdam Treaty has explicitly introduced the concept of openness into the Treaty on European Union by stating that it marks a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen,

WHEREAS the Charter of fundamental rights proclaimed at the Nice Summit in December 2000 includes as fundamental rights of citizenship the right to good administration and the right to complain to the European Ombudsman against maladministration,

WHEREAS, in order to bring the administration closer to the citizens and to guarantee a better quality of administration, a Code should be adopted which contains the basic principles of good administrative behaviour for agents and other servants of the Authority when dealing with the public,

¹ OJ L 31 of 1.2.2002, p. 1

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Considering it therefore desirable to establish a Code governing the principles of good administrative behaviour which the agents and other servants of the Authority should respect in their relations with the public, and to make this Code publicly available,

HAS DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:

Article 1 - General provision

In their relations with the public, any agent and other servant of the Authority shall respect the principles which are laid down in this Decision and which constitute the Code of good administrative behaviour, hereafter referred to as 'the Code'.

Article 2 - Personal scope of application

The Code shall apply to all agents and other servants to whom the Staff Regulations and the Conditions of employment of other servants apply, in their relations with the public.

The Code shall also apply to Members of the Authority's constitutive bodies when acting for or on behalf of the Authority in their relations with the public.

The Authority will take the necessary measures to ensure that the provisions set out in this Code also apply to other persons working for it, such as persons employed under private law contracts, experts on secondment from national civil services and trainees.

The public refers to natural and legal persons, whether they reside or have their registered office in a Member State or not.

Article 3 - Material scope of application

This Code contains the general principles of good administrative behaviour, which apply to all relations of the Authority's agents and other servants with the public, unless they are governed by specific provisions.

The principles set out in this Code do not apply to the relations between the Authority and its agents and other servants. Those relations are governed by the Staff Regulations.

Article 4 - Lawfulness

The agents or other servants of the Authority shall act according to law and apply the rules and procedures laid down in Community legislation. The agents or other servants of the Authority shall in particular take care that decisions which affect the rights or interests of individuals have a basis in law and that their content complies with the law.

Article 5 - Absence of discrimination

In dealing with requests from the public and in taking decisions, the agents or other servants of the Authority shall ensure that the principle of equality of treatment is

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respected. Members of the public who are in the same situation shall be treated in a similar manner.

If any difference in treatment is made, the agents or other servants of the Authority shall ensure that it is justified by the objective relevant features of the particular case.

The agents or other servants of the Authority shall in particular avoid any unjustified discrimination between members of the public based on nationality, sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation.

Article 6 – Proportionality

When taking decisions, the agents or other servants of the Authority shall ensure that the measures taken are proportional to the aim pursued. The agents or other servants shall in particular avoid restricting the rights of the citizens or imposing charges on them, when those restrictions or charges are not in a reasonable relation with the purpose of the action pursued.

When taking decisions, the agents or other servants of the Authority shall strike a fair balance between the interests of private persons and the general public interest.

Article 7 - Absence of abuse of power

Powers shall be exercised solely for the purposes for which they have been conferred by the relevant provisions. The agents or other servants of the Authority shall in particular avoid using those powers for purposes which have no basis in the law or which are not motivated by any public interest.

Article 8- Impartiality and independence

The agents or other servants of the Authority shall be impartial and independent. They shall abstain from any arbitrary action adversely affecting members of the public, as well as from any preferential treatment on any grounds whatsoever.

The agents or other servants of the Authority shall not be guided by any outside influences of whatever kind, including political influences, or by personal interests.

The agents or other servants shall abstain from being involved in the taking of a decision on a matter concerning their own interests, or those of their family, relatives, friends and acquaintances.

Article 9 - Objectivity

When taking decisions, the agents or other servants shall take into consideration the relevant factors and give each of them its proper weight in the decision, whilst excluding any irrelevant element from consideration.

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Article 10 - Legitimate expectations and consistency

The agents or other servants of the Authority shall be consistent in their own administrative behaviour as well as with the administrative action of the Authority. The agents or other servants shall follow the Authority's normal administrative practices, unless there are legitimate grounds for departing from those practices in an individual case.

The agents or other servants shall respect the legitimate and reasonable expectations that members of the public have in the light of how the Authority has acted in the past.

Article 11 - Fairness

The agents or other servants of the Authority shall act fairly and reasonably.

Article 12 - Courtesy

The agents or other servants of the Authority shall be service-minded, correct, courteous and accessible in relations with the public. When answering correspondence, telephone calls and e-mails, the agents or other servants shall try as much as possible to be helpful and to reply to the questions which are asked.

If an agent or other servant is not responsible for the matter concerned, he or she shall direct the citizen to the appropriate agent or other servant.

If an error occurs which negatively affects the rights or interests of a member of the public, the agents or other servants shall apologise for it.

Article 13 - Reply to letters in the language of the citizen

The agents or other servants shall ensure that every citizen of the Union or any member of the public who writes to the Authority in one of the Treaty languages receives an answer in the same language.

Article 14 - Acknowledgement of receipt and indication of the competent agent or other servant

Every letter or complaint to the Authority shall receive an acknowledgement of receipt within a period of two weeks, except if a substantive reply can be sent within that period.

The reply or acknowledgement of receipt shall indicate the name and the telephone number of the agent or other servant who is dealing with the matter, as well as the service to which he or she belongs.

No acknowledgement of receipt and no reply need be sent in cases where letters or complaints are abusive because of their excessive number or because of their repetitive or pointless character.

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Article 15 - Obligation to transfer to the competent service of the Authority

If a letter or a complaint to the Authority is addressed or transmitted to a department which has no competence to deal with it, its staff shall ensure that the file is transferred without delay to the competent department of the Authority.

The department which originally received the letter or complaint shall notify the author of this transfer and shall indicate the name and the telephone number of the agent or other servant to whom the file has been passed.

Article 16 - Right to be heard and to make statements

In cases where the rights or interests of individuals are involved, the agents or other servants shall ensure that, at every stage in the decision-making procedure, the rights of defence are respected.

Every member of the public shall have the right, in cases where a decision affecting his rights or interests has to be taken, to submit written comments and, when needed, to present oral observations before the decision is taken.

Article 17 - Reasonable time-limit for taking decisions

The agents or other servants shall ensure that a decision on every request or complaint to the Authority is taken within a reasonable time limit, without delay, and in any case no later than two months from the date of receipt. The same rule shall apply for answering letters from members of the public.

If a request or a complaint to the Authority cannot, because of the complexity of the matters which it raises, be decided upon within the above-mentioned time-limit, the agents or other servants shall inform the author thereof as soon as possible. In that case, a definitive decision should be notified to the author in the shortest time.

Article 18 - Duty to state the grounds of decisions

Every decision, opinion or recommendation of the Authority which may adversely affect the rights or interests of a private person shall state the grounds on which it is based by indicating clearly the relevant facts and the legal basis of the decision.

The agents or other servants shall avoid making decisions which are based on brief or vague grounds or which do not contain individual reasoning.

If it is not possible, because of the large number of persons concerned by similar decisions, to communicate in detail the grounds of the decision and where standard replies are therefore made, the agents or other servants shall guarantee that he subsequently provides the citizen who expressly requests it with an individual reasoning.

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Article 19 - Indication of the possibilities of appeal

A decision, opinion or recommendation of the Authority which may adversely affect the rights or interests of a private person shall as appropriate contain an indication of the appeal possibilities available for challenging the decision, opinion or recommendation. It shall in particular indicate the nature of the remedies, the bodies before which they can be exercised, as well as the time limits for exercising them.

Article 20 - Notification of the decision or recommendation

The agents or other servants shall ensure that decisions or recommendations which affect the rights or interests of individual persons are notified in writing, as soon as the decision has been taken, to the person or persons concerned.

The agents or other servants shall abstain from communicating the decision to other sources until the persons or persons concerned have been informed.

Article 21- Data protection

The agents or other servants who deal with personal data concerning a citizen shall respect the principles laid down in the Directive 95/46/EC on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and the free movement of such data.

The agents or other servants shall in particular avoid processing personal data for non-legitimate purposes or the transmission of such data to non-authorized persons.

Article 22 - Requests for information

The agents or other servants shall, when they have responsibility for the matter concerned, provide members of the public with the information that they request. They shall ensure that the information communicated is clear and understandable.

If an oral request for information is too complicated or too comprehensive to be dealt with, the agents or other servants shall advise the person concerned to formulate his demand in writing.

If, because of its confidentiality, an agent or other servant may not disclose the information requested, he or she shall, in accordance with Article 18 of this Code, indicate to the person concerned the reasons why he or she cannot communicate the information.

Further to requests for information on matters for which he or she has no responsibility, the agent or other servant shall direct the requester to the competent person and indicate his or her name and telephone number. Further to requests for information concerning another Community institution or body, the agent or other servant shall direct the requester to that institution or body.

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Where appropriate, the agent or other servant shall, depending on the subject of the request, direct the person seeking information to the unit or sector responsible for providing information to the public.

Article 23 - Requests for public access to documents

Further to requests for access to documents of the Authority, the agents or other servants shall give access to these documents in accordance with the Decision on access to EFSA documents.

If the agents or other servants cannot comply with an oral request for access to documents, the citizen shall be advised to formulate it in writing.

Article 24 - Keeping of adequate records

The Authority's departments shall keep adequate records of their incoming and outgoing mail, of the documents they receive, and of the measures they take.

Article 25 - Public access to the Code

The Authority will take the necessary measures in order to ensure that this Code enjoys the widest possible publicity amongst the citizens. It will in particular make it available on its Internet site and will provide a copy of this Code to any citizen who requests it.

Article 26 - Right to complain to the European Ombudsman

Any failure of an agent or other servant to comply with the principles set out in this Code may be the subject of a complaint to the European Ombudsman in accordance with Article 195 of the Treaty establishing the European Community and the Statute of the European Ombudsman.

Article 27 - Revision

Within two years of entry into force of this Decision, the Executive Director shall submit to the European Ombudsman a report on the implementation of this Decision.

Article 28 - Entry into force

This Decision will take effect from 1 October 2003 and will be published on the Authority's Internet site.

Done at Brussels on 16 September 2003

Dr Stuart Slorach
The Chair