



Draft Minutes

FIFTH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

BRUSSELS

4 NOVEMBER 2003

Members of the Advisory Forum

Chair: Geoffrey Podger, Executive Director, EFSA

Austria	Roland Grossgut	Italy	Agostino Macri
Belgium	Charles Crémer	Luxembourg	Felix Wildschutz
Denmark	Hans Peter Jensen	Netherlands	Willem De Wit
Finland	Jorma Hirn	Portugal	Isabel Maria Meirelles Teixeira
France	Martin Hirsch	Spain	Pilar Farjas
Germany	Andreas Hensel	Sweden	Leif Busk
Greece	Christina Papanikolaou	UK	Andrew Wadge
Ireland	Alan Reilly		

Observers and Invitees of the Executive Director

Czech Republic	Klara Zuzankova	Slovak Republic	Jan Stulc
Hungary	Agnes Horvath	Slovenia	Marusa Adamic
Iceland	Elin Gudmundsdóttir	Switzerland	Michael Beer
Norway	Kristin Farden	EU Commission	Robert Vanhoorde Jeannie Vergnettes

Staff of the European Food Safety Authority

Anne-Laure Gassin	Ingela Soderlund
Torben Hallas-Möller	Anja Van Impe
Herman Koeter	Katty Verhelst
Christine Majewski	

1. Introduction by Geoffrey Podger and the adoption of the agenda (Doc 04.11.2003 – 1)

1.1 The Chair welcomed the Advisory Forum members and observers. Bob Vanhoorde, Head of Unit of the Interface Unit at the European Commission, was introduced.

1.2 The agenda was adopted.

2. Introduction to the Advisory Forum of Herman Koëter, Director of Science, European Food Safety Authority, and Deputy Executive Director and Anne-Laure Gassin, Director of Communications.

2.1 The Chair introduced 3 new appointments at the Authority, present at the meeting:

- Herman Koëter (Dutch nationality) as the Authority's Deputy Executive Director and Director of Science. Mr Koëter has previously been employed at OECD.
- Anne-Laure Gassin (French nationality) as Director of Communications. Ms Gassin has previously worked at Kellogg's and at the European Commission.
- Ingela Soderlund (Swedish nationality) will be working with Christine Majewski in the area of International and Institutional Affairs.

3. Minutes of the meeting 10 September in Madrid and matters arising (Doc 04.11.2003 – 2)

3.1 The minutes of the last Advisory Forum meeting were approved, subject to a change made by France. The document will be published on the Authority's website.

4. Update by Geoffrey Podger on progress at EFSA.

4.1 The Authority and the European Commission have been developing the work programme for 2004. This programme, together with the Authority's overall management plan, will be presented and discussed at the Management Board meeting of 3 December. The Authority has not reached final conclusions yet since the workload from the Commission, the Parliament and the Member States is not known yet. The paper that will be presented to the Management Board will be the best account at the moment and needs to be reconsidered according to the priorities which emerge during the year. The work programme will be circulated to the Advisory Forum in early December.

4.2 The Authority is hopeful that its new website will come into being by the end of this year.

4.3 It was suggested to the Authority that there would be an advantage to hold a meeting with health and research institutions. The Authority and these institutions have a considerable mutual interest in building contacts and networks. The planning of this meeting is still at an early stage and the major institutions still need to be contacted. The Advisory Forum will be consulted regarding the invitations and on the way to proceed.

4.4 The working group on Communications has its first meeting on 24 November under the chairmanship of Anna-Laure Gassin. The first meeting of the working

AF 11.12.2003 – 2

Draft minutes - 4 November 2003

group on IT will take place at the beginning of 2004 once the new head of IT is in place.

5. Update on SEM. State of Play and lessons learnt. (Docs 04.11.2003 – 3)

5.1 The Chair invited the members and observers to comment on the recent scare relating to SEM in certain packaged foods.

5.2 There followed a full discussion concerning the way in which the SEM issue had been handled both by EFSA and the national Agencies. Some members felt that there could have been greater involvement of national Agencies in the lead up to the delivery of the statements from EFSA. France in particular raised some issues about the way SEM was dealt with:

- The Authority and the Advisory Forum did not work as a network, there were only a few contacts which was not satisfactory- there should have been more. France suggested that the Authority should involve national agencies more in these matters.
- It was perceived that the industry had given more information to the Authority than to the national agencies. France spoke to the industry and was surprised to learn that industry was going to ask for authorisation from EFSA to give information to national authorities; if true, France did not see this as a transparent approach.
- France did not receive a reply when it asked certain questions to the Authority regarding data.
- France stated that less than 100 analysis (less than 40 for baby food) were done which seemed too little to base an opinion on. However both EFSA and other national Authorities felt that the exchanges had been adequate.
- France expressed an uneasiness about the whole situation of SEM. They do not think the Authority can have a procedure which bypasses the network. SEM was considered as being important and a need of exchange of information and scientific data was expected in order to answer a question from a national authority. The opinion as being presented by the Authority was the final opinion and the national Authorities had no opportunity to provide feedback. France had to defend the opinion to consumers and press and felt uncomfortable doing that, under these circumstances. France suggested that the national Authorities should have the possibility to contribute and involve the national experts by circulating a draft opinion to them in writing or in a meeting.
- France reminded its request from the previous meeting of the advisory forum : EFSA should request analysis from laboratories independent from the industries. France would like that a laboratory should be made responsible for harmonizing the methods used in the different countries; the Authority should play a role in the data collection and the sharing of the data with the national agencies.

AF 11.12.2003 – 2

Draft minutes - 4 November 2003

It was generally felt however that exchanges would improve once EFSA had enough staff in place to enhance cooperation between itself and the national agencies.

5.3 Following a discussion between the members, the Chair concluded on the following :

- The Authority and the members were faced with the most testing kind of experience of the new arrangements, i.e. an issue with public concerns on a sensitive product in widespread public use, limited time available, and differing views on methodology within the Member States. The Authority is hoping to build on the SEM experience, and to improve wherever necessary.
- The concern of some members that industry had provided the Authority with more data than the Authority shared with Member States was based on erroneous information. The issue did however identify the need for EFSA to provide access to available data to Member States in such circumstances. Equally the Chair requested that MSs share information with EFSA and each other as quickly as possible, especially with regard to issues of general interest.
- Both EFSA and the Member States believed that there was an adequate analytical base for the conclusions drawn.
- The working group on Communication will set in place a Community wide mechanism to address communications matters related to food safety risks. Since there will be differences on advice at national level, the national authorities would appear to have a particular role in addressing and communicating particular issues that concern their own citizens.
- There was general agreement to try and obtain to the fullest extent possible data from the Member States before the risk assessment process starts. A meeting with the members is desirable during the process, preferably through video- or teleconferencing. While the Authority's founding regulation 178/2002/EC requires independence of the Scientific Committee and the Panels, the object is to try to avoid situations to the maximum possible extent where Member States' opinions differ from the Authority's.
- The Chair supported France's proposal to have a meeting to look at a risk assessment, although the scope of this kind of meeting is to be discussed.

5.4 The Chair thanked the members for their participation in the debate and their openness. He is hopeful that the useful discussion will lead to progress in key areas while recognising that overall the SEM issue had gone well.

6. Report back on the EFSA Colloque in Ostend, 23 – 25 October 2003

6.1 The colloque has achieved its purpose of bringing stakeholders together and

AF 11.12.2003 – 2

Draft minutes - 4 November 2003

establishing relationships that will help all stakeholders to work together to meet the challenges of safeguarding the food chain into the future. The conclusions that were reached by the working groups will feed into a set of recommendations to go forward to the Management Board in its December meeting. These recommendations are:

- i) in addition to webstreaming, interested observers should, given advance notice, be allowed to attend Board meetings;

- (ii) the chairman of the Scientific Committee and Panels should be asked to employ, as appropriate, additional procedures (eg public hearings, evaluations of reports in draft);

- (iii) EFSA staff should involve stakeholders, where appropriate, in the risk communication;

- (iv) progress on (i), (ii) and (iii) should be reviewed by the Management Board after one year;

- (v) the Board should continue its policy of providing adequate space in the Work Programmes to allow for the consideration of wider scientific issues;

- (vi) the Executive Director should bring forward proposals, after discussion with interested parties, for an EFSA stakeholders consultative forum; and

- (vii) an EFSA e-zine be issued from March 2004 to proactively publicise its activities.

6.2 Ireland participated in the colloque on behalf of the Advisory Forum. Alan Reilly reported that it was a useful two days and a great opportunity to meet the other stakeholders.

7. RTD presentation on their work including the 6th Framework programme - Etienne Magnien of the Directorate General for Research, European Commission

7.1 Etienne Magnien, acting Director at the Research Directorate-General, gave an overview of the Commission's 6th Framework Programme, the 2004-2005 Work Programmes and its link with the Authority.

7.2 The Advisory Forum members were requested to contribute to DG Research's 2005-2006 Work Programme by submitting ideas and suggestions to the Authority's secretariat by the end of November.

7.3 The Chair thanked Mr Magnien and his colleagues for the presentation and for working together with the Authority.

8. Update on the ideas for an Advisory Forum “Event” in 2004 and Organising Task Force (AF 04.11.2003 – 4)

- 8.1 Christine Majewski introduced this item by informing the Advisory Forum members on the event that the Authority is looking to organise in the course of 2004. The Task Force has been formed and is comprised of Andreas Hensel (Germany), Maria Purificación Neira González (Spain), Ray Ellard (Ireland), Hans Peter Jensen (Denmark), and Willem De Wit (Netherlands) and from the Authority Christine Majewski, Ingela Soderlund, and Katty Verhelst.
- 8.2 The members were requested to provide the Authority with nominations for the Task Force from other members of the Forum or their alternates before the end of 2003.
- 8.3 The first planning meeting will be held in January 2004; any ideas and suggestions should be sent to the Authority.

9. Discussion on the Rapid Alert system – request from Germany

- 9.1 Following a request from Germany to look into the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF), the Chair and the members agreed that the RASFF experts from the Commission are to be invited to the Advisory Forum meeting on 11 December.
- 9.2 The Authority will then with the Advisory Forum members prepare a note if appropriate concerning their views for improvement.

10. STANDING MATTERS - Update and exchange of views on matters raised by the Member States on significant new and existing scientific issues under consideration at national level

- 10.1 Finland raised the issue of alkaloids in buckwheat flour in Slovenia. The Health Inspectorate of Slovenia had indicated over 50 cases of food poisoning all around the country. Further inspection investigations and analysis performed had revealed a presence of alkaloids atropine and scopolamine in buckwheat flour and derivatives and datura stramonium seeds in buckwheat grain imported from third countries. The Authority informed the meeting that it has been requested to provide a scientific opinion on the presence of tropane alkaloids produced by datura stramonium in animal feed. The Authority also stated that it was making further efforts to get information on whether or not scientific advice is needed.
- 10.2 France informed the Advisory Forum that a form of prion has been identified in older animals. France is preparing a report and will circulate it to the Advisory Forum. Italy reported that studies are being carried out which links up with evidence by Japan who have been working on calves infected by BSE. The results from Italy were expected to reveal mutations of prions. The Chair asked the members to keep informing each other on any new findings on the matter.

AF 11.12.2003 – 2

Draft minutes - 4 November 2003

- An article is to be published in the New England Journal of Medicine in its edition of 6 November 2003.
- 10.3 France raised the declaration of confidentiality that scientists have to sign when attending an expert meeting of the Authority. The Chair explained that the statement relates to the legal obligation under Regulation 178/2002/EC, i.e. not to divulge any information prior to adopting the scientific opinion. The declarations have been changed so that they reflect only the appropriate legal obligation.
- 10.4 The Chair informed the members that the Authority's Panel on Genetically Modified Organisms will reach a view on maize (NK 603) before the first week of December. The opinion may attract a significant degree of public and media attention. The Authority will communicate the timeframe and content of its communication in advance to the Advisory Forum in advance.
- 10.5 Ireland expressed its thanks to those members who contributed to issues of fortification of food on folic acid to reduce neurotube defects.

11. Close of meeting

- 11.1 The Chair closed the meeting by thanking the members for their positive and constructive approach, the interpreters, and the EFSA team for having organised the meeting.