AF–01.06.2004 – 2
Adopted minutes

European Food Safety Authority

ADOPTED Minutes

EIGHT MEETING OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

NATIONAL FOOD AGENCY FINLAND (NFA), HELSINKI

6 APRIL 2004

Members of the Advisory Forum

Chair: Geoffrey Podger, Executive Director, EFSA

Austria	Roland Grossgut	Germany	Ekkehard Weise
Belgium	Charles Cremer	Greece	Mina Papathanasiou
Denmark	Hans Peter Jensen	Ireland	Raymond Ellard
Finland	Jorma Hirn	Italy	Paulo Aureli
	Gun Winter	Luxembourg	Felix Wildschutz
	Hannu Kukkonen	Netherlands	Willem De Wit
	Jouko Tuomisto	Portugal	Isabel Maria Meirelles Teixeira
	Tuula Honkanen-Buzalski	UK	Judith Hilton
France	Martin Hirsch		

Observers and Invitees of the Executive Director

Cyprus	Costas Michael	Poland	Krzysztof Pajączek
Hungary	Peter Biacs	Slovania	Marusa Adamic
Norway	Kirstin Faerden	Switzerland	Michael Beer

Staff of the European Food Safety Authority

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

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1. Welcome by the Finnish Authorities

1.1 Matti Aho, Departmental Head in the Ministry of Agriculture, welcomed the Advisory Forum members and observer on behalf of Juha Korkeaoja, the Finnish Minister of Agriculture and Forests to Finland. He further introduced NFA and reflected on two main questions: (1) what is science for safe food? And (2) what is the role of the Authority in the decision-making process in the European Community.

1.2 The Chair thanked Mr Aho 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 06.04.2004 – 1)

2.1 The Chair thanked the NFA for their hospitality, the dinner and the organisation of the meeting. In addition, the Chair thanked the City of Helsinki who had greatly helped with setting up a future home in Helsinki for the Authority. Although another seat was allocated to the Authority, the Chair put on record the continuing strength of the Finnish contribution.

2.2 Apologies for this meeting were received from the Commission, Spain and Sweden.

2.3 The agenda was adopted.

3. Minutes of the meeting 13 February in Dublin and matters arising (Doc AF 06.04.2004 – 2)

3.1 The minutes of the Advisory Forum meeting of 13 February were approved, subject to the comments made by The Netherlands, Belgium and France.

3.2 The minutes would be published on the Authority's website and circulated to the Management Board members.

4. Update by Geoffrey Podger on progress at EFSA including move to Parma, and call for new members to certain EFSA scientific Panels

4.1 The Chair reported the Forum on a useful meeting between the Authority and the WHO. The objective of the meeting was to see how both organisations can usefully cooperate with each other, exchange information and to look ahead at work programmes in order not to duplicate but strengthen activities. The Advisory Forum was invited to inform the Authority on any particular issues that should be raised with the WHO.

- The Authority had been invited to the EP's Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy to discuss the proposal for a European Parliament and Council regulation on nutrition on health claims made on foods, and the Authority's involvement in it: The Committee voted that they would not seek to continue with the proposal by the European Commission on health claims because they had not been able to reach a consensus view. The Commission legislation will not go forward and may be taken up in November 2004 by the new Parliament.
- The Authority was not consulted on the legislation before it was put forward. The Chair informed the Forum that the Authority is supportive of the principle and that a regulation is very much necessary to protect consumers. The Authority had made it clear they

would need to work together with stakeholders on what is a workable way to take the concept forward. If the Parliament decided to take up EFSA's proposal on the issue of health claims, the Chair will discuss the involvement of the national authorities in the Advisory Forum.

- Under the current proposal, the Authority would have itself to evaluate individual labelling of health claims. This exercise would be extremely resource intensive and difficult to do since it would probably need to be done for all national countries. The Chair explained that the Advisory Forum would need to be involved because not all the work could be done by the Authority. The Authority could evaluate the basic information and the national authorities could than evaluate whether or not the information could lead to misinterpretation by consumers. Nevertheless EFSA believed in such case the whole task unnecessary and a waste of resources.
- The Chair concluded that the proposal was currently in a difficult stage. Since the Commission is not keen to withdraw the proposal, the likely outcome is that there would be significant amendments. Any matters of interest to the Advisory Forum will be raised in a future meeting.

4.3 Herman Koëter updated the meeting on the guidance document for the assessment of GMOs. This document provides detailed guidance to assist applicants in the preparation and presentation of applications for the authorisation of GM food and/or feed containing, consisting of or produced from GM plants. The Advisory Forum was invited to submit written comments through an on-line consultation process by 30 April 2004 (http://www.efsa.eu.int/consultation/372_en.html). In keeping with its policy of openness and transparency, the Authority will organise a public forum with stakeholders prior to the final adoption of the guidance document. This consultation will be focused on the scientific aspects of GM risk assessment and will be held on 25 May 2004 in Brussels.

4.4 Herman Koëter informed the Forum that the Authority has been in discussion with the Commission on MRLs. Since the Authority now knows which tasks are its responsibility, the Authority could recruit the appropriate people to deal with the activity. It is estimated that a minimum of 20 additional staff members are needed and that a part of this activity can be outsourced.

4.5 The Authority, the European Commission, European Parliament and industry met on the issue of salmon. Both the EP and the Commission were sympathetic to the industry who suffered from the publication in Science. Herman Koëter reminded the Forum that the Authority gave no opinion on the article since the levels were no indication of additional measures to be taken and since more data needed to be developed.

4.6 Herman Koëter informed the meeting that the register of questions is available on the Authority's website (http://www.efsa.eu.int/register/qr_disclaimer_en.html). The register was continuously being updated.

4.7 Anne-Laure Gassin updated the Forum on the Authority's website and its new functionalities. The links to the Advisory members' and observers' sites would be operational in the very near future. In addition to a newsletter, the Authority distributes a highlights mailing every Wednesday and Friday. The Forum was requested to disseminate the information on the Authority's services at national level.

4.8 The Chair informed the meeting that the Call for expression of interest for membership of five Scientific Panels has closed on 15 March. The Chair thanked the Forum for encouraging suitable individuals to apply. Around 230 applications were received and a timetable would be set in the course of April. The same procedure would be used as for the initial Call in

2003. Upon completion of the evaluation, the Authority would draw up a shortlist to be shared with the Advisory Forum for feedback and comments on applicants on this shortlist. A final list would be composed for approval by the Management Board. The Chair agreed to provide the Forum with the full application file as long as confidentiality was not be breached.

4.9 The Chair expressed his thanks to those members who took part in the interviews in the context of the vision and mission of the Authority. The Authority would put together a paper on the various views, taking the confidentiality into account, and would discuss this in a future Advisory Forum meeting.

4.10 The Chair updated the members and observers on the series of meetings that have been taken place with the Italian authorities, both in Parma and in Brussels. The seat agreement will probably be signed in April. Detailed negotiations are still going on in terms of the temporary building and the purpose-built new building. It was envisaged that the start of the move will take place late autumn 2004 and that the move will take a year to fully complete.

5. Discussion on the issue of methyl mercury in fish, the opinion of the Contaminants Panel including the issue of the need for intake data (Doc 06.04.2004 - 3 and Doc 06.04.2004 - 4)

5.1 Herman Koëter gave an overview of the two documents, addressing the Authority's opinion on mercury and methyl mercury in food and the call for national dietary intake data. Since the Authority would like to aim at developing or generating additional data which would give a better picture on the intake, the Advisory Forum is invited to express its interest by 15 May. Forum members and observers willing to contribute to this data collection will be provided with further details of preferred data collection approaches and reporting formats in order to allow comparison and statistical analysis of national data. Depending on the level of participation and commitment of the Forum, the Authority would consider outsourcing the international coordination of the national data collection and analysis and would issue a call for tenders to apply for this project.

5.2 Following a discussion, the Advisory Forum agreed on the following:

- The Authority would make an inventory first of what is being done at national level
- The Authority would make use of existing data and see how it can be harmonised and generate new data
- The working mechanism would be discussed with the interested member states
- Not too many elements should be brought together. The data collection should focus on population, type of contaminants and type of fish
- The Authority would reflect on how to proceed with risk/benefit analysis. The item would be put on the agenda of future Advisory Forum meeting

6. SEM – update and reminder concerning data requested by EFSA (Doc 06.04.2004 – 5)

6.1 Herman Koëter introduced the paper by thanking those member states who have already provided data on the SEM content of baby food, including infant formula, and other foods which have been packed in glass jars with metal lids.

6.2 The Advisory Forum is invited to submit:

- Any analytical data on SEM, accompanied with details of sampling and methods

- Data on special foods and/or production processes differing from the general trend, and which may be specific to some member states
- Any information member states may have concerning the formation and content of SEM in food and food ingredients where the occurrence is not caused by the use of azodicarbonamide in gaskets for metal lids or due to illegal use of nitrofurans
- Data on the potential formation of SEM following treatment of food ingredients and foods with more realistic concentrations of hypochlorite to show whether this could be indeed the reason behind some findings of SEM in food and food ingredients
- Any other information concerning concentrations of SEM in foods and theories of its likely source or generation

6.3 Following the concern raised by Forum members as to whether the industry would in fact be able to meet the Commission deadline for resolving the SEM issue, the Chair would write a letter to the Commission informing them on the discussion in the Advisory Forum and requesting a possible EU meeting with the industry, the member states and the Authority.

7. EFSA Scientific Colloquium on Setting Acceptable Exposure Limits for Dioxins, Furans and PCBs: Revisiting the Process (Doc 06.04.2004 - 6)

7.1 Herman Koëter gave an overview of the paper and explained that document 6 follows up on the discussion in the Advisory Forum meeting of 13 February. The Advisory Forum concluded then that (1) there were no new scientific data and (2) the US EPA standards were different from the other standards used because of differences in methodology and principles.

7.2 Based on the suggestion by some member states to carry out a thorough analysis of the methodology for the evaluation of the food safety risks of contaminants in oily fish, the Authority has decided to arrange for an open scientific meeting of experts on dioxin/furan/PCB toxicity and risk assessment and evaluation methodologies to discuss and analyze the various approaches for setting tolerable intake levels for these contaminants.

7.3 Following a discussion, the Advisory Forum agreed on the following:

- Aside from topics as (1) principles of and approaches for risk additivity, (2) thresholds for carcinogenic effects, and (3) the assessment of contaminants that induce toxicities other than cancer, exposure models would be included in the agenda
- The Authority would involve all member states
- The event would address current approaches and should not be too general
- In order to have all inputs and a well-balanced representation, a number of international and European organisations would be invited
- Some short introductions would be considered to set the scene for the debate
- The dates and venue for this colloquium was set for 28-29 June in Brussels.

8. Advisory Forum Event in Berlin (Doc 06.04.2004 - 7)

8.1 Following discussion and a decision in previous Advisory Forum meetings, the members and observers decided to make its work more publicly known to the stakeholders. To this extent, a Task Force consisting of Denmark, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, and the Authority, met on 12 February in Dublin and on 5 April in Helsinki.

8.2 The Advisory Forum event would take place in Berlin on 8-10 November.

8.3 Following a discussion in the Forum, the members and observers were invited to provide the Authority with (1) names of suitable chairpersons and (2) suggestions and ideas on items to discuss. The Authority would draw up a revised proposal and redistribute it to the Advisory Forum.

9. Investing in food science: priority projects and cooperation with national research centres – revised (Doc AF 06.04.2004 - 8)

9.1 Herman Koëter informed the meeting that document 8 had been revised based on the discussion in the Forum meeting of 13 February.

9.2 Although this document would not be continuously updated, the Advisory Forum is invited to provide the Authority with suggestions on criteria for setting priorities.

10. Standing Matters

10.1 Anne-Laure Gassin informed the Forum on the 2nd meeting of the Working Group on Communications which had taken place on 24 February. The next meeting would be on 22 April in Brussels. The Chair added that the Working Group on IT would soon start with the practical delivery of what has been discussed and decided on.

10.2 Herman Koëter presented the 'Acrylamide Formation in Food' workshop report, held on 17 November 2003 in Brussels, for informational purposes. The workshop highlighted a need to develop a better understanding of the fundamental chemistry of acrylamide, how it is formed, what the rate-limiting steps of formation are and how formation can be reduced. The workshop concluded that the main challenge for researchers is to understand how acrylamide is formed and how to influence the mechanism of formation, in order to reduce acrylamide levels whilst retaining the food's nutritional and organoleptic properties, and not adversely affecting other food safety parameters. The report also identifies areas which would need further research.

10.3 Herman Koëter updated the meeting on the Authority's activities in the field of zoonoses data collection. Although Directive 2003/99/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on monitoring of zoonoses and zoonotic agents would be operational on 12 June, the Authority and the Commission have agreed to start the work in January 2005. In order to start the preparation of this task, the Advisory Forum is invited to (1) provide the Authority with national contact points for zoonosis monitoring and data collection at national level, and (2) provide the Authority through its expert members of the Advisory Forum IT Working Group with suggestions and advice on the development of a new, electronic, zoonosis database. Upon publishing its call to invite tenders for offering scientific and technical assistance to EFSA in zoonoses data collection, assessment and reporting, the Authority will inform the Advisory Forum.

10.4 The UK raised the question of the use of vaccinations in animals and the lack of food safety implications from vaccinated animals. The issue is addressed by the EFSA in collaboration with the Commission.

10.5 The UK raised the question of how fully aware the Commission is in the progress of the current reviews of coccidiostats in order that the development of its proposals for setting levels for the carry-over of veterinary medicines and zootechnical additives in feed are sufficiently harmonised and coordinated. The Chair undertook to come back on the matter

in a future Forum meeting.

10.6 Norway informed the Forum on the possible publication of an article in Science on fish oil supplements that may contain flame retardants. The Chair would take the matter up in a future Forum meeting.

10.7 Hungary thanked the Authority for the valuable material in the article on dietetic products, nutrition and allergies in the EFSA Journal. The Chair informed the Forum that the Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition and Allergies would welcome any comments on the article. If there are specific comments which are of concern to the Advisory Forum, a discussion on the topic could be put on the agenda.

11. Any Other Business

11.1 The Authority is finalising its in-house crisis plan with contact point at national level. The Advisory Forum is requested to inform the secretariat on their national interlocutors. A telephone crisis number can be found on the Authority's website (http://www.efsa.eu.int/about_efsa/contact_us/catindex_en.html).

11.2 The Authority is working on a role-playing crisis scenario which could be presented in a future Advisory Forum meeting with the use of a facilitator.

11.3 Following their accession as of 1 May, the 10 new EU Member States are requested to provide the secretariat with contact names for the Advisory Forum members, the alternate, the animal welfare expert and the plant expert.

11.4 Advisory Forum members who had not done so were requested to provide the Authority with names of national bodies which may put questions to the Authority in line with the provisions of the founding regulation.

12. Close of meeting

12.1 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 Finnish Food Safety Agency for having organised the meeting.

12.2 The next meeting is on 1 June; the venue for this meeting will be communicated as soon as possible.