



Adopted Minutes
FIFTEENTH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY FORUM
AVIATION HOUSE, LONDON (UK)
25 NOVEMBER 2005

Members of the Advisory Forum

Chair: *Geoffrey Podger*, Executive Director, EFSA

Austria	<i>Roland Grossgut</i>	Italy	<i>Marina Miraglia</i>
Belgium	<i>Charles Crémer</i>	Latvia	<i>Dace Santare</i>
Cyprus	<i>Constantinos Michael</i>	Lithuania	<i>Rolanas Kliucinsakas</i>
Czech Republic	<i>Milena Vicenova</i>	Luxembourg	<i>Felix Wildschutz</i>
Denmark	<i>Hans Peter Jensen</i>	Netherlands	<i>Evert Schouten</i>
Estonia	<i>Hendrik Kuusk</i>	Poland	<i>Jan Krzysztof Ludwicki</i>
Finland	<i>Jorma Hirn</i>	Portugal	<i>Isabel Meirelles Teixeira</i>
France	<i>Valerie Baduel</i>	Slovakia	<i>Jan Stulc</i>
Germany	<i>Reiner Wittkowski</i>	Slovenia	<i>Marusa Adamic</i>
Greece	<i>Evangelos Lazos</i>	Spain	<i>Felix Lobo Aleu</i>
Hungary	<i>Mária Szeitzné-Szábo</i>	Sweden	<i>Leif Busk</i>
Ireland	<i>Alan Reilly</i>	UK	<i>Andrew Wadge</i>

Observers and Invitees of the Executive Director

Bulgaria	<i>Galya Kostadinova</i>	Switzerland	<i>Roger Meuwly</i>
Norway	<i>Kristin Faerden</i>	European Commission	<i>Rossella Brozi</i>
Romania	<i>Liveu Rusu</i>		

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Staff of the European Food Safety Authority

<i>Jan Bloemendal</i>	<i>Djien Liem</i>
<i>Antoine Cuvillier</i>	<i>Christine Majewski</i>
<i>Anne-Laure Gassin</i>	<i>Filomena Siravo</i>
<i>Irene van Geest</i>	<i>Ingela Soderlund</i>
<i>Herman Koëter</i>	<i>Katty Verhelst</i>
<i>Lesley Koschel</i>	<i>Victoria Villamar</i>

1 Welcome and introduction by the Food Standards Agency (FSA)

- 1.1 Dr. Jon Bell, Chief Executive of the FSA, officially welcomed the AF members to the United Kingdom. Being one of the first independent food safety agencies in Europe, the FSA had taken part in the Advisory Forum from its outset. He said that the FSA were happy with the progress EFSA had made under the guidance of Geoffrey Podger, chairing his last meeting of the Advisory Forum as EFSA's Executive Director since he was taking new functions at the British Health and Safety Executive.

Jon Bell referred to the successful gathering the evening before, and hoped the meeting would continue in a fruitful atmosphere.

- 1.2 The Chair thanked Dr. Bell for opening the meeting, his nice and friendly words and FSA's great hospitality.

2 Introduction by Geoffrey Podger and adoption of the agenda (Doc AF 25.11.2005 – 1)

- 2.1 The agenda was introduced by the chair and adopted.

3 Minutes of the meeting 30 September in Larnaca and matters arising (Doc AF 25.11.2005 – 2)

- 3.1 The minutes of the Advisory Forum meeting of 30 September in Larnaca were approved.
- 3.2 Germany expressed its wish to participate in the possible risk assessment on marine biotoxins (mentioned under paragraph 15.3) and to expand its mandate if that would be possible. The slightly modified minutes will be translated and published.

4 Update by Geoffrey Podger on progress at EFSA including final update on the move to Parma, succession arrangements to Executive Director and developments on the partial replacement of EFSA's Management Board

- 4.1 The move of the Authority from Brussels to Parma had been completed and all staff were based in Parma.
- Geoffrey Podger informed the Forum that the Commission has made significant progress with the succession of the Executive Director and that it was finalising a shortlist with candidates which would be interviewed by EFSA's Management Board in February next

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year.

- 4.2 The Commission had issued some months before a call for the partial replacement of the Management Board, since the official term for 7 of its Members would expire in 2006. The final decision on the replacement of Board Members would be taken by the European Council and European Parliament which was foreseen to happen during the Austrian presidency in the first half of 2006.

4a State of Play on Aspartame (Document AF 25.11.2005 – 12 & 12a)

- 4a.1 Herman Koëter informed the Advisory Forum that EFSA planned to reiterate his request to the Ramazzini institute to urge them to release their data on the Aspartame study as soon as possible. The Advisory Forum supported this and would like to be kept closely involved.

EFSA informed the meeting that the AFC Panel was prepared to do additional statistical analysis as well as a re-evaluation of the results of the histopathology findings, if the latter could be made available to the Authority.

France reiterated its wish to actively participate on this matter to EFSA.

- 4a.2 Furthermore, Herman Koëter informed the Forum that EFSA was in close contact with food safety agencies in the US (FDA) and Japan, which were following EFSA in its further actions.

The Forum stressed the importance of communications in this respect, which should be clear, consistent and well co-ordinated between EFSA and the national authorities.

5 Avian Influenza, state of play on the risk assessments as regards the food safety implications

- Presentation by AFSSA

- Presentation by EFSA (Doc AF 25.11.2005 – 3, EFSA's press release

http://www.efsa.eu.int/press_room/press_release/1193/comm_pr_avian_flu_update_20051026_en1.pdf)

- 5.1 Ms Valerie Baduel, Deputy Director-General of the French Afssa, presented the work the agency had done on Avian Influenza (AI) during recent years, which was divided in three different parts: one on the possibility of transmission of the virus; one on the danger infected birds and pigs might cause for the human population; and the third on the impacts of immunization.

Conclusions so far were that: those at risk concern in particular those people in close contact with infected animals; that vaccination only appeared feasible as regards the H5N1 strain and then only if normal hygiene practices emerged to be insufficient.

Results of new studies were underway, also on possible risks of possible transmission through food. Ms. Baduel, however, stressed the fact that France did not had any case of AI in domestic poultry yet, which, in fact, meant a status of zero risk for the moment.

- 5.2 Herman Koëter reminded the meeting of the opinion of EFSA's Panel on Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW), issued in mid September, concerning the animal health aspects of the disease. In the meantime, EFSA had received three new questions from the Commission: one on the monitoring of low pathogen strains; one questioning which possible infection routes exist; and the third, on differences of bird species as regards clinical signs and in terms of the transmission of the virus.

Herman also gave the Forum background information about recent media coverage on interviews given by EFSA. The resulting articles did not reflect truthfully EFSA's position although some of the content was correct. EFSA's policy is to be open and transparent and report information accurately, including on emerging issues. EFSA had commis-

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sioned a study, by a contractor, on an assessment of the available information on exposure of the virus to humans through food consumption. It hoped to have a first paper ready within a couple of months.

- 5.3 With respect to communications, EFSA regretted the impact caused by particular media coverage which misinterpreted the Authorities advice on food safety aspects of AI. The meeting agreed that the outcome of media interviews cannot always be predicted. The Advisory Forum asked the Communications WG to study current communications experiences with AI more in depth in order to learn lessons for the future. It was noted that there had been cross cultural differences among the MS in the assessment and understanding of EFSA's press releases and statements. The Advisory Forum asked for EFSA to continue its close collaboration with other organisations on AI, such as ECDC and called for extra research in order to obtain more and better reliable data.

6 Items on EFSA's Scientific Committee and Scientific Panels

- Update on EFSA's Call for scientific experts for the partial renewal of its Committee and Panels

(Doc AF 25.11.2005 – 4, http://www.efsa.eu.int/opportunities/recruitment/1222_en.html)

- Reflection on issues related to the functioning of the Scientific Committee and Panels (Doc AF 25.11.2005 – 4a)

- 6.1 Djien Liem informed the Advisory Forum that the call for expressions of interest in membership to EFSA's Scientific Committee and Panels of EFSA had been published in the Official Journal of the EU on 22nd of November 2005. From 2006 onwards, EFSA would have 9 Scientific Panels instead of 8 since the Panel on plant health, plant protection products and their residues [PPR] would be divided into two panels, i.e. one on plant health and the other on plant protection products.
- 6.2 Following a discussion that took place in the Forum at the Lisbon-meeting on 3th and 4th February 2005, the members were asked to encourage excellent scientists in their MS to apply for these positions. Especially AF Members of the new Member States were asked to promote this call strongly through their national networks
- 6.3 Herman Koëter introduced the document for the Management Board on the functioning of the Scientific Committee and Panels. This paper, which contained reflections on the number and size of the Panels, their functioning and on possibilities of outsourcing scientific work, would be discussed with the Scientific Committee and Panel members too. It would return on the table of the MB at its meeting in January 2006.
- 6.4 Amongst others, the Advisory Forum felt that the 'Scientific Expert Services' in EFSA should be strengthened and that, recognising their enormous workload, Members of the Scientific Committee and Panels should be deployed as efficiently as possible, i.e. for their expert input rather than for collection of data or other tasks which could be done by EFSA staff. The Forum was also in favour of establishing 'National contact points' in the MS for collecting data e.g. on exposure and consumption. As regards the new Scientific Panel on Plant Health, the Forum would like it to produce guidance documents first according to which it would organise its work. One issue that has been raised is whether the Panel should include economic factors in the risk assessments it is going to produce. The Director of Science, however, pointed out that all work would be based on scientific grounds only, excluding economical factors.

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7 Report back on the second meeting of the *ad hoc* Advisory Forum Working Group on the Input of National Authorities into the work of EFSA’s scientific Committee, Panels and other Expert Groups (AFWG-INA) (Doc AF 25.11.2005 - 5)

- 7.1 Herman Koëter and Jan Bloemendal reported on the progress of this Working Group by presenting an outline document which will be the basis of a discussion paper to follow for the next meeting of the Group on 20th January 2006. It was foreseen that the WG would need one more meeting in 2006 before it could send its final recommendations to the Advisory Forum.
- 7.2 Members appreciated the progress the Group had made and the atmosphere in which it was doing its work. Part of the next paper would include an exploration of the role of the Advisory Forum as regards the exchange of scientific information, its role in the Article 36-network, etc. Members were asked to send possible comments beforehand to the drafting group.

8 The Article 36-network, contractual and funding mechanisms (Doc AF 25.11.2005 – 6)

- 8.1 Antoine Cuvillier introduced the document which presented the state of play concerning the creation of the Article-36-network, in particular financial and legal mechanisms that would be subsidy-based, therefore somehow departing from classical tendering processes. More detailed guidance will be made available in the first quarter of 2006. The list of organisations designated by the Member States was made available; it was agreed that feedback from the Forum would be sought in establishing the draft list to be submitted to the Management Board.
- 8.2 It was foreseen that the Management Board would adopt the list of institutes in the first quarter of 2006. This list, however, would be a “living” list that can be updated regularly on the basis of Member States proposals for reviews and new designations. Potential comments from the Advisory Forum on the list should be sent via the Permanent Representatives, preferably with a copy to EFSA.

9 Report back on the Outcome of EFSA’s Stakeholder meetings (Doc AF 25.11.2005 - 7)

- 9.1 Christine Majewski reported on the Stakeholder Consultative Platform which had its inaugural meeting early October. This meeting had included procedural matters and the Chair and Vice Chairs of the Platform would be chosen by its members in the near future. There were also discussions on the work of the scientific committees and panels and EFSA’s communication activities.
The Platform would have its first real business meeting in March 2006 and the second one in July where after its functioning would be evaluated by EFSA’s Management Board.
- 9.2 EFSA’s third Stakeholder Colloque took place on 9 and 10 November 2005, also in Parma. More than 50 stakeholder organisations were present at this gathering at which EFSA’s review currently taking place was the main subject for discussion. The discussions concerned: ESFA’s review; the issue of fees; nutrition; and transparency in the work of the Scientific Committee and Panels.
Hans Peter Jensen reported back on the Questions and Answers asked to EFSA’s Management Team in a session which he had led.

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10 Introduction to EFSA's 4th Colloquium on 'Principles of Risk Assessment of Food Producing Animals: Current and future approaches' (Doc AF 25.11.2005 – 8, the Announcement:

http://www.efsa.eu.int/science/colloquium_series/no4_animal_diseases/catindex_en.html

- 10.1 Herman Koëter introduced this 4th Scientific Colloquium to the meeting. Experts with a background in animal health as well as animal welfare were invited, and the event was aimed at developing guidelines on how to perform risk assessments as regards food producing animals. It was highlighted that especially the current knowledge on conducting risk assessments as regards animal welfare needed to be improved, seeking scientific criteria for welfare aspects.

11 STANDING MATTERS

- 11.1 Anne-Laure Gassin reported back from the meeting of the AF Communications Working Group that had been held mid-October in Parma. The progress of the Eurobarometer project had been discussed; the report would be finalized shortly and sent to the AF Members.
The Task Force on Crisis Communications Requirements had concluded its activities of which most referred to the use of the Extranet during incidents and crisis.
- 11.2 Sweden presented a report containing background material to the Swedish Action Plan for healthy dietary habits and increased physical activity (Doc AF 25.11.2005 – 11). The report described tools on how to prevent the increase of obesity in Sweden, by elaborating on two principles: 1) changing dietary habits and 2) increasing physical activities. The report stressed the responsibilities of consumers in this respect, although it also showed the importance of the policy environment.
- 11.3 Ireland reported that the issue with ITX-contaminated milk seemed to be under control. The incident, however, had created a lot of media and other coverage in which EFSA had at times been cited incorrectly.
- 11.4 France informed the meeting that AFSSA was conducting further investigations on 'noni juice' since information on three cases of hepatotoxicity had been published by Austria. EFSA's NDA panel was performing an evaluation of the new scientific elements provided by the Austrian authorities. It would also examine whether anthraquinones were present in the juice, which, in that case, may have caused the illnesses. Expected time of completion was July 2006.
- 11.5 Djien Liem reported back from the EFSA/WHO/ILSI conference on new approaches in the risk assessment of compounds which are both genotoxic and carcinogenic, that took place in the preceding week in Brussels. The objective of the conference was to explain the approaches proposed under the umbrella by each of the three organisations and to help reaching conclusions on the best practice and the way forward.
The meeting had been successful. The next step will be to further explore the benefits of the use of the Margin of Exposure approach, as proposed by the EFSA Scientific Committee..
- 11.6 Belgium informed the meeting on its Food action plan, recently issued by its authorities. This Plan also included a study on dietary habits resulting in ways on how to reduce the intake of salt by consumers whilst the consumption of iron should be increased.

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- 11.7 Christine Majewski informed the meeting that technical problems with the Extranet were being solved. Members would receive passwords and instructions soon. EFSA would follow up to ensure that the veterinarians and plant health experts, involved in the AF network, were informed on the Extranet.
- 11.8 The representative from the Commission informed the meeting that the ad hoc work-group on lead in ceramics, led by the EC with participants from Sweden, Norway, Germany and EFSA, had met and prepared a mandate for EFSA to perform a risk assessment on this source of lead exposure.

12 Closing of the 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 UK FSA administration for their kind hospitality.
- 12.2 The Advisory Forum Members thanked Geoffrey for the excellent work he had done in setting up EFSA and creating the Advisory Forum as a valuable network of food safety risk assessors at EU and national level. Geoffrey handed over the chairmanship to Herman Koeter who will lead the Forum until a new Executive Director would be appointed.