MEETING OF THE EFSA ADVISORY FORUM

Malta, 22-23 September 2010

Address by John Dalli, EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy

SPEAKING NOTE

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today to participate in this meeting of the Advisory Forum and, of course, to meet you all for the first time.

This is an ideal opportunity for me to learn more about the work national food safety agencies do in co-operation with the European Food Safety Authority.

It is also a special occasion because it marks the first time that Norway and Iceland participate as full members of the Forum, rather than as observers. I recognise that the legal steps towards gaining full participation status have required significant efforts from all concerned, and I am glad that this has been successfully resolved.

I want to use this opportunity to share with you my perspective of EFSA's co-operation with the national authorities.

The data collection, research and evaluation activities of the national scientific bodies underpin much of EFSA's work.

The independent scientific experts who make up EFSA's Scientific Committee and Panels are employed by national scientific bodies. These scientists have built, and will continue to build, their expertise through national activities.

The EU needs EFSA to function at the maximum of its capabilities on its core business – that is, the delivery of scientific opinions. National expertise clearly forms an essential element in pursuit of this principal aim.

Co-operation is of vital importance. The different actors in a collaborative EU risk assessment system become partners.

- As partners they trust each other and work in a convergent manner with a common purpose.

- They share relevant information thus minimising the risk of divergent scientific opinions.

- They avoid duplication of efforts and promote synergies, thus enhancing efficiency through the best use of resources.

- They work together on coherent and consistent messages to consumers, which is essential to gain the long term trust of consumers.

- They acknowledge that EFSA's outputs are the product of collective expertise and have a sense of ownership towards them.

Scientific co-operation in the area of risk assessment was virtually non-existent before the creation of EFSA. Such co-operation effectively started in 2006 with the adoption of the strategy on co-operation by EFSA, with the Advisory Forum contributing to its development.

Scientific co-operation is still in an early phase – but I hope and expect that some of the presentations to be made by Member States this afternoon will already illustrate these concepts of trust and partnership.

EFSA has produced a report for this meeting listing the different co-operation activities. A significant part of EFSA's budget is already dedicated to co-operation activities. Indeed this has increased threefold from 2007 to 2010 with almost 8 million Euro forecast to be spent this year on cooperation.

We have now reached a stage where the Council and the European Parliament should be made more aware of the essential role of scientific co-operation within the EU risk assessment system.

In particular, we need to raise awareness of the need to maintain and develop a critical mass of expertise at national level in order to ensure the sustainability of the entire EU system of risk assessment.

In other words, we need to make it clearer that EFSA relies on the scientific contribution of the Member States. If that contribution is weakened, the entire system could collapse.

This meeting of the Forum is focussed on mid-term objectives. At the last Forum meeting in Limassol, the Commission services presented to you the Directorate General's medium term risk assessment needs.

Allow me to underline some of these medium term challenges:

- In some areas, EFSA is confronted with a heavy workload which it cannot properly address without finding new ways of working and cooperating with national bodies.

  For example, the implementation of the food improvement package including the re-evaluation of old food additives and the start of the new authorisation procedure on enzymes will require the assessment of hundreds of substances. The re-evaluation of feed additives will also concern a large number of substances.

  In such cases, the evaluation work has to be considered as a project. It demands planning over several years. So the mid-term planning proposed today by EFSA should encompass more substantial involvement of the Member States.

- New technologies (such as biotechnologies and nanotechnologies) will continue to give rise to significant challenges. Innovation is vital for progress but it can also be a vector for fear.

The role of EU risk assessors is extremely difficult in these areas. Cooperation is essential to ensure that we all share up-to-date information; that appropriate new methodologies for risk assessment are jointly developed; and that clear and consistent messages are agreed and delivered.

- The area of data collection is traditionally an area of cooperation and some of the networks (zoonoses, and pesticides residues for example) are of long standing.

  EFSA has invested significant resources in order to gain greater understanding of what EU citizens eat, and to identify the levels of contamination of our food and their variations.

  This is essential knowledge for risk assessors and risk managers but the usefulness of the results of this work needs to be <u>better publicised</u> if we want the wider world to understand the importance of this type of work.

Before I close, let me stress that I am well aware of the important and particular significance of EFSA, and the central role it plays in our common efforts to ensure that European citizens enjoy the very highest standards of food safety.

Thank you for the work that you – the Advisory Forum – have achieved so far, and for the valuable support you give to the Commission. I hope we can count on your continued commitment and professionalism in the years to come.

Thank you. **End Word count: 945 words**