
SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE AND ADVISORY FORUM UNIT

Parma, 7 January 2010

Minutes of the National Experts Meeting on Aspartame

Porto, Portugal, 10-11 November 2009

(Agreed on 19 January, 2010)

Participants

National Experts: Hannu Raunio (FI), Iona Pratt (IE), Indre Karpoviene (LT), Jacqueline J.M. Castenmiller (NL), Andre H. Penninks* (NL), Tor Øystein Fotland (NO), Maria de Lourdes Bastos (PT), Maria Conceição Branco Montenegro* (PT), Angelina Lopes Simões Pena* (PT), Marica Theiszová* (SK), Martina Valachovičová (SK), Nils-Gunnar Ilbäck* (SE), Stephen Atkin* (UK), Natalie Thatcher* (UK)

(* Organising Team Member)

EFSA: Gian Luca Bonduri, Georgi Nikolaev Grigorov, Miriam Jacobs, Hugues Kenigswald, Djien Liem, Jeffrey Moon, Torben Nilsson, Karen Talbot.

1. Opening of the meeting

Djien Liem, Head of Scientific Committee and Advisory Forum Unit of EFSA, welcomed the National Experts to the meeting and invited them to introduce themselves.

Djien Liem provided an overview of the objectives for the meeting and highlighted the fact that the work on preparing a report was undertaken at the request of the Advisory Forum not because of new safety concerns, but to address remaining public concerns.

Apologies were noted from representatives of The Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Cyprus, Ireland, Czech Republic and Slovak Republic.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The Agenda was presented and adopted without changes. No additional items were raised.

3. Declarations of interests

In accordance with EFSA's Policy on Declarations of Interests, EFSA screened the Annual Declaration of Interest filled in by the invited experts. No conflicts of interests re-

lated to the issues discussed in this meeting have been identified during the screening process.

Stephen Atkin declared that he was currently involved in undertaking a pilot study of clinical trials funded by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) UK. Iona Pratt informed the meeting that she was also a member of EFSA's Panel on Food Additives and Nutrient Sources added to Food (ANS) . These additional interests were not deemed to represent a conflict of interest.

4. Introduction and background

The background to the work of the Organising Team was presented, noting that since the preliminary National Experts meeting in April, all the additional identified publications had been considered and a database of anecdotal case reports had been established.

5. Presentation and discussion/Anecdotal data analysis

Information on the establishment of a database and the subsequent analysis of the anecdotal case information that had been carried out was presented. It was noted that in general the anecdotal information lacked information on exposure, diet, health and other relevant factors which prevents establishing cause and effect. It was also noted that the large number of assumptions made about the data and the limitations in the data made interpretation difficult and that the data was not gathered within a proper framework for scientific analysis.

The chairman summarised the discussion noting that there were limitations in the anecdotal data which prevented conclusive interpretation but the information and analysis could be useful as a starting point for any further investigations. The chairman considered it important to note in the report the 'lessons learnt' on the limitations of such information and what can and can not be done with it.

6. Presentation and discussion/Endpoint updates

Each of the experts of the Organising Team presented a short summary on each endpoint considered by way of an update on the information presented at the National Expert meeting held on 2-3 April, 2009

The National Experts agreed that the consideration of satiation and appetite needed clarification on the context in relation to aspartame use.

There was discussion on the metabolism of aspartame and the consideration of metabolites including methanol. The National Experts agreed that there should be more clarity about the metabolism of aspartame.

With regard to carcinogenicity, the National Experts noted the EFSA Opinions on the studies carried out by the European Ramazzini Foundation (ERF) and also other papers commenting on the protocols used by the ERF.

Djien Liem noted that it was not possible to prepare conclusions and recommendations for the Advisory Forum until all the issues raised in the discussions could be considered.

7. Summary of discussions and Next steps

Djien Liem briefly summarised the discussions, highlighting the areas of concern for the finalisation of the report, particularly in relation to the anecdotal information and the conclusions.

The suggested timeframe for the completion of the report was no later than January. The report would then be prepared for consultation and forwarded to the Advisory Forum for the February meeting.

Djien Liem thanked the participants for their contributions to the meeting, the EFSA Staff involved for their support and brought the meeting to a close.