EFSA
European Food Safety Authority

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MINUTES OF THE 3rd PLENARY MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC PANEL ON BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS

Held in Brussels on 26-27 November 2003

AGENDA:

1. Welcome
2. Apologies
3. Adoption of the agenda
4. Official requests to EFSA.
    a. Presentation of new mandates received from the Commission
    b. Organization of Working Groups
5. Discussion and possible adoption of following opinions
    a. Opinion on the interpretation of results of EU surveillance of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) in ovine and caprine animals, culling strategies for TSEs in small ruminants and the TSE- related safety of certain small ruminant products**.**
    b. Opinion on BSE-related culling in cattle.
    c. Opinion on Tuberculosis in bovine animals: risk for human health and control strategies
    d. Opinion on the effects of nitrites/nitrates on the microbiological safety of meat products
6. Progress reports
7. Feed-back by the Chairman on subjects discussed in the Scientific Committee (SC) of interest to the Panel
8. AOB
9. Closure of the meeting

MINUTES OF THE 3rd PLENARY MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC PANEL ON BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS
Held in Brussels on 26-27 November 2003

PARTICIPANTS

Panel Members:
Herbert Budka, Sava Buncic, Pierre Colin, John D. Collins, James Hope, Mac Johnston, Günter Klein, Hilde Kruse, Simone Magnino, Riitta Liisa Maijala, Antonio Martinez López, Birgit Noerrung, Servé Notermans, George-John Nychas, Maurice Pensaert, Terry Roberts, Ivar Vågsholm, Emmanuel Vanopdenbosch.

Apologies
For 26 November: Christian Ducrot, Ernst Lücker, Christophe Nguyen-The
For 27 November: Christian Ducrot, Ernst Lücker, Christophe Nguyen-The, Serve Notermans and Sava Buncic.

EFSA
Bart Goossens, Marta Hugas, Wolfgang Gelbmann and Angela Cohen.

Commission
Eric Thévenard, (26-27), Pia Mäkelä, (27) John Maher (26) (DG Health and Consumer Protection)

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1. WELCOME

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everybody. Dr. Wolfgang Gelbmann was welcomed in particular as new Assistant Scientific Coordinator.

Special tribute was paid to the late Prof Dominique Dormont by Prof Herbert Budka and a minute's of silence was observed as a mark of respect.

No specific interests declared.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Christian Ducrot, Ernst Lücker, Christophe Nguyen-The (26th-27th November) and Serve Notermans and Sava Buncic (27th November).

3. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The Chair proposed to re-order the agenda items. The agenda was adopted with the proposed re-arrangement of items.

4. OFFICIAL REQUESTS TO EFSA.

4.1. Presentation of new mandates received

4.1.1. *Questions related to animal by-products (ABP)*

Three questions were received related to animal by-products (ABP) including the risk of TSEs:

- Request for opinion on the safety vis-à-vis biological risk including TSEs of the application on pastureland of organic fertilizers and soil improvers.
- Request for opinion on the safety vis-à-vis biological risk including TSEs of biogas and compost treatment standards of animal by products.
- Request for a re-assessment of the process of 'Combustion of Tallow in a Thermal Boiler process for safe disposal of animal by-products'.

The background to the questions was explained and a suggestion for a Working group was made in order to handle the three questions. Specific remark was made to the submission of documents in a community language other than English and which had no accompanied translation. This is slowing down the process of evaluation and in certain cases it is clear that the deadline given by the European Commission (COM) can not be respected. It was argued that EFSA could request the COM services to send all documents already translated or otherwise take the time required for translation into account when setting the deadline.

4.1.2. *Request from the European Commission for an opinion of the European Food Safety Authority on the quantitative assessment (QRA) of the residual BSE risk in certain bovine derived products.*

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is invited (1) to assess the validity of the outcome of the quantitative assessment of the residual BSE risk in bovine derived products: gelatine, tallow and dicalcium phosphate from bones, tallow from fat tissues and tallow from rendered mixtures of tissues carried out by DNV Consulting and if the outcome is considered valid, (2) to review the Scientific Steering Committee (SSC) opinions listed above in the light of the quantitative risk assessment (QRA) and to advise on how to interpret the results of the calculation when wishing to estimate the potential number of cases of BSE and variant Creutzfeld-Jakob Disease (vCJD) per year in a population.

4.1.3. *Request for a scientific opinion on microbiological risks in foods intended for infants and young children*

The Scientific Panel of Biological Hazards is invited: to identify the microbiological risks related to infant formulae, follow-on formulae and baby foods, to evaluate the significance of these risks to public health and to identify different control options to reduce these risks along the food chain and to evaluate their effectiveness. The Terms of Reference together with the scope of the question were discussed. In particular, the scope requested was considered to be very wide. The Panel and COM representative agreed to reformulate the question narrowing the scope. Ideally, the intention is to have the opinion adopted by September 2004.

4.2. Organization of Working Groups

- A Working Group (WG) on ABP was created and Prof Mac Johnston was appointed Chairman.
- A Working Group on QRA was created and Dr James Hope was appointed Chairman.
- A Working Group on microbiological risks in foods intended for infants and young children was created; Dr Terry Roberts was appointed Chairman and Dr Birgit Noerrung as Rapporteur.

The members of each of the working groups will be identified after consultation with the Chair of the WG and the Chair and Panel members.

5. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ADOPTION OF FOLLOWING OPINIONS

5.1. Opinion on the interpretation of results of EU surveillance of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) in ovine and caprine animals, culling strategies for TSEs in small ruminants and the TSE- related safety of certain small ruminant products.

The report of the WG and the opinion were presented by Dr. Vanopdenbosch. In this opinion, the Scientific Panel on Biological Hazards was requested by The European Commission to assess the results of the active surveillance in the European Union (EU) as from January 2002 and to take new data from 2003 on TSE-resistant sheep into account in order to advise on an update of previous opinions on safe sourcing in small ruminants in particular in relation to breeding for resistance and the use of genotype in culling strategies. A member from the Panel on Animal Health was involved in the assessment. It was concluded that the current TSE surveillance in the EU-Member States does not allow an estimation of the prevalence of TSEs in sheep. Furthermore, it was considered that a higher number of sheep should be examined, taking into account geographical area, genotype, breed and age, using rapid tests approved for TSE in sheep. In spite of the limitations of current surveillance data and the new information there is no need to revise previous opinions on the breeding for TSE resistance, culling strategies or safe sourcing of small ruminants. Following discussion by the Panel members the opinion was unanimously adopted after taking some minor modifications into account, a final written consultation after the adoption at the plenary meeting was foreseen.

5.2. Opinion on BSE-related culling of cattle.

The report is in a draft format and will be finalized early next year. The report was discussed briefly and was deferred to the next plenary meeting.

5.3. Opinion on Tuberculosis in bovine animals: risk for human health and control strategies

The draft opinion was presented by the chair of the WG, Prof. Collins, while the Panel was chaired by Prof Maijala. The draft opinion included aspects of the presence of *M.bovis* in bovines in several possible diagnostic situations, the safety of the meat for consumers, the routes of infection and the role of meat. A member from the Panel on Animal Health was involved in the assessment. It was concluded that provided the measures currently in operation to control tuberculosis in cattle together with the current meat inspection requirements are followed, the level of risk to be associated with the consumption of meat is

considered low. Following discussion by the Panel members the opinion was unanimously adopted after some agreed minor modifications.

5.4. Opinion on the effects of nitrites/nitrates on the microbiological safety of meat products

The draft opinion was presented by the chair of the WG, Dr Notermans. The Panel on Food Additives was involved in the WG, represented by two experts. The draft opinion focused on the microbial inhibitory activities of nitrites and nitrates, on the concentration needed to prevent outgrowth of spores of *Clostridium botulinum*, as well as on factors affecting residual levels of nitrites. The toxicological aspects of nitrites and nitrates were outside the scope of the present opinion. Following discussion by the Panel members the opinion was unanimously adopted after taking some minor modifications into account, a final written consultation after the adoption at the plenary meeting was foreseen.

5.5. Opinion on the process of High-Pressure Hydrolysis Biogas (HPHB) as method for safe disposal of category 1 Animal by-Products (ABP) not intended for human consumption

The report of the WG and the opinion were presented by members of the Working Group, Dr. Emmanuel Vanopdenbosch and Dr. James Hope. Animal by-products (ABP) not intended for human consumption have to be disposed of or may be used by means laid down in detail in the ABP Regulation (EC) No 1774/2002. This regulation divides ABP into 3 categories of risk, where category 1 includes ABP of high risk including TSEs and category 3 presents low risk to animals and humans. The former Scientific Steering Committee (SSC) of the European Commission (EC) evaluated alternative methods for the safe disposal of ABP, including the HPHB process and regarded this as safe only for the disposal of ABP of categories 2 and 3. Following receipt of further data from the Federal Republic of Germany on a modification of the HPHB process, the Scientific Panel on Biological Hazards of EFSA was asked by the European Commission to reassess this process in view of its ability to safely dispose of Category 1 animal by-products (ABP). It was concluded that the combination of the conventional method fixed by regulation (3 bar, 133 degrees Celsius, 20 min) with the HPHB process in a closed system presents no additional risk when disposing of animal by-products of category 1. Following presentation and a short discussion this opinion was adopted.

6. PROGRESS REPORTS

6.1. Revision of meat inspection procedures for lambs and goats

Prof Johnston (chair of the WG) reported on the excellent progress of the WG. The draft opinion on revision of meat inspection of lambs and goats will likely be ready for discussion and possible adoption at the next plenary meeting in January.

6.2. Antimicrobials to control *Salmonella* in poultry

The Chair of the WG reported to the Panel that the WG has been established and will have the first meeting by mid-December.

6.3. Vaccines to control *Salmonella* in poultry

The Chair of the WG reported to the Panel that the WG has been established and will have the first meeting by mid-December.

6.4. Campylobacter in animals and foodstuffs

The Chair of the WG reported to the Panel that the WG has been established and will have the first meeting by mid-December.

6.5. Over Thirty Months Rule – Date Based Export Scheme – Moderate risk request (UK)

EFSA was requested by the Commission to provide an opinion on (1) the scientific justification or proposed amendments to the United Kingdom date based export scheme and (2) the application of the United Kingdom for moderate risk BSE status. In particular the Commission requests EFSA to estimate the extra BSE risk to human health which would occur if the United Kingdom Date Based Export Scheme were amended to (a) remove the upper (30 month) age limit for eligible cattle and (b) remove the dam survival rule and lower (6 month) age limit for eligible cattle and to base the answers on the statistical modeling carried out as part of the review of the over thirty months rule in the United Kingdom, and taking into account on the most up-to-date scientific evidence regarding the possibility of maternal transmission of BSE. A working group meeting was held on 22 October 2003 in which the questions were discussed in two sub-groups chaired by Dr. Emmanuel Vanopdenbosch and Prof Sheila Bird. Additional questions were formulated, forwarded to DEFRA; at the next meeting (14 January 2004) this matter will be further discussed. Possible adoption of this opinion is foreseen for the plenary meeting of January 2004 or March 2004.

6.6. Tongue infectivity

On 10 July 2003, the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) of the United Kingdom issued a statement on the BSE risk from bovine tonsil and the consumption of ox tongue. A working group was composed with Prof Lücker as Chairman. A date for a first meeting was set for 11 February 2004.

7. FEED-BACK BY THE CHAIRMAN ON SUBJECTS DISCUSSED IN THE SC OF INTEREST TO THE PANEL

The chair gave some feedback on items of interest and discussed during the 4th Plenary of the Scientific Committee.

http://www.efsa.eu.int/pdf/minutes_sci_04_adopted_en.pdf

The chair then also gave feedback on the Colloquium organized by EFSA in Ostend (Belgium), which was a very useful gathering of all stakeholders of EFSA. It gave the opportunity to discuss possible future collaboration of stakeholders in the work of EFSA.

8. AOB

Dr Herman Koëter, Deputy Executive Director and Director of Science came briefly to the meeting, introduced himself and there was some exchange of ideas on the work of Panel and items of general interest to the Panel and to EFSA as a whole. Points of discussion were the formulation of requests by COM to EFSA and the possibility of the plenary meeting to discuss these requests before their formal adoption. The Panel was also welcome to suggest topics which are identified during the risk assessments carried out by Working Groups or the

Panel, for future research. A close collaboration between EFSA and Directorate-General (DG) Research is recognised as being vital for scientifically based risk assessments.

Mrs. Anne-Laure Gassin, Director of Communication attended the meeting briefly, introduced herself and addressed questions raised on the subject of Media Handling activities by Members of the Panel.

A text related to the travel by experts was distributed; the details of same were clarified to the Members. The text related to the re-imbursement of the travel expenses of the experts and the use of pre-paid tickets.

An issue on addressing draft opinions was raised, *viz*., that the Panel would like, whenever possible, to have two opportunities to assess a proposed Opinion or other document before being asked to agree to its adoption. This matter is to be pursued further.

On the issue of self-tasking, it was suggested that arrangements for the Assessment of the European Annual Report on the Epidemiology of Zoonoses and the emerging Zoonotic Risks, given the new role of EFSA in this regard, be further discussed. It was agreed to continue discussion on the subject during a future meeting.

The panel members were informed about the possibility of organising the plenary meeting at another venue other than Brussels after agreement by the Executive Director of EFSA. This suggestion is to be investigated further.

9. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

The meeting was closed at 17.00 on Thursday 27 of November.