



Minutes of the 148th meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Board
Held on Thursday, 13 May 2021 at 10:30am
Zoom

PRESENT:

Ms Helen O'Donnell (HOD) (Chair)
Dr Eddie Rooney (ER)
Mr Brendan Kehoe (BK)
Ms Wendy McIntosh (WMI)
Mr Alan McGrath (AMG)
Dr Mary Upton (MU)
Dr Sinead McCarthy (SMcC)
Mr Alex Attwood (AA)
Ms Teresa Canavan (TC)
Prof Maeve Henchion (MH)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Ray Dolan, Chief Executive (RD)
Dr Gary Kearney, Director, Food Science (GK)
Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Director, Corporate Operations (PF)
Dr Aileen McGloin, Director, Marketing and Communications (AMcG)
Dr Catherine Conlon, Director, Human Health and Nutrition (CC)
Mr Dermot Moriarty, Manager, Marketing and Communications (DM) (Items 7)
Ms Alison Dries (AD) Secretary

APOLOGIES:

Mr Stephen Moutray (SM)

1. Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present

Noted: The Board met in private without the Executive present

2. Matters arising from the private session

Noted: BK informed his Twitter profile was targeted because of his membership of the **safefood** Advisory Board in relation to the publication of the research report titled 'Vegetarian meat substitutes'. AMcG confirmed that a small group identifying with the vegan community took the report as criticism and believed the report to be encouraging the consumption of meat and had reacted negatively on social media.

CC informed the report was not anti-beef/dairy. The research highlighted that meat alternatives, often viewed as a healthy alternative to meat, are processed foods and not always a source of protein (25%). The report highlighted healthy vegetarian protein sources such as beans, peas, lentils and linked to **safefood** resources to support this approach.

An in-depth discussion took place regarding the information available to the public on Board members, the increase of activism and the use of social media and how this impacts the reaction to **safefood** reports it was agreed that this should be included on **safefood**'s risk register and considered by **safefood** before issuing press releases.

Action: Due to time constraints the Chair advised to table this for discussion at the next Board meeting.

3. Introduction and apologies

Noted: The Chair welcomed members of the Advisory Board to the meeting hosted virtually on the Zoom platform.

Noted: The CEO offered condolences on behalf of Board Members and staff to CC on the passing of her father.

Noted: The apologies of SM were noted.

4. Conflicts of interest

Noted: The Chair asked members if there were any conflicts of interest relating to the agenda. No conflicts of interest were raised.

5. Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 25 March

Action: MH requested a change to the wording of the minutes; the edit is as follows 'safefood to consider a policy on open access data'. Subject to this change, the Board approved the minutes.

Proposed: BK

Seconded: ER

6. Matters arising from the minutes

Noted: No matters arising.

7. Presentation on safetrack

Noted: Aisling Corcoran, Ipsos MRBI, presented the results of safetrak 2020. **safefood** conducts market research titled 'safetrak' on a yearly basis to track food and nutrition issues as well as emerging issues in these areas.

Noted: The Chair thanked Aisling for an interesting presentation.

Action: **safefood** to share the presentation with Board members.

8. Presentation on the current media landscape on the island of Ireland.

Noted: Hannah Kelleher and Laura Comber, PHD Media, presented an overview of the current media landscape on the island of Ireland.

Action: The presentation opened several queries, in particular in relation to ethics involved with the practice of tracking people's eye reaction. Considering time restraints at this meeting the Chair invited members to send in queries or topics for further discussion which can be reviewed in advance and tabled for the June agenda.

9. Audit and Risk committee (ARC) 3rd Annual Report

Noted: ER and AMG presented the Audit and Risk Committee 2020 Annual report. A PDF of the report was circulated to all Members prior to the meeting. They briefly summarised the main findings from the report as:

- The Internal Audit was carried out in 2020 by Crowleys who then presented directly to the ARC. The internal audit focuses on a different topic yearly. The focus in 2020 was Business Continuity Risk.
- Covid-19 was a live test of the organisations resilience and it performed well.
- The External Audit was carried out by the Comptroller and Auditor General's office (C&AG) of which Ronan O'Regan presented the findings to the ARC in April.
- No significant issues arose from the C&AG's audit and any minor issues were adequately dealt with by the CEO.
- All audit reports to date have reported a strong governance and control culture in **safefood**.
- The 3rd Annual Report on Data Protection was presented to the ARC in 2020. Progress by **safefood** have been recognised but there is still improvement required.

10. Data Protection Annual Report 2020.

Noted: A PDF of the Data Protection Annual Report 2020 was circulated to Board members prior to the meeting.

Noted: PF presented an overview of the report summarising the main points as:

- The 2020 report was **safefood's** 3rd report on the Data protection.
- The reports detail a framework to enhance compliance in Data Protection requirements including GDPR.
- Six data breaches were reported to the Data Protection Officer in 2020 which were deemed not serious in nature. This highlights the awareness in staff and that they acted appropriately in reporting the breach.
- **safefood** is currently rolling out refresher Data Protection remote learning modules for all staff.
- At the start of the emergency working from home arrangements, **safefood** was aware of the additional risks posed in relation to data protection whilst staff are working from home and provided a remote learning module to all staff on 'remote working'.

11. Chief Executive's report

Corporate Plan 2017-2019, Business Plans 2017 and 2018

The CEO confirmed that that the Minister of Finance cannot retrospectively approve these Business Plans and the account for these respective years must remain irregular.

Corporate Plan 2020-2022 and Business Plans 2019 and 2020

safefood's Corporate Plan 2020-2022 and Business Plans for 2019 and 2020 have been submitted by the sponsor departments to the NSMC for approval at a future meeting.

Business Plan 2021

safefood's Business Plan for 2021 was approved by the NSMC at a meeting on 5 May 2021.

Covid-19 Working Arrangements

safefood continues to work remotely in line with the Government's guidelines and staff are being encouraged to take annual leave and avail of the wellbeing resources provided under **safefood's** Employee Assistance Programme.

2019 Annual Report & Financial Statements

The 2019 Annual Report & Financial Statements were laid before the Oireachtas, and the Assembly and printed copies were posted to stakeholders. An electronic version, which includes a version translated into the Irish language, was published on our website.

Human Resources Updates

The following developments were noted:

- A new ICT Executive started with **safefood** on 10 May.
- In April, the Finance Manager informed **safefood** of her intention to retire in July. **safefood** advertised in April to fill this position. The closing date for applications was 7 May.
- The NSMC meeting on 26 March 2021 approved the process of the recruitment for a CEO of **safefood** to commence in October 2021. The Department of Health in Dublin is tasked with the recruitment campaign.

Campaigns/Communications

Noted: AMcG informed of the following updates from Communications since the last meeting on in March.

- Phase 9 of the Start campaign launched on 3 May. The focus of this phase is reducing treat foods. 50% of families surveyed reported an increase in the consumption of treat foods during the pandemic. The campaign has received good PR coverage to date, appearing on National T.V and radio and regional radio and press.

- The hand washing campaign in primary schools is currently being evaluated with findings to inform future development and distribution of the RUFUS resource. This evaluation is being carried through a comparison of in-classroom usage of soap and hand sanitiser in classes that were and were not exposed to the rufus resource. Recruitment of schools to take place in the evaluation is proved difficult due to current Covid-19 restrictions.
- World Food Safety Day is on Monday 7 June 2021 and the theme for this year is 'Safe food today for a healthy tomorrow'. **safefood** will support the day with a week of social and digital communications in the week prior. These communications will focus on key food safety messages for the public including handwashing; use by dates; BBQ cooking; and common food safety myths.
- **safefood** will launch 'the curious consumer' podcast shortly. This is **safefood's** first podcast to a public/consumer audience which will look at the myths around food safety.
- **safefood** has developed a new six-week school programme that will be delivered by the Irish Football Association (IFA) Let Them Play Officers. The programme which is currently being piloted in afterschool settings covers the Start campaign messages repurposed for children. The results of the pilot are expected late June and it is hoped to roll out the programme on a bigger scale later in the year.

Noted: SMcC suggested **safefood's** campaign materials could be extended to community groups such as scouting Ireland and its equivalents as these organisations are always looking for new ideas. It was also asked if the IFA project was being evaluated in terms of gender involvement. AMcG informed **safefood** had no control over the gender split and the project was being run in afterschool's.

Action: **safefood** to provide statistics on involvement in IFA project in terms of gender if this is available.

Community food initiative

CC informed that the current 3-year CFI programme is ending at the end of 2021. A proposal is being prepared for the next 3-year programme. CFIs continue to deliver smaller projects and community events remotely in line with Covid-19 restrictions.

Healthy eating

Noted: CC informed of the following work taking place in **safefood** and through partnerships in relation to healthy eating

- An evaluation of the publication All-island Obesity News was carried out. The evaluation showed a drop in subscribers. The team will work on increasing readership and subscribers.

- Members of HHN contributed to the WHO meeting on healthy and sustainable diets. The knowledge and insights gained during this meeting will contribute to a report and set of recommendations to build capacity in countries across the region to promote sustainable and healthy diets in their national context.
- **safefood** is assisting Healthy Ireland in establishing a Food in schools forum in Ireland. **safefood** brings valuable knowledge to the table from its active membership in the food in schools forum Northern Ireland.

Knowledge Network

Noted: GK informed the Knowledge Network is providing a programme which disseminates information and offers training on different food safety topics across a breadth of areas. Regulatory issues are not covered as this does not fall into **safefood**'s remit.

Noted: GK informed of webinars which have recently taken place and are upcoming. Board Members receive invitations to all these events.

Research

Noted: GK informed of the status of research projects

- 3 new projects are currently being evaluated; it is hoped to have contracts in place by early August.
- The final report of 2 research projects ('Exploring the world of food – the perspective of families with children' and 'Socioeconomic cost of food hypersensitivity on the island of Ireland') have been submitted to the **safefood** research office.

12. Disability Action Plan 2021-2025

Noted: PF informed of the recent publication of **safefood**'s Disability action plan, which had been circulated to Board members, and highlighted the actions which **safefood** has identified to meet its obligations.

13. Financial Report

Noted: The Financial report for January – March 2021 was tabled and discussed by PF.

14. AOB

Noted: Alan McGrath suggested that **safefood** consider developing statements on its approach to Corporate Social Responsibility and Climate Action given the positive effect this can have on a brand.

Date of next meeting: Thursday, 17 June 2021