



Minutes of the Tenth Meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee of **safefood**,
held on Thursday 2nd October, 2008 at 9.30 am
safefood, 7 Eastgate Avenue, Eastgate, Little Island, Co. Cork.

PRESENT:

Dr Wayne Anderson (WA)
Dr Ken Baird (KB)
Mr Jim Buckley (JB)
Prof Charles Daly, Chairperson (CD)
Dr John Egan (JE)
Prof Seamus Fanning (SF)
Ms Catherine Foye (CF)
Mr Barney Heywood (BH)
Mr Bert Houston (BeH)
Dr Derval Igoe (DI)
Mr Gerry McCurdy (GMcC)
Prof David McDowell, Vice Chairperson (DMcD)
Mr Martin Mullane (MM)
Dr Emer Shelley (ES)
Dr Brian Smyth (BS)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms Erin Brennan, Minute Secretary (EB)
Mr Ray Dolan, Director, Corporate Operations
Dr Marian Faughnan, Senior Technical Executive, Human Health & Nutrition (MF)
Dr Cliodhna Foley-Nolan, Director, Human Health & Nutrition (CFN)
Ms Fiona Gilligan, Director Marketing & Communications (FG)
Mr Martin Higgins, Chief Executive (MH)
Dr Gary Kearney, Corporate Operations Manager (GK)
Dr David McCleery, Chief Specialist Microbiology (DMcC)
Dr James McIntosh, Chief Specialist Toxicology (JMcI)
Dr Michelle Moore, **safefood** Fellow (MM)

APOLOGIES:

Mr Peter Dewhurst, Financial and Administration Manager
Prof Barbara Livingstone
Ms Patricia McCusker
Dr Margaret Patterson
Dr Brian Gaffney

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chairperson welcomed all Members to the tenth meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC). Erin Brennan was introduced as the secretary taking over from Emma Corbett. Gary Kearney and Michelle Moore were also introduced.

The CEO (MH) outlined the background to the roll-over of the term of the present SAC for a further 12 months and all members were invited to remain on the SAC for this period. One of the primary objectives of the SAC for this next period will be to explore the purpose and on-going activities of the SAC.

Action: All members were asked to indicate to GK whether they would be content to serve the additional 12 months on the SAC.

2. MINUTES OF THE NINTH MEETING OF THE SAC HELD ON 7TH FEB 2008.

The minutes were agreed and adopted.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Noted: MH circulated a paper on obesity for information and comment by the committee.

4. DECLARATION OF INTEREST (oral)

No questions arose regarding the declaration of interests.

5. ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE IN FOOD PAPER (SAC/2008/13)

A draft paper on the Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) and Food Safety was circulated to Members prior to the meeting. The paper was spoken to by SF who invited comments and observations from Members. These included:

Noted: The *salmonella* and *campylobacter* sections could be reduced as it distracts from the AMR discussion.

Noted: The purpose of this document must be confirmed and needs to be user-friendly so to attract a variety of different audiences.

Noted: There is a need in some sections for increased detail and more hard data.

Noted: Particular elements in the paper as for example on biocides could be used specifically by **safefood** with consumers.

Noted: CFN noted that there is an intention for **safefood** to hold a conference on AMR in the spring of 2009 and that this paper could be used as a basis for that event.

- Noted:** JB would be delighted to have this document discussed at a workshop he and CFN are organising for a subgroup of the National Veterinary Council, which will have multidisciplinary participation.
- Noted:** The document content could be separated out and submitted for peer publication and/or broken down into human and animal sections and be peer reviewed.
- Noted:** The final conclusions section of the document should also include recommendations on how to include stakeholders. A need for greater clarity on recommendations was noted.
- Noted:** MH noted that there is a North-South value and approach in this paper, and Ministers would find this of enormous interest.
- Noted:** When a final version of the paper is available, the setting up of a dissemination committee to 'package' this paper would be helpful.
- Noted:** BH suggested involving the Royal College British Veterinary Association to increase awareness.
- Noted:** DI noted that the European Centre for Disease Control is organising a European AMR Day in all countries in November and there will be a meeting in Dublin - DI to follow-up with more information.
- Noted:** The possibility of eliciting the expertise and opinions of the pharmaceutical industry was suggested, as it might provide a different but balanced perspective.
- Noted:** SF and DMcD thanked the following personnel for all their work and support in drafting this paper, in particular Ciara Walsh, Ina Kelly, DMcC, CFN, MM, and Ann McMahon. The Chairperson expressed thanks for the support of all involved.
- Action:** SF and DMcD both noted that there was still editing required and undertook to complete this, and invited Members to submit any comments or amendments, including any thoughts about target audiences.
- Action:** MH suggested that the target audiences need to be identified; FG to consider the consumer point of view with the marketing & communications team.
- Noted:** CFN noted that the final paper should be ready in spring 2009.
- Action:** MH asked members to send any feedback to GK or MM in the coming week so that comments can be forwarded to SF and DMcD.

6. Surveillance Working Paper (SAC/2008/14)

DI spoke to this paper and gave an overview of the work to date.

Noted: DI noted that the final document should be ready by the end of January 2009 as the final meeting of the Surveillance working group, will be held on 16th January 2009.

Action: The final paper will be presented at the next meeting of the SAC.

7. North-South Working Group

MH gave an oral report on the activities and outputs of the North-South Working Group. MH noted that BS, BH, and DMcD are all members of this Group. The following Group suggestions were noted by MH:

- ✓ The working group identified a challenge that **safe food** currently faces, namely, not having a physical presence in Northern Ireland (NI). The possibility of opening an office in NI was discussed, but is an issue for the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) to decide;
- ✓ The option of inviting key stakeholders to open meetings in NI was also discussed;
- ✓ The importance of targeting/lobbying key local journalists, especially within NI;
- ✓ The importance of radio as an inexpensive, localised communications tool;
- ✓ The option of creating a radio studio in the Cork Office, at minimal cost, to better facilitate access to radio stations in NI;
- ✓ An increased involvement with industry sectors, primary and secondary schools, Open Farms and Environmental Health Officers in NI may also be a consideration for the future;
- ✓ There is a need to expand stakeholder networks and membership without diluting functionality. MH suggested having a multi-disciplinary annual conference.

Noted: MH also distributed a paper from the NSMC on Health and Food Safety Sectoral Formats to all members for their information.

8. CHALLENGING AND EMERGING ISSUES: *TOUR DE TABLE*

The Chairperson invited Members present to identify issues that they considered to be of note. These included:

- ✓ Food poverty which is very important especially considering the current economic climate, both in a general sense and within a North-South body context. With a rise in food poverty, there may also be an associated rise in obesity with an increased consumption of inexpensive, high calories foods. There is in place in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) a cardiovascular health policy group, and suggested enhanced liaison between them and **safefood**;
- ✓ Lead and aluminium levels in water, which is an issue that affects both NI and the ROI;
- ✓ Legitimacy of considering water as a food;
- ✓ Increased food costs may result in pressure to drive down costs, which may in turn affect food safety and quality. It may also provide an opportunity for an increase in food fraud. A rise in food fraud will place an increased burden on laboratories, but many of the methodologies are not there;
- ✓ Increases in fuel costs may lead to a decrease in disposal earnings and perhaps resulting in poor diets;
- ✓ Rationalisation of government agencies in the context of budget cutbacks;
- ✓ Amidst a wave of *salmonella* & *listeria* outbreaks etc across Europe and North America, the question was raised about possible related deficiencies within food safety systems. The decrease in standards due to cost restrictions is causing a significant decrease in quality. Are statutory controls for food adequate?
- ✓ The need for a better surveillance system in ROI;
- ✓ The requirement for enhanced training for molecular typing and interpretation should be examined, which will in turn will provide improved surveillance data;
- ✓ Economic difficulties could have an impact on Obesity and that there should be more collaboration with national Cardiovascular Disease groups and other food agencies;
- ✓ Perhaps **safefood** could organise further workshops for 'Outbreak Management' (multidisciplinary);
- ✓ The presence of VTEC in group water schemes in ROI is a problem;
- ✓ The balance of research expenditure between pure research and surveillance is not what it should be.

Noted: MH said that the above suggestions would need to be looked at within the context of the 2009 Business Plan. The CEO thanked Members for identifying these issues.

9. SAC Progress Report

Noted: Members were given the updated SAC Progress Report document for information.

10. Any Other Business

Noted: FG provided an update of current activities in the Marketing & Communication Directorate at **safe food**.

- Christmas Campaign: using a text mechanic for turkey cooking times.
- Speak Out Campaign
 - o 3rd phase will be launched 20th October
 - o Consumers getting messages through radio, outdoor posters, and in restaurants.
- Little Steps Campaign
 - o 2nd phase near completion
 - o Evaluation should be finished by the end of October
- Tastebuds
 - o Primary School resource for 8-10yr olds
 - o To be launched 13th/17th October in Cork
 - o Will be launched in NI next year
- Allergy Training Conference
 - o Malahide, 30th October
 - o Invitations will be sent to all members

Noted: DMcD discussed current research in his lab surrounding the use of disposable BBQs. DMcD will pass relevant information to FG for the summer campaign 2009.

Noted: SF informed the SAC of a 1-day training seminar in UCD on 8th December on molecular typing. He also advised Members of an International Meeting on Cronobacter (*Enterobacter sakazakii*) at UCD on January 22nd & 23rd, 2009.

Noted: WA mentioned that a surveillance report on bottled water has just been completed by the FSAI.

Noted: MH stated that the Enteric Reference Service Consultation Paper should be published in Oct/Nov, and will be open for feedback for 4-5 weeks following its release. To ensure that the paper will be circulated to all interested parties, a list of all those consulted will accompany the paper, so that it may be forward on to others who may be interested.

Noted: It is proposed that the next meeting of the SAC will be held in Belfast in early February of 2009 – to be confirmed.

Noted: The CEO thanked Members for their contribution and closed the meeting.