



**REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE.**

**NIFAC Meetings:** this report includes the advice and observations from two meetings

**NIFAC meeting 27<sup>th</sup> June**

1. NIFAC met on 27<sup>th</sup> June at the FSANI offices, 10a-c Clarendon Road, Belfast. Details of the topics discussed are contained in Board paper INFO 07/07/02, and the advice and observations given at the meeting are recorded below.

*Final Report on the Implementation Review Group on the OTM Rule Change (by video conference)*

2. The Committee was grateful to David Carruthers and Jill Wilson, FSA TSE Division for the presentation of the Final Report of the IRG, and offered the following observations and advice:

- The Committee is not comfortable with the IRG view that addition of real time electronic systems in GB, are unnecessary since the identification of inappropriate animals in the human food chain comes too late for recall action;
- Nevertheless, the report is encouraging since a major change has been implemented with a robust system of testing and without a loss of consumer confidence;
- Members expressed their frustration that the wrongful presentation of older animals has not stopped. The Committee asked the Executive to investigate if something can be done proactively in Northern Ireland about this.

*The Review of the Delivery of Official Controls in Meat Plants*

3. The Committee was grateful to Geoff Tierney, Programme Manager of the Review for briefing the Members on the Review of the Delivery of Official Controls in Meat Plants. Advice and observations were recorded as follows:

- The Committee agreed that overall, the FSA should be a policy organisation and be separate from the delivery arm. This model of governance should enable a better development of a risk based proportionate enforcement regime that still ensures the necessary public health outcomes;
- When changes are introduced they will need to be developed in a way that maintains consumer confidence;

- Contingencies need to be made for market failure;
- Potentially serious public health issues are associated with this industry and evidence must be gathered on where the real risks are and assurance given that the measures taken are necessary and effective;
- It was also noted that the success of responsible operators should be celebrated while enforcers robustly address the failures of those that are less responsible. In this way trust could be established and evidence shared.

*The EC Proposal to Amend Regulation (EC) 852/2004 on the Hygiene of Foodstuffs*

4. The Committee was grateful to Chris Pratt, Head of Hygiene Policy and Legislation Unit for his overview of the above consultation, and commented as follows:
- The Committee is opposed to any exemption to the regulations on the basis of the size of food businesses. The only basis for exemption is low risk and a risk assessment has to be done to determine that;
  - It was agreed that enforcement needs to be proportionate and that risk assessment is the only basis on which you can regulate;
  - Members advised that it is worth examining ways to build flexibility into the record keeping but that this may be a little premature at this stage.

*The Consumer Attitudes Survey*

5. The Committee was grateful to Helen Ralph and Robyn Ackerman, FSA Communications Division for their overview of the Consumer Attitudes Survey. The following issues were addressed in discussion:
- It is felt that although there is now a huge amount of nutrition information in the public domain, there is still a big communications gap. People know what is bad for them but still choose to eat unhealthily. Attitudinal segmentation was discussed;
  - It was confirmed that the drop in concern about food poisoning from 63% to 57% may be statistically significant;
  - Members were informed that although data from each of the four countries can show significant statistical difference, FSA have not yet used this to build campaigns;
  - A mini tracking survey is carried out on a quarterly basis and information on all FSA survey work is available on the research section of the website;

- Greg Irwin informed Members that according to the findings from the survey, Northern Ireland consumers are very concerned about healthy eating. As well as this, NI respondents claim to eat red meat more often, and oily fish and fruit and vegetables less often than the UK average.

### **NIFAC meeting 6<sup>th</sup> September**

6. NIFAC last met on 6<sup>th</sup> September at the FSANI offices, 10a-c Clarendon Road, Belfast. The following topics were discussed:

#### *DNA in Food and Forensic Science (closed)*

7. The Committee was grateful to NIFAC Member Michael Walker for his overview of the issues surrounding DNA in food and forensics. His presentation detailed the use of DNA profiling and analysis in the detection of crime in the context of food. The Committee advised the following:

- That the FSA should continue, with some urgency, to gain agreement in Europe on some of the outstanding methodological issues that will allow this technique to be more powerful in detection of food fraud;
- That NIFAC should discuss and respond to the forthcoming FSA-led consultation on the Association of Public Analysts.

#### *Review of the 2005 Sudan I Incident (by video conference) (closed)*

8. The Committee was grateful to Nick Tomlinson, Head of FSA Chemical Safety and Incident Prevention Division and Colin Houston, Deputy Head of Imported Food Division and Head of Food Standards Branch for the overview of the 2005 Sudan I Incident. The overview detailed actions that had been taken prior to the review; the review process and summarised the review panel's recommendations.

#### *The Food Fraud Task Force: Final Report (closed)*

9. The Committee was grateful to David Statham, Head of FSA Enforcement Division for detailing the Report from the Food Fraud Task Force. Members gave advice concerning various aspects of the Task Force's activities and conclusions.

#### *NIFAC Retreat 2007 and the SWaNI Review (closed)*

10. The Assistant Director and Chairman updated members of the forthcoming Committee Retreat, which will feature a discussion on the Review of the SWaNI Advisory Committees. Members considered the questionnaire which will form the basis of the discussion and discussed possible measures of effectiveness.

## *Findings of the Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey (LIDNS)*

11. The Committee was grateful to Alison Tedstone, Head of FSA Nutrition Science and Maria Jennings, Head of FSANI Consumer Choice and Food Standards Division for detailing the findings of the LIDNS. The members appreciated a healthy discussion, which will inform discussions on diet and health at subsequent meetings.

## *Task Force on Publication of Information Relating to Food Businesses, Food Products and Local Authorities (by video conference)*

12. Members were grateful to Steve Wearne, Head of FSA Regulation, International and Openness Division for his overview of the Agency's plans to establish the above task force. The Committee offered the following advice and observations:

### Terms of Reference

- The terms of reference should be prefaced by a statement that notes the primary aim of the FSA's openness agenda. Namely to be transparent, maintain informed consumer choice etc;
- One element of the purpose of the Task Force is to consider how appropriate reputational sanctions can be applied while ensuring that the FSA can maintain sufficient trust to do research and relevant surveys that inform its further work;
- It was suggested that the terms of reference be altered to read '...that might be applied *consistently* by the FSA...';
- It was suggested that the phrase 'or other relevant bodies' be added, to read 'relating to food companies, food products, local authority regulatory services *or other relevant bodies.*' This would cover all eventualities and not limit the Task Force to considering only the previous three sectors;
- The terms of reference should explicitly state that the Task Force advises the FSA Board on *situations* as well as criteria that might be applied to decisions on publishing information.

### Work Plan

- The Committee was content at the Task Force's proposed work plan – this is a matter for the Executive.

### Membership of Task Force

- While recognising that most of this work should be location neutral, the Agency was encouraged to ensure some representation from the Devolved

Administrations on the Task Force. This would help identify issues that may be location specific.

### **Meetings with Others**

The Chair has met with a number of stakeholders during the period. For details please see the Board Member Engagements paper number SO 07/09/04.

### **Future NIFAC meetings**

The programme and provisional agenda for future meetings of the Committee is described below.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>EVENT</b>	<b>POTENTIAL TOPICS</b>
23 October 2007	Open meeting, Dungannon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The meeting will take the form of a panel discussion on the topic 'What we can do to promote healthy eating'. Speakers will be from the spectrum of FSA stakeholders.</li></ul>
5 December 2007	Open meeting, FSANI offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work of the Wine Standards Branch</li><li>• Review of Nutrient Profiling Model (Provisional)</li></ul>