

## WORKING PARTY ON CHEMICAL CONTAMINANTS IN FOOD

### THE ROLE OF THE WPCC

#### Background

1. The WPCC was formed in 1997 to coincide with the establishment of the Joint Food Safety and Standards Group within the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. At that time the main aims of the WPCC were to advise Departments, prior to the establishment of the Food Standards Agency, on the results of completed surveys and to review the work programme of and future requirements for surveillance and research.
2. The composition of the membership reflects the wide subject matter of the WPCC with members being chosen for their range of expertise and backgrounds on chemical contaminants in food. Members have been invited because of their personal expertise. In many cases, organisations have nominated representatives to contribute on their behalf.
3. With the establishment of the Food Standards Agency the role, Terms of Reference (Annex 1) and remit of the WPCC, and other groups that advise the Agency, need to be reappraised.
4. The Agency is conducting a review of the various expert committees that advise it on food safety issues. The purpose of the review is to ensure that the Agency has access to the best possible scientific advice, and that these Committees operate in an effective and transparent manner, in line with recent recommendations from the Phillips Report and other guidelines for the operation of public bodies. (Annex 2)

#### *Members are asked to consider:*

- the role that they can play in advising the Agency in the future, with respect to pertinent and timely research and surveillance work in the area of chemical contaminants; and
- the possibility of undertaking the peer reviewing contractor's final research reports prior to their public dissemination.

**Chemical Contaminants & Animal Feed Division**  
**Food Standards Agency**

November 2001

## ANNEX 1

### TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. To advise on the scope of future surveys and related research on chemical contaminants for funding by the Food Standards Agency.
2. To consider the results of surveys and relevant research on chemical contaminants<sup>1</sup> and advise on the implications for the Agency, consumers, industry and other interested parties.
3. To consider and review the causes of human exposure to chemical contaminants in food in the United Kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes inorganic contaminants, organic environmental contaminants, natural toxicants (whether or not adventitious) as defined and processing contaminants, but not migrants from food contact materials.

## **ANNEX 2**

### **AGENCY'S REVIEW OF SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEES**

#### **Key points**

- The purpose of the review is to ensure that the Agency has access to the best possible scientific advice, that these Committees operate in an effective and transparent manner, in line with recent recommendations from the Phillips Report and other guidelines for the operation of public bodies.
- The review includes committees that also advise other Departments, such as the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (which advises the Agency and the agriculture and health departments) and is being conducted in concert with observers from those Departments.
- The next meeting of the Review Group is on 4 December at which the draft report will be considered. The meeting will include a session with stakeholders.
- It is expected that the review will be completed early in the new year.

#### **Background**

The Food Standards Agency is conducting a review of the various expert committees that advise it on food safety issues. The purpose of the review is to ensure that the Agency has access to the best possible scientific advice, and that these Committees operate in an effective and transparent manner, in line with recent recommendations from the Phillips Report and other guidelines for the operation of public bodies. This review will include committees that also advise other Departments, such as the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (which advises the Agency and the health and agriculture Departments), and is being conducted in concert with

observers from those Departments. It is expected that the review will be completed around the turn of the year.

### **Committees covered by the review**

The review covers the following committees that offer specialist scientific advice to the Agency:

- ACAF Advisory Committee on Animal Feedingstuffs
- ACMSF Advisory Committee on Microbiological Safety of Food
- ACNFP Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes
- COC Committee on Carcinogenicity
- COM Committee on Mutagenicity
- COT Committee on Toxicity
- SACN Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition
- SEAC Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee

The following non-scientific advisory committees also advise the Agency but will not be directly included in the review, although some of the more general conclusions of the review may have implications for their operation:

- FAC Food Advisory Committee
- MHAC Meat Hygiene Advisory Committee

In addition the following ad hoc group is not included since it was formed (by MAFF and DH) to conduct a specific review and its work is expected to be completed later this year:

- EGVM Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals

## **Scope of the review**

The terms of reference are as follows:

"To examine the role, method of operation and effectiveness of the independent expert committees in regard to the work that they undertake for the Food Standards Agency."

The review includes the following topics:

- The extent to which the Committees provide the best possible scientific advice on food matters, whilst ensuring that a broad range of scientific opinion is considered
- Openness and transparency
- The way that conflicts of interest are handled
- The role of the Chair, members and the secretariat
- The role, function and support for consumer/lay members
- Working practices
- Handling uncertainty (during discussions & in committee advice)
- Roles of the committees and the Agency re risk assessment and risk management and risk communication
- The extent to which the committees put into practice recommendations of the May/Donaldson/Krebs review of risk procedures and relevant sections of the Phillips review
- How, and the extent to which, the recommendations of advisory committees are used to inform the development of policies and regulation
- Appointment and selection procedures, including cross-membership of committees and role of experts outside UK
- Remuneration
- Accountability of committees

## **Working methods**

The review is being conducted by a Review Group, with secretariat support from Chemical Safety and Toxicology Division.

## **Membership**

Sir John Krebs is chair of the review panel and its membership is as follows.

Valerie Howarth FSA Board member

Michael Walker FSA Board member

Derek Burke Academic / former committee chairman (ACNFP)

Andrew Puddephatt FOI expert

Barbara Saunders Consumer member of committee (EGVM, ex-FAC)

Maureen Edmondson Committee member with industrial experience  
(FAC)

## **Timescale**

The timetable for the review is

Late June First meeting of the Review Group: morning session for Review Group, afternoon session with stakeholders

August All committee members invited to contribute to the review, either in writing or via their chairmen

27 September second meeting of Review Group, including a discussion with chairmen of the various committees (or their deputies)

Oct / Nov Secretariat to produce first draft of the report

End Nov Draft report to be sent to Review Group and stakeholders

6 December Meeting of the Review Group, to consider the draft report.

Session with stakeholders to allow comment on draft report

January (if needed) final meeting of the Review Group to finalise the draft report

Early 2002 report to the Agency Board

## **Liaison with other government departments**

DH, MAFF and OST have nominated observers who would receive papers and attend meetings of the Panel.

**CST Division  
October 2001**