REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND FOOD ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Report by Colm McKenna, Chair of the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee.

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1. Summary

1.1 This report from the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) Chair reports on the activity of the Committee in Northern Ireland from the period September 2017 to September 2019.

1.2 The Board is asked to comment on the proposed forward work programme for NIFAC.

2. Introduction

2.1 NIFAC’s role is defined in the Food Standards Act 1999 and acts as an advisory body to the Food Standards Agency (FSA). It is chaired by the Northern Ireland Board member and its role is to advise the FSA on food safety and standards issues, with particular emphasis on Northern Ireland.

2.2 NIFAC members provide a wide range of expertise, experience and practical knowledge of the FSA. All members are recruited through open Public Appointment style competition and are appointed by the Minister of Health in Northern Ireland. Currently without devolved Government in Northern Ireland, appointments to NIFAC are approved by the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health.

2.3 The Committee works closely with the FSA both in Northern Ireland and beyond and supports the FSA’s strategic outcomes.

2.4 The operating budget expenditure for NIFAC for 2018/19 and the estimated budget expenditure for 2019/20 is shown in Annex A. The dates of NIFAC meetings are shown in Annex B and an outline of the Agenda Items discussed can be found in Annex C. Information on NIFAC membership can be found in Annex D.

3. Strategic Aims

3.1 NIFAC is committed to working in an open and transparent way by:

- Holding public meetings;
- Listening to the views of Northern Ireland stakeholders;
- Supporting the FSA at public events and stakeholder meetings;
- Maintaining an efficient process for agenda planning, involving the early identification of subjects with Northern Ireland-specific interests and;
• Producing thorough and well considered advice which it may publish independently.

4. Committee Membership

4.1 The Committee has 7 members and the FSA Board member for Northern Ireland chairs the Committee. The list of Committee members and their terms of office is shown at Annex D.

4.2 There is a wide range of expertise among the NIFAC membership, including members with backgrounds in farming and agriculture; consumer and community engagement; the meat industry and agri-food journalism; public health; nutrition policy; marketing, research and communications; public and media relations; and social science. This wide-ranging experience as well as members’ associated networks and insights has been extremely useful for NIFAC discussions.

5. Discussion and Retrospective Review

5.1 Since September 2017, NIFAC has visited two sites.

Lough Neagh Eel Fisherman’s Cooperative

5.2 In September 2017, NIFAC held an open meeting at the Lough Neagh Eel Fishermen’s Cooperative in Toome, County Antrim. The Committee was given a tour of the impressive site to see the processing of the brown eels from the lough as well as some of the scale fish also processed there. Members heard about the measures and processes put in place by the fishery to ensure quality, welfare, yield and conservation of the eel stocks. NIFAC was also given an overview of the significant challenges faced by the fishery from both the UK’s exit from the EU and the global decline in eel stocks. This was a highly informative visit, giving Committee members an insight into the issues faced within a large-scale inland fishery.

Devenish Nutrition

5.3 In February 2018, NIFAC visited Devenish Nutrition’s lands at Dowth where members heard presentations from Dr John Gilliland, Dr Heather Hayes and Dr Eva Lewis on their Soil to Society project, the importance of long chain Omega 3 oils, consumer understanding of health claims and their sustainable land management strategy. This was followed by a tour of the site – an area of significant historical and archaeological significance where historical and prehistorical land use in the area is still having an impact on soil chemistry.

Themed Meetings

5.4 In June 2018, the Board considered a paper (FSA 18-06-11) on the review of the Food Advisory Committees (FACs) following a Board commissioned review of the FACs which was carried out by the Heads of Private Office. The aim of the review was to consider how the contribution of the FACs could be improved
and strengthened, ensuring the FSA could harness their potential, derive greater value from them and enhance their contribution to FSA insight and decision making.

5.5 This invited the Chairs and FACs to provide wider consumer insight and to proactively explore country specific issues that exist in relation to the FSA’s strategic priorities.

5.6 Following the review, FACs have been using a new format for open meetings, focused on particular themes and considering these from the specific country perspective. The meetings have consisted of presentations from both internal and external presenters, followed by a panel style discussion with NIFAC members and the presenters.

5.7 The first of these themed meetings took place in March 2019 and the topic of Animal Feed was considered. This was followed by a discussion regarding Allergens in April and the future FSA Strategy in July.

5.8 Since the implementation of the review, NIFAC have met in closed session to consider and discuss Board papers, specifically from a Northern Ireland perspective, with the NIFAC Chair providing feedback at Board meetings.

6. **Forward Work Plan**

6.1 The agendas for NIFAC meetings will continue to take the issues being discussed by the Board into consideration, with particular attention to any areas that may have a special relevance to Northern Ireland. I will continue to provide reports of the Committee’s discussions and represent the views of NIFAC at Board meetings and discussions. NIFAC has been working within the new format with a view to providing a more meaningful contribution to policy development and providing important country specific insights.

6.2 As part of the review, it is expected that the Committee develops and agrees a forward work programme to ensure it considers issues pertinent to Northern Ireland. Areas which NIFAC are planning to consider over the coming year include:

- The structure and characteristics of the food retail, wholesale and production sectors in Northern Ireland;
- Antimicrobial Resistance;
- Communications, considering where and how comparable bodies are achieving high impact with their consumer communications;
- Nutrition and dietary health;
- Consideration of any Northern Ireland specific insights emanating from the results of the Food and You survey;
- Food crime and surveillance; and
- Food poverty.
6.3 During the year, the Committee will seek to visit relevant sites in Northern Ireland and engage with local stakeholders.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The Board is asked to comment on the proposed forward work programme for NIFAC.
## ANNEX A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Expenditure £ (thousands)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2018/2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members’ Remuneration</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIFAC Secretariat Staff Costs</td>
<td>5.5¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference costs – includes:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- NIFAC sub group costs</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Advertising meeting costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conference/Event costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- NIFAC meeting costs (accommodation, room hire, sound technician and equipment hire costs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel and subsistence costs</td>
<td>Included in Members’ Remuneration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIFAC appointment process costs</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL COSTS</td>
<td>40.7</td>
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¹ During this period, the NIFAC Secretariat Officer was being paid from a different cost centre due to a temporary promotion, while still completing NIFAC work. This has now been regulated following the employment of a new NIFAC Secretariat Officer.
ANNEX B

Open Meetings

2018

- 7 March
- 13 June
- 11 September
- 28 November

2019

- 6 March
- 10 April
- 24 July
- 24 October

2020

- 14 January
- 21 April
- 21 July
- 21 and 22 October
ANNEX C

Retrospective review of items discussed by NIFAC in open sessions – November 2017 to September 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NIFAC Open Meeting</th>
<th>Agenda Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 29 November 2017    | • Regulating Our Future – The Food Standard Agency’s Role as a Supporting Regulator under Primary Authority  
                      • Regulating Our Future – Development of the Assurance Framework for the Target Operating Model  
                      • Update on the FSA’s Activities Concerning Antimicrobial Resistance  
                      • Strategic Surveillance Update  
                      • Understanding People: Social Science in the FSA |
| 7 March 2018        | • Science Update and Update from the Chair of the Science Council  
                      • Raw Drinking Milk  
                      • International Strategy  
                      • Nutrition Surveillance  
                      • Public Attitudes Tracker |
| 13 June 2018        | • NFCU Business Case  
                      • Cutting Plants and Cold Store Review  
                      • Half-way Review of Regulating Our Future  
                      • Calorie Wise  
                      • Raw Drinking Milk |
| 11 September 2018   | • Annual Animal Welfare Update  
                      • Annual Incidents and Resilience Report  
                      • Regulating Our Future  
                      • Standards and Dietary Health Team Update  
                      • Update on the FSA’s activities on AMR |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Theme:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28 November 2018</td>
<td>Risk Analysis: Process, Governance, Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allergens Update</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incident Management post EU Exit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regulating Our Future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Progress and future direction of social science in the FSA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Raw drinking milk triggers for review</td>
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**Beginning of Themed Meetings**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Theme:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 March 2019</td>
<td>Animal Feed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The FSA and Animal Feed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DAERA Perspective</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NIGTA Perspective</td>
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<td></td>
<td>NIFAC Panel Discussion</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Theme:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 April 2019</td>
<td>Allergens</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General Introduction to Allergens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allergens: Legislative Requirements, Current Situation and Plans</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implementation and Enforcement of Allergens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Patient’s Perspective</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Research on Allergens</td>
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<td>NIFAC Panel Discussion</td>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 July 2019</td>
<td>Future FSA Strategy</td>
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<td>Food Industry in Northern Ireland</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Food Strategy in Northern Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food Borne Illnesses, Disease Patterns and Emerging Trends</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NIFAC Panel Discussion</td>
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ANNEX D

NIFAC Membership

New appointments to NIFAC

Since September 2017 NIFAC has lost two members, Mr Colin Reid and Dr Christine Kennedy. Both were very highly effective contributors, greatly esteemed by their NIFAC colleagues and valued members of the Committee and I thank them for the contribution they made to ensuring NIFAC’s effectiveness in scrutinising FSA policy.

Since September 2017 there have been two new appointments to NIFAC.

Lorraine Crawford has over 30 years’ experience as a practising Environmental Health Officer, finally in her role as Director of Environmental Services for Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, before starting business as a self-employed consultant in May 2016.

She has extensive experience in conducting food audits and advising large manufacturing premises. Holding qualifications in health education and public health leadership, she has maintained a long-standing interest in food matters and health and wellbeing.

Greg Irwin has worked in a range of senior positions in the public and voluntary sector over the last 25 years (including working in three different regulatory bodies over the past 14 years). He is currently Head of Strategy and Communications and Board Secretary at the Utility Regulator. Prior to that he worked as Assistant Director at the Food Standards Agency’s NI office. This included a secondment to the NSW Food Authority in Sydney as Executive Director, Consumer and Corporate Services.

He has a particular interest in consumer communications and social research and spent significant periods of his career as a researcher in academia and the charity sector.

His previous public appointments were as a non-Executive Director at HSC Business Services Organisation and as a lay member of the HPSS Research Ethics Committee.

The current membership of the Committee is as follows:

- **Colm McKenna** – Chair of NIFAC and Board member for Northern Ireland (Term of appointment ends 31 August 2020)
- **Aodhan O’Donnell** (Second Term of appointment ends 31 July 2020)
- **Phelim O’Neill** (Second Term of appointment ends 31 July 2020)
- **Sara McCracken** (First Term of appointment ends 31 July 2020)
- **Fiona Hanna** (First Term of appointment ends 31 July 2020)
- **Lorraine Crawford** (First Term of appointment ends 16 February 2021)
- **Elizabeth Mitchell** (Second Term of appointment ends 31 July 2021)
• **Greg Irwin** (First Term of appointment ends 31 March 2022).