

**Enforcement Stakeholder Meeting Tuesday 25th October 2005
at the FSANI offices, 10A Clarendon Road, Belfast**

Attendees

Industry Representatives

Alexis Cann – Coleraine Borough Council
Damien Connolly – Belfast City Council
Owen Fulton – Carrickfergus Borough Council
Richard Hanna – Armagh City & District Council
Linda Hutton – Fermanagh District Council
Dr Ian Leitch – Omagh District Council
Colin Magill – North Down Borough Council
Audrey McClune – Southern Group Environmental Health Service
John McKee – Northern Ireland Food Liaison Group (NIFLG)
Michael Rowe – DARD
Clifford Todd – Newtownabbey Borough Council
Dr Ian Wilson – NI Public Health Laboratory

FSANI Officials

Gerry McCurdy – Chairman
Greg Irwin – Assistant Director
Susanne Boyle
Mervyn Briggs
Dr Kirsten Dunbar
Michael Jackson
Jim Ross
Ruth Watson – Secretariat
Trevor Williamson

Apologies

Karen Cregan – Derry City Council
Paddy Cosgrove – Strabane District Council
George McIlroy – DARD
John Murray – Strabane District Council

1. Introduction

- 1.1** The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that the Forum has been set up to provide a mechanism for enforcement bodies to raise matters of broad concern with the Agency on an informal basis. The meeting also enables stakeholders to look ahead with the Agency to help identify emerging issues as early as possible. A topic relating to ethnic businesses was identified for discussion under agenda item 4.

1.2 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

2. Key Developments since the last meeting

The Chairman updated the enforcement representatives on the key developments since the last meeting.

2.1 New Chairperson for the FSA

The Chair noted that Dame Deirdre Hutton CBE was appointed as Chair of the Food Standards Agency on 31st March 2005. He also gave an extensive outline of Dame Deirdre Hutton's service on a range of public bodies, and her considerable experience of corporate governance, risk-based regulation and consumer policy. She has served on a number of public bodies and has considerable experience of corporate governance, risk-based regulation and consumer policy.

2.2 The Recruitment of new NIFAC members

The Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee has recently renewed its complement. The Chairman detailed brief biographies of the four new members who have been appointed in August and September – Tony McCusker, Paul Archer, Professor Jack Pearce and Dr Alex McGarel. Members are usually appointed on three-year terms, which gives the Committee consistency while also providing new perspectives on a regular basis. The Assistant Director added that a new recruitment exercise for NIFAC members to be appointed in 2006 will begin in November.

2.3 Sudan I and Para Red incidents

2.3.1 The Chairman stated that following an incident in February relating to the adulteration of chilli powder with the dye Sudan I, the Agency announced in March that it planned to review the incident in order to identify lessons. In order not to prejudice the outcome of the ongoing legal proceedings, the external review of the incident involving Sudan I in Worcester sauce has been deferred until these investigations, and any possible resulting legal action, have been completed.

2.3.2 The Chairman noted that the legal investigations may take a substantial amount of time to complete. In the interim, a Taskforce has been established to consider ways

of strengthening controls in the food chain. The Chairman detailed the complement of the Incidents Taskforce, which is chaired by the FSA's Chief Executive, Dr Jon Bell. The Task Force held its first meeting on 14th June and has met 3 times since then.

2.3.3 The Chairman announced that in light of recent incidents, the Agency is revising its Guidelines on handling incidents. These will be developed into a set of guidelines applicable to all key stakeholders. The Taskforce is being kept informed of progress with the revisions.

2.4 Salt Update

2.4.1 The Chairman stated that the second phase of the salt campaign would run from the week commencing 10th October to 20th November, with the message focussing on '6g per day'. Television and poster adverts have been confirmed and a major feature ran in the Sun newspaper. The Agency is also financially supporting a number of projects involving key stakeholder organisations.

2.4.2 Stakeholders were informed of The Agency's consultation package on the proposed targets for levels of salt in various food product categories. The targets in the consultation have been developed by a working group that includes representatives from all of the product sector organisations.

2.5 Signposting and Nutrient Profiling

2.5.1 The independent assessment of the FSA's signposting options has recently finished. Consumer testing was carried out in Northern Ireland in July and a review of the results is currently taking place.

2.5.2 On 27th July the Agency published a consultation document on a proposed nutrient profiling model to support OFCOM's work to regulate the advertising and promotion of foods to children. The Chairman detailed the profiling model, which is a simple scoring system giving points on the basis of the level of each nutrient in 100g of the food.

2.6 OTM

2.6.1 The government has accepted the FSA's recommendation that the OTM rule should be replaced with a robust testing regime, and the Chairman outlined the detail of this. The FSA will be represented on the implementation group, which has been formed to oversee the roll-out of the regime, and will report to the FSA Board. The new regulations are operational from 7th November.

2.6.2 The Chairman also referenced the DARD consultation on legislation to lift the beef export ban. Due to the link between this and the resultant consequential changes to controls on specified risk material (SRM), such changes, although the responsibility of the FSA, have been included in their consultation.

2.7 Belfast Board Meeting

The Chairman updated stakeholders on the recent FSA Board meeting which was held in Belfast on 13th October. Items on the agenda included: Protecting Consumers – the FSA's role as a regulator; FSA Priorities for Local Authority Food Law Enforcement; and Nutrient Profiling. The full agenda and meeting papers are available on the FSA's website. The minutes will be published on the website once they have been ratified at the next meeting on 8th December.

3. Partnership Working / Taking Forward the Agency's Strategic Plan

3.1 The Assistant Director introduced this item. He noted that the Agency's consultation on its Strategic Plan 2005 – 2010 received over 200 responses, several of which indicated a willingness to participate in the delivery of strategic plan targets through partnership with the Agency. The final strategic plan strongly supported the intention of the FSA to work in partnership with others, and since then the FSA has been seeking to further explore how the idea of partnership can be advanced with stakeholders.

3.2 Stakeholders' initial views were sought on the following questions:

- a) What does partnership mean to you, can you identify successful examples of partnership?
- b) What are the challenges required to move from stakeholders to partners – can all

stakeholders become partners?

- c) What can the FSA do to enable stakeholders to become partners?
- d) What are the barriers to successful partnership with the FSA?

3.3 John McKee, Northern Ireland Food Liaison Group (NIFLG) welcomed the Agency's consideration of partnership working with stakeholders. He suggested that a mechanism should be developed, creating partnership between stakeholders and the Agency, focussing on issues that require urgent responses; medium term responses; and longer term, strategic issues.

3.4 A discussion followed on the implications of the Freedom of Information (Fol) Act, and its impact on local authorities. Stakeholders viewed this as an example of where they could work in partnership with the Agency. The Chairman sympathised with stakeholders regarding the impact on local authorities and the resulting uncertainties, noting that the Fol Act was a new concept to the Agency as well. FSA Scotland have formed a group to look at the implications of the Fol Act, and Damien Connolly, Belfast City Council, expressed an interest in being part of any similar pilot scheme for Northern Ireland.

3.5 The Chairman thanked enforcement representatives for their views, encouraging them to initiate partnership with the Agency and to forward any further thoughts to Ruth Watson by 11th November.

4 Invitees' Topics and General Issues

4.1 There is a large base of ethnic catering establishments in Northern Ireland, particularly from the Chinese sector, and many of which fall into the high-risk category for food safety audits. Due to the language barriers, difficulties have arisen in communicating and enforcing documented HACCP with ethnic businesses around the Province. It was recognised that the HACCP guidance documents must be tailored to suit the needs of all food businesses, and that local authorities must be able to communicate effectively with all sectors of the community. Belfast City Council is investigating the option of recruiting a Cantonese-speaking EHO for this purpose.

4.2 A discussion took place, with all agreeing that the issue of tailoring HACCP to all sectors of the community should be addressed. It was recognised that difficulties lie in the practicalities of communicating with the range of ethnic communities, and that simply translating the current HACCP guidance pack Safe Catering into different languages would not be sufficient. The FSANI is currently revising its HACCP guidance in line with the new EU Hygiene Regulations, and it was noted that any guidance produced for ethnic communities must reflect this.

4.3 The Chairman thanked stakeholders for raising the issue, and agreed that the needs of ethnic minorities should be considered. He noted that it is imperative to establish a level playing field for all HACCP guidance documents, and was open to suggestions regarding different methods of communicating HACCP to businesses.

5 Six Monthly Forward Look

The Chairman updated stakeholders on forthcoming events for FSANI.

5.1 New Food Hygiene Legislation

The Chairman noted that seminars have been held to inform industry stakeholders of the impact of the changes, and a scoping exercise has been carried out to identify the key needs of those involved in food law enforcement. Training for food law enforcement officials will take the form of five sessions each focussing on a specific area. These training seminars are available to any official engaged in food law enforcement, and are detailed below:

- The framework of the new EU Hygiene Regulations and how it relates to the Official Food and Feed Controls.
- Food Hygiene Regulations – new enforcement powers.
- EU Regulation 853, which deals with products from Animal Origin premises.
- EU Regulation 852, which deals with premises not covered by EU Regulation 853.
- The new microcriteria regulation.

5.2 The Official Feed and Food Control Regulations (NI) 2005

The Chairman informed industry representatives of the progress of the Official Feed and Food Control Regulations (NI) 2005. The public consultation to the Regulations was completed in June 2005, and it is anticipated that they will come into effect from 1st January 2006. The chairman explained in detail the impact of the Regulations.

The aims and objectives of the Regulations are as follows:

- The aim of the EU Regulation is to create a more comprehensive, integrated, risk-based, EU wide 'farm to fork' approach to official controls.
- The objective is to improve the consistency and effectiveness of controls across the EU and, as a consequence raise standards of food safety and consumer protection and provide a more level playing field for businesses.

5.3 Foodborne Disease Strategy

5.3.1 Poultry and red meat, HACCP, and hygiene education have been identified as priorities for the Agency's foodborne disease strategy. Work in these areas will continue for the next year along with the development of the appropriate approaches and interventions that will contribute towards meeting the new targets in the Agency's Strategic Plan 2005 – 2010. The Chairman briefed those present on the Agency's aims and activities planned for the next 12 months.

5.3.2 The Chairman updated enforcement representatives on the computerised Food Surveillance System (FSS). The system is FSA led and was piloted in Scotland, and will be implemented throughout the UK in due course. This may take a substantial amount of time due to the scale of the roll-out. It was also recognised that for the FSS to work, laboratories must have compatible IT systems.

5.3.3 The Chairman also updated those present on the FVO programme for 2006. The FVO will conduct a number of visits throughout the year, focussing on a range of issues.

5.3.4 It was noted that a joint FSA-NIFLG conference on food standards will take place in February 2006. Details have been circulated to Local Authorities. Ian Wilson, NIPHL enquired if the Agency has sought dental opinions on the effect of the 5-a-day fruit and vegetable message.

Action – Chairman to investigate if dental opinion sought on the Agency's 5-a-day fruit and vegetable message.

6 Concluding Comments and Close

The Chairman sought comments on the meeting. All present considered it to have been a useful exercise and looked forward to the next meeting. The Chairman thanked everyone for their participation and confirmed that the next meeting will be held in March 2006.

Ruth Watson

29/11/2005

Appendix 1 – Table of Action Points

	Action	To be actioned by
1	To investigate if dental opinion sought on the Agency's 5-a-day fruit and vegetable message.	Chairman