

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD

Proposed working group on non-proteolytic *Clostridium botulinum* and vacuum and modified atmosphere packaged foods

Introduction

1. The current FSA guidelines in this area indicates that, unless suitable grounds for extension are proven, the shelf-life of vacuum-packaged (VP) and modified atmosphere packaged (MAP) chilled foods, including fresh meat, held at temperatures from 3 to 8°C is a maximum of 10 days. Industry has regularly challenged the basis for this and claims that for many of these products a longer shelf-life would be in place in other countries. Other aspects of the guidelines have also been challenged.
2. At the committee's meeting in May 2018 the secretariat was asked to look at what information had been published or made available over the past 10 years which might be relevant to the issue of *Clostridium botulinum* and vacuum and modified atmosphere packaged foods. This was summarised in paper ACM/1282 and discussed at the meeting in October 2018. Members identified several aspects which would need to be considered if a working group was established and noting that some industry-funded experimental work was still underway at the time. The industry-funded work undertaken by QIB Extra Ltd in relation to fresh meat and referred to in ACM/1282 has now been completed (See ACM/1304) and the FSA has been asked to revisit the guidelines in relation to this new evidence.
3. It is now appropriate for the committee to establish a short-life working group to review the evidence on key aspects relating to the risk of non-proteolytic *Clostridium botulinum* and VP/MAP foods. This following provides a draft terms of reference and comments on proposed membership, timescale envisaged and structure of the meetings and expected outputs.

Draft terms of reference

- Review the risk posed by non-proteolytic *C.botulinum* and the FSAs guidelines for the shelf-life of vacuum and modified atmosphere packaged foods.
- Specifically review the industry funded risk assessment of botulism from chilled, VP/MAP (Vacuum Packed/Modified Atmosphere Packed) fresh meat held at 3°C to 8°C (ACM/1304).
- Where appropriate consider other risk-related evidence relevant to this topic made available to the FSA and the ACMSF during the lifetime of the group.

Proposed membership

4. The group will be chaired by Professor David McDowell. Members will be drawn from existing membership of the ACMSF together with additional co-opted experts.

Timescale

5. It is envisaged that this should be a short-term working group and would last for about 7 months meeting approximately 4 times (July, September and November 2019 and January 2020). After this period a decision would be made about the future of the group. We would like to establish this group to begin work on the task as soon as possible. The secretariat would begin some background work to inform a first meeting probably in the second half of July.

Structure of the meetings and expected output

6. It is proposed that meetings of the new group would focus on delivering the terms of reference. It may be possible for relevant stakeholders from industry to present evidence to the group in addition to written evidence where this cannot be done
7. It is expected that the outputs of the group will be in the form of a paper presented to the main committee in early 2020.

8. Members are asked to:

- Indicate whether they are content to proceed with establishing a short-term working group as outlined in this paper.
- Identify the priority issues which the working group will need to address.
- Comment on the draft TOR, approach and timescale envisaged for this task

**Secretariat
June 2019**