

**MINUTES OF THE FORTY-FOURTH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY
COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD HELD ON
27 JUNE 2002 AT AVIATION HOUSE, 125 KINGSWAY, LONDON WC2 AT
10.30 AM**

Present

Chairman : Professor D L Georgala

Members : Dr G R Andrews
Dr D W G Brown
Dr K M Hadley
Professor T J Humphrey
Mrs P Jefford
Professor A M Johnston
Mr A Kyriakides
Mr B J Peirce
Dr Q D Sandifer
Dr T D Wyatt

Assessors : Mr P J R Gayford (DEFRA)
Professor C H McMurray (NIDARD)
Dr R Skinner (FSA)

Secretariat : Mr C R Mylchreest (Administrative Secretary)
Mrs E Stretton
Miss C Wilkes

Others : Ms C Bowles (FSA) for item 9

1. Chairman's introduction

- 1.1 The Chairman welcomed Members to the forty-fourth meeting of the Committee. The 2 major agenda items would deal with horizon scanning and the outcome of the Food Standards Agency (FSA)'s review of scientific committees. There would also be an FSA briefing on the making of hygiene legislation.
- 1.2 The Chairman drew the attention of Members to the fact that Professor McMurray had been awarded a CBE in Her Majesty the Queen's 2002 Birthday Honours List. Professor Georgala also noted that Professor McMurray would be retiring in August and thanked him for his valued input to Committee business over his many years as a Northern Ireland assessor.

- 1.3 The Chairman also drew Members' attention to the fact that Mr Mylchreest had received an OBE in the 2002 Birthday Honours List.
- 1.4 Members expressed their pleasure at both these awards.

2. Apologies for absence

- 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from 6 Members – Ms Davies, Professor Gasson, Ms Lewis, Professor Mensah, Dr O'Brien and Mr Piccaver. The Chairman noted that Ms Lewis was recovering from a serious illness and the Committee expressed its best wishes for her speedy recovery.
- 2.2 Apologies for absence were also received from the Scottish Assessor – Dr Pryde – and the Medical Secretary – Dr Hilton.

3. Declarations of interest

- 3.1 The Chairman reminded Members of the need to declare any interests in any of the agenda items due for discussion. No such declarations were made.

4. Minutes of the 43rd meeting

- 4.1 These had been circulated to Members, and those making presentations, in draft form. Suggestions for amendments were shown in a tracked version – ACM/MIN/43/REV.1.
- 4.2 Members accepted ACM/MIN/43/REV.1 as a correct record of the 43rd meeting. The Secretariat was asked to have the approved version posted on the Committee's website. **Action : Secretariat**

5. Matters arising (ACM/579)

- 5.1 Members noted the summary (ACM/579) prepared by the Secretariat of actions taken on matters arising from the 43rd meeting.

6. *Campylobacter* Working Group progress report (ACM/580)

- 6.1 Members noted ACM/580, charting progress made by the *Campylobacter* Working Group. The Chairman also reported that a small number of Working Group Members would be visiting Norway and Denmark in November, to discuss with leading players there how *Campylobacter* was tackled in those countries.
- 6.2 The Working Group's next meeting was scheduled for August when it was hoping to take oral evidence from a major retailer and a leading industry representative body. The Chairman said that outputs from the August meeting would be incorporated into the advice being developed

on on-farm control measures. The intention was to be able to clear this with Members of the full Committee by September.

- 6.3 Professor Georgala also reported that a good level of consensus had been achieved in relation to detection and typing methods. A draft chapter covering these aspects would be cleared with ACMSF Members as soon as practicable.

7. Horizon scanning (ACM/581)

- 7.1 The Chairman recalled that, following the Committee's preliminary discussion in March, Members had been asked to submit to the Secretariat 1 page summaries of priority topics for further consideration at the current meeting. The topics suggested by Members had now been grouped under broad headings in ACM/581. The emphasis had been placed on newly-emerging issues. Topics suggested by Members which raised policy issues outside this criterion or were judged to fall outside the Committee's direct remit had been excluded. Members were nevertheless free to raise these with the Chairman or the Secretariat outside the current exercise if they felt that they should be given further attention.

- 7.2 The ensuing discussion ranged widely over the topics identified. Among the points made were :-

- imported foods : this was regarded as a key area for concern. EU enlargement and the increasing globalisation of markets could result in the UK population being exposed to new pathogenic challenges. If the multi-resistant strain of *Salmonella* Newport currently affecting the USA (see agenda item 11) were to reach the UK, food or people would be the most likely vehicles of transmission. The 2 large imported lettuce-associated outbreaks of infectious intestinal disease in England and Wales in 2000 emphasised the need for robust traceability systems. It was suggested that a chart of potential pathogens and their survivability in a range of food matrices would be a useful reference document;

- opportunistic pathogens : there were mixed views among Members on the need for the ACMSF to look at opportunistic pathogens. There was a case for concentrating on those bacteria known to be of importance in food safety terms. On the other hand, Members recognised that bacteria not traditionally regarded as important in relation to infectious intestinal disease might pose a risk to humans, particularly in specific food matrices (eg. infant foods). Objective evidence was required in order to justify action, and a surveillance system capable of identifying *S. Newport*-type incidents was seen as valuable. Members also agreed on the importance of protective action being proportionate to the risk involved;

- changes in agriculture and food animal production : information was sought about the future work of the ACMSF *Ad Hoc* Group on Sewage Sludge and the disposal of sewage sludge to agricultural land following the decision to ban disposal at sea. It was explained that the *Ad Hoc* Group had already considered the first phase of a microbiological risk assessment in respect of pathogens in biosolids. The aim of the risk assessment was to establish whether current sewage treatment operations were associated with a risk with respect to human and animal pathogens. The first tranche of papers from the contractor had demonstrated a risk assessment for 2 bacteria (*Salmonella* and *Listeria monocytogenes*). The second tranche (which was due to cover VTEC, *Campylobacter*, *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia* and viruses) was awaited. In a parallel development, the water industry and the major food retailers had reached a voluntary agreement on the use of wastes on agricultural land. This agreement was embodied in the Safe Sludge Matrix. Government proposed to give statutory effect to these provisions. More broadly under this heading, the importance of good stockmanship in animal health/welfare and food safety terms was stressed. It was noted that competence was becoming increasingly recognised as more important than the attainment of formal qualifications, although this was not to minimise the importance of appropriate training;
- changes in production practice : in terms of assessing whether new microbial antibiotic resistance threats had arisen in the period since publication of the ACMSF's Report on the subject, Members stressed the importance of monitoring animal, as well as human, isolates;
- bacterial stress responses : it was suggested that, in awarding Government research funding, much greater emphasis than hitherto should be placed on applied, rather than pure, research. It was noted that the philosophy of FSA and DEFRA was that research would only attract funding if it supported Departmental policy objectives, and that the Microbiological Safety of Food Funders' Group (MSFFG) existed as a forum in which funders could coordinate research programmes, thus avoiding duplication;
- transfer of genetic material between bacteria : it might prove necessary for the ACMSF to revisit the question of microbial antibiotic resistance in the light of developments since publication of its Report on the subject;
- biocides : Members posed the question of whether kitchen cleaning products containing biocides were really efficacious or whether they helped promote microbial antibiotic resistance. Members wondered whether the cross-contamination element of PHLS outbreak data could be broken down so as to cast further light on the question;

- loss of culinary skills : food hygiene training in skills was seen as essential if the current trend of culinary skills being lost was to be reversed. Members acknowledged FSA's initiative in this area;
- viruses : Members felt that it would be useful for the Committee to draw fresh attention to some of the advice contained in its Report on Foodborne Viral Infections. There had been recent viral-associated outbreaks (in hospitals, hotels and among the armed forces in Afghanistan). There was a tendency to underplay the importance of food in human viral-associated outbreaks. It was also felt that it would be useful for the ACMSF to get an update of progress on the development of rapid detection methods;
- probiotics : Members thought that the Committee might better inform itself about the use and efficacy of probiotics. It was noted that there was a potential danger associated with the importation of antibiotic resistant strains of bacteria in probiotic preparations;
- food distribution systems : Members signalled that they would find it helpful to have a briefing from the FSA on food law enforcement (eg. what the law provides, how it is enforced, whether there are gaps, etc);
Action : Secretariat (to approach FSA Local Authority Enforcement Division).
- global warming : it was noted that a Department of Health report on climate change was expected shortly and the Secretariat was asked to obtain a copy of this to help inform the ACMSF's consideration of whether it needed to give further consideration to this subject;
Action : Secretariat
- chronic sequelae : Members regarded this as a potentially important area but noted the current lack of information on which to base a definitive view on the importance of foodborne infection in terms of chronic sequelae. It was noted that there had been an attempt as part of the IID study to follow up on this question and the Secretariat was asked to seek further information on the outcome of this work;
Action : Secretariat (to approach FSA Microbiological Safety Division).

7.3 It was agreed that the next step should be for the Chairman and Secretariat to meet to select and prioritise a small number of candidates from ACM581 which Members could consider for further action. This might range from requesting further information, through the re-statement of ACMSF advice, to the setting up of ad hoc groups to consider particular topics in greater depth.

Action : Chairman/Secretariat

8. FSA Report on the Review of Scientific Committees (ACM/582 and ACM/583)

- 8.1 The Chairman drew attention to the FSA Report on the Review of Scientific Committees (ACM/582) and to the schedule prepared by the Secretariat (ACM/583) assessing the potential impact of the recommendations on the ACMSF. The FSA Board had accepted all of the recommendations. The scientific committees were now being asked to implement them. However, there was scope for flexibility in implementation, to reflect the specific circumstances of individual committees. The FSA Board had asked for 6-monthly implementation reports, the first of which was likely to be required by November 2002. Members' comments would be reflected in an ACMSF response document.
- 8.2 In the ensuing discussion, a few Members expressed some reservations over the advance publication of papers, and the holding of all meetings in public, believing that this could detract from the Committee's effectiveness. However, the general view was that openness was an essential element in rebuilding public confidence in the machinery of Government. Members felt it important that ACMSF should not approach its work differently as a consequence of the initiative to expose that work to greater public scrutiny. Members felt that the benefits of openness far outweighed the disadvantages and that keeping the public informed of the Committee's deliberations was likely to be beneficial in avoiding food scares. It was noted that there would still be scope for withholding information on grounds of commercial or other sensitivities. However, the general expectation was that papers would be made public and that the case for not doing so would be rare and would be considered on an *ad hoc* basis. The justification for withholding papers would be subject to robust challenge before a final decision was taken.
- 8.3 Members were unanimous that seeking to involve the public more widely in the advisory process should not compromise the ACMSF's ability to provide the FSA with urgent food safety advice by the shortest possible route and in the shortest possible time.
- 8.4 The Secretariat was asked to prepare a draft implementation document, for clearance with Members before being submitted to the FSA.
Action : Secretariat

9. The making of hygiene legislation (ACM/584)

- 9.1 The Chairman explained that, as part of the orientation process for new Members, the FSA had provided a briefing paper (ACM/584) on the making of hygiene legislation. He welcomed Ms Catherine Bowles from FSA's Microbiological Safety Division and invited her to introduce the paper.

- 9.2 Ms Bowles noted that legislation had been mentioned on a number of occasions during the course of the Committee's discussion of horizon scanning. She hoped that the paper would therefore serve as a timely information note on the principles and origins of, and the constraints on making, food hygiene legislation. Food businesses often regarded Government as too ready to legislate but, in practice, there were considerable constraints. Moreover, the existence of legislation did not of itself equate with food safety. Compliance and enforcement were both essential elements. Government regarded legislation as a solution of last resort and accepted that it should be proportionate. Ms Bowles noted that much of the food hygiene legislation applying in the UK was made through the European Union and that the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) had an important role in seeking to ensure uniformity in the way EU legislation was applied and enforced within and between the Members States. The FVO was also responsible for carrying out hygiene audits of premises in third countries authorised to supply foodstuffs to the EU market.
- 9.3 Ms Bowles touched on the consolidation of EU food hygiene law which was currently under way in Brussels and emphasised that the making of hygiene law was essentially a compromise, depending on being able to secure agreement among the 15 Members States. Whilst most hygiene legislation was EU-based, there was nevertheless an important matrix of supporting domestic legislation which was also described in the paper. The paper also contained information on the impact of devolution and on local authority inspection and enforcement. Ms Bowles hoped that Members would find the paper a useful source of reference material.
- 9.4 Ms Bowles responded to a number of questions from Members, as follows :-
- the European Food Safety Authority would report to the European Commission and would be a risk assessment body. This distinguished it from the UK FSA which also had risk management responsibilities;
 - there were no plans for the general licensing of all food premises or workers, although particular types of premises (eg. slaughterhouses) were subject to licensing or prior approval;
 - all food businesses (other than primary producers) would soon be required by legislation to implement food safety management systems based on HACCP principles. Local authorities would consequently have a greater audit role than hitherto. This would have resource implications for local authorities in relation to their advisory and educational roles;
 - a legislative obligation would still exist to provide effective food hygiene training for managers and personnel, but this was likely to be

written in broad terms and, in the UK, reliance would be placed on guides to good practice;

- the Government took regulatory impact assessment (RIA) extremely seriously. Producing a meaningful RIA was an exacting task, given the vast range of businesses affected by food hygiene legislation. A hard copy draft RIA had been distributed to around 2,000 bodies in connection with the consolidation exercise. The RIA would continue to be developed. Although not the sole criterion, the economic impact was clearly of major importance.

9.5 The Chairman thanked Ms Bowles for providing Members with a comprehensive and informative briefing on the making of hygiene legislation.

10. Dates for future meetings (ACM/585)

10.1 The following dates were confirmed for future meetings of the Committee :-

2002 : 19 September and 5 December

2003 : 20 March; 26 June; 18 September; and 4 December.

11. Any other business

11.1 Mr Gayford provided information for Members on multi-resistant strains of *S. Newport* which were currently causing considerable concern in the USA and had also been reported in Canada.

11.2 Mr Gayford said that all of the strains were resistant to ampicillin, chloramphenicol, streptomycin, sulphonamides and tetracycline, and were capable of showing intermediate or full resistance to third generation cephalosporins. Many were also resistant to other antimicrobials such as kanamycin, potentiated sulphonamides and gentamicin. In the USA, large numbers of people had been ill, although information to date suggested that the strains concerned were no more virulent than the multi-resistant strains of *Salmonella typhimurium* in comparatively recent circulation (eg. DT 104 and 204B).

11.3 Mr Gayford said that food vehicles identified to date included soft cheese made from raw milk, and ground beef. The strains were not known to be present in the UK but, in the US, had caused significant problems in cattle, particularly dairy cattle. Isolations and clinical disease had also been reported in other animal species, including horses. DEFRA believed that, if introduced into the UK, these strains of *S. Newport* had the potential within a short time to become as well established and as widespread in livestock as some previous *Salmonella* strains such as *S. Typhimurium* DT104. Previous *Salmonella* epidemics in the UK national herd had been associated

with significant disease in humans. There was also the possibility of infection spreading to other species, thereby putting public health at further risk.

- 11.4 Mr Gayford said that DEFRA was working with the Department of Health, the Public Health Laboratory Service, the FSA, the Veterinary Laboratories Agency and devolved administrations to ensure a cross-Government approach to S. Newport. DEFRA was assessing the risk posed to the UK animal population and to public health. This should be finalised within the next couple of weeks. The first draft of a contingency plan to manage the risk of these strains being introduced into the UK, and the risk of their spreading within the livestock population, was also being prepared for discussion at an inter-Departmental meeting planned for early July. Steps had been taken to ensure that current reporting arrangements and the exchange of information continued with all interested groups. This would alert them to the emerging problem and to developments. Private veterinary surgeons and others had been alerted via a notice in the Veterinary Record on 14 June. DEFRA had also written to organisations representing those importing animal feed ingredients. Letters had also been sent to laboratories approved by DEFRA to test for *Salmonella* in animal feed ingredients and breeding flocks of domestic fowl. The devolved administrations would be writing to laboratories in their own areas. DEFRA had, in addition, alerted the Advisory Committee on Animal Feedingstuffs and had notified the European Commission. DEFRA had also written seeking further information from the Chief Veterinary Officers in the USA and Canada.