

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE MICROBIOLOGICAL SAFETY OF FOOD**  
**DISCUSSION PAPER**

**Report on the Quinquennial Review of the ACMSF**

Introduction

1. This paper updates ACMSF on the quinquennial review of the Committee. Committee Members are invited to consider the final report and suggest how the recommendations made can be addressed.

Background

2. The 2002 Food Standards Agency Report of the Review of Scientific Committees recommended that all scientific advisory committees should be reviewed at least once every five years to determine whether each committee fulfils its intended function and whether all the current committees are still needed.
3. The quinquennial review of ACMSF was conducted between January and March 2011 on behalf of the FSA by an independent assessor, Helen Lucas Associates. A number of ACMSF Members, Assessors, Secretariat and other stakeholders were interviewed as part of the process. The full report of the review including its terms of reference and review methodology can be found at Annex A.

Outcome of the Review

4. The Report concludes that there is still a need for ACMSF, with value to the FSA, other government departments and stakeholders. The report highlights 6 examples of good practice by the Committee and makes 12 recommendations.
5. The recommendations are directed towards the Committee, the Secretariat, the Chair or a combination of these. In some cases the recommendations are relevant across all Agency scientific advisory committees and the Chief Scientists Team will also respond to these recommendations separately.

Action

6. Members are invited to:
  - note the review and recommendations made,
  - consider the specific questions posed in the attached paper in order to assist the Secretariat in preparing a response to the recommendations.

## Recommendations of the Review

**Recommendation 1.** The Chair and the Secretariat should ensure that the work of the Committee continues to be focused on where it can have most impact, value and relevance.

### Secretariat comments:

We suggest the response to this recommendation is linked to recommendations 2 and 3 on the process for developing the Committee's work plan and horizon scanning. We propose to develop a more formal procedure for planning the ACMSFs work programme. The programme will be reviewed by the Committee, Chair and Secretariat to ensure work continues to focus on areas which have most value and relevance.

**Recommendation 2.** Horizon scanning should be undertaken on an annual basis.

### Secretariat comments:

We suggest horizon scanning could be discussed annually when the work plan is reviewed and thereby feed into the process for refreshing the ACMSF work programme. Horizon scanning was last discussed by the Committee at its January 2011 meeting but prior to that the last full discussion was in September 2006.

**Recommendation 3.** The process for determining the work programme should be improved and a forward work plan published with proposed timescales for the work.

### Secretariat comments:

We propose to develop a more formal procedure for planning the ACMSFs work programme. The programme will be reviewed by the Committee, Chair and Secretariat. The work programme will be published on the ACMSF website. The Committee should however maintain the flexibility to consider urgent issues that arise unpredicted and it must therefore be recognised that scheduled discussions may change.

### **Questions relating to recommendations 1, 2 and 3:**

- Members are invited to comment on whether the proposal to develop a more formal work planning process would address recommendations 1, 2 and 3 or whether there are other ways they feel these could be addressed?
- Members are invited to comment on how the procedure for developing the work plan should work in relation to the Committee, for example how would the Committee input into programme development, how frequently would they wish to review the work programme?
- Members are invited to comment on how they would like the horizon scanning process to be undertaken and how frequently?

**Recommendation 4.** Completed work should be summarised in terms of outcomes and impact achieved. This should be updated to track known outcomes and impacts over time.

### **Secretariat comments:**

Consideration needs to be given as to how the outcomes and impact of ACMSF advice can be measured. There is also a need to focus on the key areas where outputs and impact achieved should be summarised as there are potential resource considerations in providing this level of information for every issue discussed by the committee.

We will endeavour to provide quick feedback on significant issues such as consideration of ACMSF advice taken into account in FSA Board discussions or in incident management.

This recommendation could also be taken forward through the ACMSF annual report where a section on outcomes and impact of completed work over the year could be included.

It is noted that the matters arising paper provides a level of feedback on previous Committee discussions and identified actions.

### **Questions relating to recommendation 4 :**

- Members views are sought on how the outcome and impact of risk assessment can be measured?
- Members are invited to comment on whether immediate feedback on significant issues combined with an update on outcomes and impact in the annual report would provide them with sufficient feedback on the outcome of ACMSF work or whether there are other routes through which this could be achieved?

**Recommendation 5.** It is recommended that the Committee takes greater steps to show evidence of scientific rigour by using the FSA's Good Practice Guidelines and Science Checklist more explicitly and also routinely considering whether peer reviews are appropriate for work on which the Committee's decisions are based

**Secretariat comments:**

The Science Checklist and Good Practice Guidelines are regularly circulated to ACMSF sub-group meetings for reference. They are also sent to all new Committee members in their induction pack. Members are also asked to assess the committees' performance against the Good Practice Guidelines in their annual self-assessments which are reviewed by the Secretariat and Chair. We will re-enforce with Chairs of ACMSF sub-groups the need to take these documents into account in producing their reports or statements.

In most cases the Committee, in making recommendations, are asked to review existing peer-reviewed research summarised by the Secretariat. In other cases they are reviewing unpublished work and acting as the peer-reviewers. Public consultation on Committee reports could also be considered as peer-review.

We suggest consideration of the need for additional peer-review should be undertaken on a case-by-case basis, for example when the Committee does not have the relevant expertise to assess information required for their deliberations.

**Questions relating to recommendation 5:**

- Members are invited to comment on how the use of the Science Checklist and Good Practice Guidelines could be made more explicit.
- Members are invited to comment on what might be a suitable approach for considering whether peer reviews are necessary for work on which the Committee's decisions are based.

**Recommendation 6.** There is currently no ACMSF assessor appointed for Northern Ireland and it is recommended that FSA addresses that in the near future.

**Secretariat comments:**

We will appoint a Northern Ireland assessor to the Committee.

**Recommendation 7.** The Chair and Secretariat should consider Secretariat resources in terms of scientific expertise and amount of resource available when planning ACMSF's work programme and identify and address any gaps as appropriate.

**Secretariat comments:**

Scientific Secretariat resources are considered in the planning of ACMSF work and the work of the ACMSF sub-groups. Resources are however limited and can be affected by other FSA priorities. Development and regular review of the Committees' work plan (see recommendation 3) should facilitate Secretariat resource planning.

**Questions relating to recommendation 7:**

- Members are invited to comment on this recommendation.

**Recommendation 8.** The Committee should review the balance of expertise on the Committee at regular intervals in the context of the future work programme for the Committee.

**Secretariat comments:**

We suggest it is for the Secretariat and the Chair to review the balance of expertise on the Committee ahead of new appointments and re-appointments. The opportunity already exists to co-opt specific external expertise onto ACMSF sub-groups if required and this flexibility is frequently used.

**Questions relating to recommendation 8:**

- Members are invited to comment on this recommendation.

**Recommendation 9.** It is recommended that in future the recruitment process for new members starts earlier, so that the new members are in place either before or by the end of the terms of the retiring members to provide continuity of membership for the Committee and the sub group work.

**Secretariat comments:**

The Secretariat will endeavour to have new members in place by the end of the terms of retiring members for future appointments rounds.

**Recommendation 10.** It is recommended that new members have an induction meeting with the Secretariat.

**Secretariat comments:**

New members are sent an induction pack when they join the Committee and feedback is routinely sought on whether this is sufficient. We propose to build on existing arrangements and develop a short induction programme for new members.

**Questions relating to recommendation 10:**

- Members are invited to comment on whether an induction session for new members would be useful and what form this should take.

**Recommendation 11.** There is a need to clarify the role and responsibilities of the assessors on the Committee.

**Secretariat comments:**

The role of assessors will be clarified by the Chair at the next open meeting.

**Recommendation 12.** The work of the ad hoc groups should in general be run to a tighter timescale with the timescale being agreed at the start of the group's work.

**Secretariat comments:**

We propose to encourage future sub-groups to produce a work plan and anticipated timeline for their deliberations. The timescale for sub-group work needs to be balanced against Secretariat resource, member availability and the priority and urgency of the subject matter.

**Questions relating to recommendation 12:**

- Members are invited to comment on this recommendation.

**Annex A: Report of the 2011 Quinquennial Review of the ACMSF**  
**Annex B: Science Checklist and Good Practice Guidelines**

**Secretariat**  
**June 2011**