

Strategic plan event: note on discussion

Food Standards Agency in Scotland

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Airport Hilton Hotel

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(i) Introduction

The Food Standards Agency in Scotland held a stakeholder event on the 21st May 2009 in Edinburgh to discuss the focus and priorities of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) draft strategic plan. Various themes were examined and are summarised below.

FSA in Scotland Director George Paterson introduced the event. Sharn Bowen of the FSA then provided a general background to the draft document following which George Paterson provided a summary of the objectives and architecture contained in the draft plan. The meeting was then opened for discussion.

Each stakeholder was asked individually by George Paterson for their comments on the draft plan, thereby facilitating further discussion.

Issues raised by stakeholders during the plenary discussion included Sustainability, Labelling, Regulations/Recommendations, Engagement, Consumer Behaviour, Food and Food Safety, Scores on the Doors and other Schemes, issues related to Europe, measuring outcomes and future issues. Specific comments are listed below:-

1. General Stakeholder View

- The draft strategic plan was well received and described as 'ambitious' and was welcomed by the nine stakeholders present.

1.1 Sustainability

- The Agency should consider how the current economic situation will impact on social sustainability. *(Consumer stakeholder)*
- Sustainability more broadly required greater emphasis in the document. *(Consumer stakeholder)*
- Greater integration is required in regard to food standards and consumer choice, in terms of sustainability. *(Consumer stakeholder)*
- Scottish Government work-streams have been looking at the effects of changing consumer behaviour on sustainability, and this research should be utilized by the Agency. *(Consumer stakeholder)*

1.2 Labelling

- **Easily understandable labelling should be encouraged especially where hard to reach groups are a factor. (Consumer stakeholder)**
- **Flexibility should be encouraged, for example mussels and oysters naturally possess salt and zinc respectively and therefore should not be labelled in a negative manner. (Food Business stakeholder)**

1.3 Regulations / Recommendations

- **Proportionate, risk - based regulation should be encouraged, and that better regulation does not necessarily mean less or no regulation. (Food Business stakeholder)**
- **Consistency in relation to the enforcement of regulations should be improved. (Food Business stakeholder)**
- **The difference between a recommendation and a regulation should be better recognised and “enforced” appropriately. (Food Business stakeholder)**

1.4 Engagement

- **Greater engagement is required with small businesses particularly in “helping” them make the shift to healthier products. (Food Business stakeholder)**
- **Greater internal engagement is required within the agency, between social science teams and consumer engagements teams. (Consumer stakeholder)**
- **Greater focus on social marketing is required. (Consumer stakeholder)**
- **Issues surrounding Children’s health is slightly disconnected with related fields of study/work and could be better linked. (Consumer stakeholder)**

1.5 Understanding Consumer Behaviour

- **The Agency should be able to provide information on how minimum pricing would effect social change. (Food Business stakeholder)**
- **The promotion of a healthy diet and the issue of preventing chronic diseases should be given greater emphasis in the document in particular in relation to teenagers and the elderly. (Academic stakeholder)**
- **In the future, psychologists should be involved with the Agency, in relation to providing advice on how to achieve sustained consumer behavioural change. (Consumer stakeholder)**

1.6 Food and Food Safety

- **In light of the current economic climate, the importing of cheaper alternative supplies may carry increased food safety risk. (*Food Business stakeholder*)**
- **Food safety is more important than nutrition and should be given appropriate emphasis in the document. The Agency should recognise, the “primacy” of health departments in regard to Diet and Nutrition, and the Agency therefore should establish effective partnering with the health department. (*Academic stakeholder*)**
- **There is a need to re-examine food as the nutrient make up of certain foods may have changed with time and this information would be beneficial to policy – makers. (*Academic stakeholder*)**
- **The issue of food standards itself was slightly lacking in the document (*Academic stakeholder*)**

1.7 Scores on the Doors and other Schemes

(General Summary)

- **Scotland’s proposed version of the above system received considerable support. Similarly well received was the Healthy Living Award. The self – assessment aspect of the Healthy Food Marks was questioned.**

1.8 Europe

- **The Agency when appropriate should promote Scotland’s case in relation to county of origin labelling. For example in relation to Scotch Whisky. (*Food Business stakeholder*)**
- **Greater Agency engagement with stakeholders is encouraged in Europe - level discussions regarding issues affecting stakeholders. (*Food Business stakeholder*)**

1.9 Outcomes

- **It was asked at the event how would the proposed outcomes be measured? (*Consumer stakeholder*)**

2.0 Future Issues

- **New technologies (e.g. nanotechnology), bio-technology and animal cloning are issues that the Agency needs to consider, in particular the need to ensure consumer understanding of the risks and benefits to allow informed choice. (*Academic stakeholder*)**