

**DRAFT MINUTES OF THE OPEN BOARD MEETING, 6 APRIL 2006, THE
CONGRESS CENTRE, LONDON**

OPEN SESSION, 09:30 – 12:30

Present:

Dame Deirdre Hutton, Chair
Julia Unwin, Deputy Chair
Richard Ayre
Chrissie Dunn
Maureen Edmondson
Alan Gardner
Valerie Howarth
Iain MacDonald
Graeme Millar
Sandra Walbran
Nelisha Wickremasinghe

Officials attending:

Pat Stewart, Deputy Chief Executive
Chris Lawson, Chief Executive, Meat Hygiene Service (item 4 only)
Alison Gleadle, Head of TSE¹ Division (item 5 only)
Alick Simmons, Veterinary Director (items 4 and 5 only)
David Statham, Director of Enforcement (item 6 only)
Julie Monk, Head of Enforcement Division (item 6 only)
Rosemary Hignett, Head of Nutrition Division (item 7 only)
Alison Tedstone, Nutrition Division (item 7 only)
Keith Gregory, Board Secretariat
PK Khaira, Board Secretariat

Others attending:

Professor Chris Higgins, Chair of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) (item 5 only)
Professor Alan Jackson, Chair of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) (item 7 only)

¹ Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies

Chair's Introduction

1. The Chair welcomed all observers attending the open Board meeting and invited the Deputy Chair to introduce the meeting. The Deputy Chair reminded those attending the meeting and watching the webcast that the FSA Board discussed policy issues at its open meetings to meet its commitment to transparency and accessibility. There would be an opportunity for questions immediately after the formal session and those watching the webcast could also send questions to the Board.
2. The Chair noted that this would be the last open Board meeting for Iain MacDonald. Iain had served two terms as a Board member (four years in total), during which he had been a valued member of the Meat Hygiene Advisory Committee, subsequently being appointed its Vice Chair early in 2002 and taking over as its Chair a year later. Iain had steered the MHS through some difficult and challenging times. The Chair thanked him for the valuable contribution he had made and recognised the sound judgement he had brought to the FSA's Audit Committee.
3. The Chair noted that apologies had been received from Bill Reilly, and that Chris Pomfret had been unable to attend due to illness. Apologies had also been received from the Interim Chief Executive (John Harwood) who had been unable to attend this meeting due to prior commitments; the Chair welcomed the Deputy Chief Executive to the table in his place.
4. The Chair reminded Board members of their obligation to declare interests before discussion of relevant items.
5. There were no items raised for discussion under Any Other Business.

Item 1- Minutes of Open Meeting on 9 March 2006, Royal Concert Hall, Glasgow.

(FSA 06/04/01)

6. The Board agreed the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2006 at the Royal Concert Hall, Glasgow as an accurate record.

7. The Chair informed Board members that the paper on atypical scrapie planned for discussion at this meeting (referred to in paragraph 29 of the Minutes) had been postponed until June. This possibility had been raised at the last meeting (recorded in paragraphs 34 and 35 of the Minutes). An information paper reporting on the work underway to consider options for possible additional precautionary measures to reduce the theoretical risk to human health from atypical scrapie had been included in the papers for the present meeting².

Item 2 - Actions Arising

(FSA 06/04/02)

8. The Board noted the table of follow up actions.

Item 3 - Chair's Report

Ofcom³ Consultation

9. The Chair informed Board members that Ofcom's consultation "Television Advertising of Food and Drink Products to Children: Options for New Restrictions" had been published on 28 March 2006. The closing date for the consultation would be 6 June. The Board would be asked to decide its response to the consultation at its closed meeting in May. Consideration would be given to getting that discussion into the public domain, if the Agency's response differed from policy already agreed. The response would be published on the FSA website.

EFSA⁴ Management Board

10. The Chair informed Board members that she had resigned as Vice Chair of the EFSA Management Board and outlined the process for identifying her successor.

Meeting with Shaun Woodward MP

11. The Chair informed Board members that she and Maureen Edmondson had met Shaun Woodward MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Office) to discuss a range of issues including some of the challenges

² INFO 06/04/01

³ The independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industries

⁴ European Food Safety Authority

faced by FSA Northern Ireland, particularly the Eurofreeze (Ireland) Ltd incident and lessons learned.

Interim Chief Executive

12. The Chair informed Board members that John Harwood had taken up his post as Interim Chief Executive at the beginning of that week. He was a well respected leader of local authorities and his wide range of management experience would help the FSA build on what it had achieved in its first six years. The Chair wished publicly to welcome him to the FSA on behalf of the Board and looked forward to working with him over the coming months.

Item 4 – Deputy Chief Executive’s Report

Avian Influenza

13. The Deputy Chief Executive invited the FSA’s Veterinary Director to join her at the table and referred Board members to the announcement by Defra⁵ the previous evening of the preliminary finding of the H5 strain of avian influenza in a wild swan in Scotland. She reminded Board members that, on the basis of current scientific evidence, the FSA’s advice remained that avian influenza did not pose a food safety risk for UK consumers. That advice would stand even if the H5N1 strain were to be confirmed in this case. There was currently no evidence that eating poultry products had infected anyone. Even in those countries where people had become infected, it had always been because of close proximity with sick, dying or recently deceased birds. The risk of catching the disease came from being in close contact with poultry that had the disease, not through eating cooked poultry or eggs.

14. The Deputy Chief Executive noted that when an outbreak occurred in wild birds or in other parts of the world in the poultry flock, controls were put in place aimed at preventing the spread of the disease between animals and between birds. This process had begun in Scotland. These controls would also mean that it was unlikely that infected eggs or poultry would enter the food chain. The FSA’s Veterinary Director added that, in accordance with a recent EU decision, precautionary measures had been taken to reduce the risk of the virus spreading from wild birds into poultry.

⁵ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

15. The Deputy Chief Executive added that, even if the virus was present in poultry meat or eggs, several factors would contribute to preventing or limiting its effect on people:

- the virus was easily killed by cooking – the FSA already advised that poultry and eggs should be cooked properly to avoid the risk of food poisoning;
- even if the virus were still present after cooking, it would be destroyed by saliva and gastric acid and, in people, there were very few receptors in the gastro-intestinal tract that the virus would need to enter the body;
- washing hands remained a very important piece of advice generally for the handling of any poultry products, which would also help to ensure that the virus was not spread;

16. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the FSA would keep the matter under review in case there was any change in the scientific information available.

17. The Chair added that the World Health Organization, EFSA, and the FSA's independent scientific advisory committee had said that there was no evidence that avian influenza presented a food safety risk. She emphasised that the FSA's advice continued to be that if you wish to eat poultry and eggs you should continue to do so, following the normal precautions of cooking thoroughly - which means cooking until there are no red juices or, in the case of eggs, cooking until the white is solid.

Malicious contamination of Kingsmill Bread

18. The Deputy Chief Executive reminded Board members that, at the March meeting, the then Chief Executive⁶ had reported that, following a number of malicious tampering incidents relating to Allied Bakeries' Kingsmill bread, the company had introduced tamper-evident packaging. She informed Board members that, since the tamper-evident packaging had been introduced, no further incidents of malicious contamination had been reported to Allied Bakeries, to the FSA, or to the Police. The Police investigation was still ongoing and Board members would be informed of any future developments. The FSA's Director of

⁶ Dr Jon Bell

Food Safety Policy would be asked to raise the possible wider use of tamper-evident packaging with the Food Incidents Task Force that he now chaired.

Action: Andrew Wadge

Euro Freeze (Ireland) Ltd

19. The Deputy Chief Executive informed Board members that, following on from the Euro Freeze (Ireland) Ltd investigation, the European Commission had requested all Member States to inspect all of their coldstores. As a result of the survey in Great Britain, three premises in the North West of England had been found to have boxes of poultry products with damaged health marks originating from O’Kane Poultry in Northern Ireland.

20. The products had been seized by officers from South Ribble District Council and presented to Magistrates on 29 March. A total of 823 boxes with damaged health marks had been the subject of a condemnation order and O’Kane Limited had been required to pay £12,640 in costs. The Deputy Chief Executive thanked South Ribble District Council for their work on resolving this issue.

Meat Hygiene Service

21. The Deputy Chief Executive invited the Chief Executive of the MHS to join her at the table and alerted Board members to the finding, by DARD, the previous day of a small piece of spinal cord in an OTM⁷ quarter carcass at a cutting plant in Northern Ireland. The carcass had been dispatched from a plant in Great Britain to the Northern Ireland plant and had been part of a shipment of 208 quarters, the remainder of which had been inspected and no other SRM found.

22. The Chief Executive of the MHS apologised to Board members for this incident. The MHS was urgently investigating the incident and he would report the outcome to the Board.

Action: Chief Executive of the MHS

23. The Chief Executive of the MHS confirmed that the carcass had tested negative for BSE and added that this had been the first such incident since November 2004 and that some 3 million cattle had been processed since then. It was currently too early to say whether this breach had occurred as an indirect consequence of the move from the OTM rule to the BSE testing system. One

⁷ Over Thirty Months

Board member commented that the fact that SRM material had not entered the food chain meant that the checks that had been put in place were working.

24. The Deputy Chief Executive added that the MHS had also been caught up in the wider one day industrial action called by UNISON on 28 March over changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme. The Chief Executive of the MHS reported that, on that day, 644 staff had been working and 593 had gone on strike. 39 plants out of 380 had been unable to operate because of the shortage of MHS staff. A further five-day strike originally called for the current week had been deferred. He and the Chair paid tribute to MHS staff for all their efforts to enable plants to continue operating.

Joint FSA and Royal Society Workshop on Social Sciences

25. The Deputy Chief Executive informed Board members that the Royal Society would shortly be publishing a joint Royal Society and FSA report on a workshop held last Autumn. The workshop had brought together the Chairs of expert scientific advisory committees and leading academic social scientists to explore the impact that social science could make on risk assessment and risk management. The previous FSA Chairman and Chief Executive (Sir John Krebs and Dr Jon Bell) had suggested the workshop. The Deputy Chief Executive gave particular credit to the personal contribution made by Dr Bell to this important initiative.

26. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the workshop findings had highlighted five principles that participants considered would help to make the risk assessment, management and communication processes more effective. She confirmed the intention to take account of relevant outputs from the workshop in the FSA's work on science governance and its science strategy. The Chair confirmed that the Deputy Chair would be signing off the final science strategy before it was published.

Item 5 – BSE and Sheep Contingency Policy

(FSA 06/04/03)

[Prior to the discussion of this item Alan Gardner declared an interest as a sheep farmer. The Chair considered this to be a material conflict of interest and

consequently Alan Gardner left the table and took no part in the discussion or determination of this issue.]

27. The Chair welcomed Alison Gleadle (Head of TSE Division) and the FSA's Veterinary Director to the table to introduce this paper and answer questions. The Chair likewise welcomed the Chair of SEAC to provide the Board with independent scientific assurance.

28. Alison Gleadle reminded Board members that this was the second time they had been invited to review the FSA's BSE and Sheep contingency policy. In line with the Board's request that further work be done when the policy was last reviewed in December 2004, the FSA had now received feedback from stakeholders regarding the proportionality of various risk reduction strategies proposed. In addition a more robust differential TSE testing to distinguish between BSE and scrapie - and atypical scrapie - was now available.

29. There had been other developments that also needed to be taken into account. The presence of BSE in a French goat had been confirmed, and recent unusual test results had been found in three sheep in Europe (further testing is being carried out to distinguish the TSEs in question). The EU was considering a review of current TSE monitoring programmes and EFSA was in the process of preparing a quantitative risk assessment of the BSE risk associated with sheep products.

30. The FSA's current contingency policy relied on genotyping, allowing only those animals that were genetically resistant or semi-resistant into the food chain, in the event of a BSE finding. However, animals genetically resistant or semi-resistant to classical scrapie and BSE were not resistant to atypical scrapie, which had a higher prevalence in "resistant" genotypes. Despite extensive surveillance, BSE has not been detected in UK sheep and although the possibility of BSE being present cannot be excluded, this uncertainty was being reduced as more "scrapie" sheep were tested.

31. Due to the difficulties in establishing genotypes of animals robustly at the abattoir, the current FSA policy would effectively result in a mass cull of animals if a single confirmed case of BSE were to be found. The general view gained from stakeholder consultation was that the current FSA policy was disproportionate, and a more graduated response was required to a finding of

BSE in sheep, depending on the number of cases and their geographical and temporal spread.

32. The Chair of SEAC informed Board members that tests to distinguish BSE in sheep from scrapie were now very much more robust, and SEAC was now fairly sure that BSE was not being masked by scrapie. The theoretical worst case “maximum estimate” was that about 700 sheep might be infected with BSE, but the most likely scenario was that none were. Precautions had been put in place that would prevent an epidemic in sheep if BSE were in the flock, for example the removal of meat and bone meal (MBM) from feed. Furthermore, removal of SRM reduces the risk to human health if a BSE infected sheep entered the food chain.

33. Board Members raised the following questions in discussing the paper:

- What reduction in risk resulted from the removal of SRM material? - the Chair of SEAC suggested this would be in the region of 40-70% as the spread of infection around the body was different from that in cattle;
- How reliable a means of risk reduction was SRM removal? – the Chair of SEAC commented that the current removal of SRM material was not enough to remove all infectivity, and that all lymphoid material would need to be removed in order for this to be fully effective; this, however, was not practical or economic.
- What was the status of the UK contingency plan and who owned it? - Alison Gleadle confirmed that the UK plan was a Defra published document and had been based on advice provided by the FSA. Any change to that advice would need to be fed into an appropriate review of the plan;
- How reliably could the age of animals be determined, bearing in mind the emphasis placed on age as a key means of controlling risk, and would tagging improve the situation? - the Chair of SEAC confirmed that, as infectivity increased with age, this was an important means of controlling risk. The FSA’s Veterinary Director confirmed that a combination of detailed records and dentition checks could be used to establish age and that the issue of tagging was currently being addressed by UK rural affairs departments.

34. Board members also raised the following points:

- the paper was primarily focussed on proportionality, cost and practicality; it was important to take these into account, but consumer protection was the ultimate driver here;
- although it would be preferable for the UK to work with the EU on this issue, in the event of an outbreak of BSE in UK sheep, it would be important to be prepared to consider unilateral action;
- the contingency plan needed to be clearer about the steps that would be taken under the different scenarios of a single case or multiple cases being found (eg whether there was a need for SEAC to be re-convened immediately, and then for the Board to meet within a specified timeframe to consider SEAC's advice, etc). If specific scenarios could be predicted, these should be used in the plan and the proposed response to those scenarios illustrated;
- the language used should be more precise (eg terms like "handful of confirmed BSE cases" and "significant outbreak" would need to be clearly defined if they were to be used);
- it would be important to ensure that consumers were given appropriate information and consideration should be given to how the FSA's current advice might change were BSE ever to be found in the UK sheep flock;
- surveillance in the event of a BSE case being found should be targeted geographically.
- urgent research was needed to develop better analytical measures for testing BSE in sheep.

35. The Chair of SEAC commented that the scenarios of finding one case or several cases were substantially different. SEAC had already given its advice on the "single case" scenario, but should a possible outbreak be identified, SEAC would need to convene urgently.

36. In summary, the Chair noted that the Board had:

- agreed that, in the event that a single BSE case in sheep were to be found in the UK, the FSA should move away from its current advice (which would have implied an immediate cull), and that intensive and targeted surveillance should be carried out to
 - determine whether the case was an isolated one, and
 - estimate what the prevalence of BSE might be in the UK sheep flock;
- requested a paper for the June meeting, alongside the planned paper on atypical scrapie in sheep, that should contain recommendations on actions to be taken were BSE ever to be found in larger numbers of sheep;
- agreed that the FSA's advice on eating sheep and lamb had not changed, but that the June paper should consider what the advice might be were BSE ever to be found in the UK sheep flock;
- asked that the June paper should also address research into quicker and cheaper testing regimes, and the issues of sheep identification and determining the age of sheep;
- agreed that the FSA should work to a consistent European "roadmap" on BSE in sheep, but that, should a significant development occur in the UK, the FSA would retain the right to advise unilateral action.

Item 5 – Action to Tackle Food Fraud

(FSA 06/04/04)

37. The Chair welcomed Julie Monk (Head of Enforcement Division), and David Statham (Director of Enforcement) to the table to introduce the paper. Julie Monk informed Board members that the paper followed on from the report to the Board in February⁸. Proposed terms of reference and membership for a Food Fraud Task Force, and a proposed agenda and timescale for its deliberations, had been set out in the present paper. It was intended that the Task Force would initially focus on the meat sector including issues such as health markings, staining,

⁸ FSA 06/02/03 – Action to Tackle the Trade in Illegal Meat

whistle-blowing, and would draw lessons that could then be expanded more broadly to the rest of the food industry. The Director of Enforcement apologised that the first three lines of Annex 1 to the paper had not made clear that these described the areas of expertise from which a potential Chair of the Task Force might be sought.

38. The Board made the following points during discussion:

- members of the Task Force should be chosen for their practical experience and expertise, not as representatives of particular organisations;
- there were others with relevant experience that could provide useful input, for example members of the Welsh Food Fraud Co-ordination Unit;
- the Task Force should draw on past work where this was relevant, for example the work of the Waste Food Task Force;
- it would be important to consider the impact of food fraud on low income and vulnerable consumers;
- there was a need to ensure the scope did not concentrate solely on the meat sector and was sufficiently clear and broad to ensure the Task Force could consider the whole range of the food chain;
- there was a need to look at the range of forms of assurance that might be used – rather than just focussing on inspection and audit.

39. In summary, the Chair noted that the Board had:

- agreed the proposed terms of reference, work programme, and timetable for the Food Fraud Task Force;
- approved the proposed range of membership, but emphasised that members should be chosen for their practical experience rather than as “representatives”;

- suggested the Task Force should
 - include someone who understands, in commercial terms, the whole range of the food chain;
 - include input from the Police;
 - draw on past work, where relevant;
- agreed the Task Force should look imaginatively at the range of forms of assurance that might be used;
- emphasised that the Task Force should also focus on the impact of food fraud on low income consumers;
- agreed to receive a first interim report in October.

Item 7 - Folate and Health

(FSA 06/04/05)

40. The Chair welcomed Alison Tedstone (Head of Nutritional Science (SACN⁹ and Research) Branch) and Rosemary Hignett (Head of Nutrition Division) to the table to introduce the paper and answer questions. She also welcomed the Chair of SACN to the table to provide the Board with independent scientific assurance.

41. The Chair reminded Board members that this issue had already received a significant amount of recent press coverage. The present paper sought the Board's agreement to consult on policy options for reducing the number of neural tube defect (NTD)-affected pregnancies in the UK and its views on whether the consultation paper should recommend a preferred option. The paper also sought views on what additional information the Board would need to enable it to decide, when considering the issue in the autumn following the consultation, what the FSA's advice to Ministers should be. The Chair added that, in view of recent press coverage, she wanted to make it clear - for the record - that a decision on which option to recommend to Ministers had not yet been taken by the Board and that the Board was not being asked to take that decision at today's meeting. The

⁹ Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

Chair encouraged Board members not to allow the recent media coverage to influence the present discussion.

42. Alison Tedstone noted that the Board had last discussed this issue in 2002, at which time the Board had decided against recommending fortification, partly because of concerns about the masking of vitamin B12 deficiency in the elderly and partly because of concerns about the impact on consumer choice. The FSA's current Strategic Plan included an overall aim to help reduce diet-related diseases. In this context, the FSA had made a commitment to Health Ministers to provide advice on dietary folate and NTDs. SACN had been asked to review the scientific evidence on the effects of fortification, including new evidence from countries that had proceeded with mandatory fortification. The draft report of the Committee now recommended the mandatory fortification of flour with folic acid in the UK.

43. Three options had been set out in the present paper for improving the folate status of young women:

- encourage the uptake of folic acid supplements and changes to diets to increase the consumption of folate rich foods;
- further encourage voluntary fortification of foods;
- mandatory fortification of foods.

The Board's advice was now being sought on the shape of the proposed consultation on these options. It was also being asked to identify any further information that would help it to finalise its advice to Ministers following the consultation.

44. The Chair of SACN informed Board members that the Committee had examined in detail significant amounts of new evidence that had become available since the previous review in 2000. The draft report of its conclusions had been published for consultation and feedback from stakeholders had been useful and constructive. The results of population based studies provided strong evidence that mandatory fortification of a standard food produced benefits. The Committee had considered the specific issue of vitamin B12 masking in the elderly raised in 2000. There was no evidence that there was any risk associated with a daily

intake of folic acid of less than 1 mg/day, and the Expert Committee on Vitamins and Minerals (EVM) had identified 1mg/day as a lifelong level of consumption that carried no risk to health. There was no clinical or other evidence of problems with B12 masking in the elderly in those countries currently using folate fortification. Of an estimated 15,000 older people in the UK thought to consume more than 1mg/day by choice (through supplementation and consumption of fortified foods), about 1,200 were currently estimated to have low vitamin B12 status. Co-fortification of foods with folic acid and vitamin B12 would not be a solution as the issue for the elderly was around the ability of the gastro-intestinal tract to absorb vitamin B12, rather than the levels of dietary intake of vitamin B12.

45. The Chair of SACN went on to refer to one new study that had, very recently, suggested that people who consume more than 1mg/day of folic acid may have an accelerated progress from pre-cancerous polyps in the bowel to cancer. He noted that these findings had not been peer reviewed and that only an abstract of the study was currently available.

46. The Chair asked what the benefits would be of improving the folate status of the UK population as a whole. The Chair of SACN informed Board members that folate was an essential nutrient required for making cells and improved general well being. Some 5-15% of the UK population was currently defined as having a folate status below recommended levels.

47. The Chair invited the Chairs of the Advisory Committees for Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland to report on the views of their Committees on any issue raised by this issue for their specific countries.

48. The Chair of the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee reported that the Committee had raised the following points:

- there was a genetic susceptibility to NTD pregnancies on the island of Ireland and differences in termination policies from GB;
- mandatory fortification of some sort was necessary, their preference being for bread rather than flour to maintain consumer choice;
- intakes should be increased to prevent deficiencies rather than to the high levels necessary to prevent NTDs;

- it would be important to set upper limits and enforce these in products;
- consideration would need to be given to the effect on inter-community trading before making any decision; and
- appropriate consumer information would be essential.

49. The Chair of the Welsh Food Advisory Committee noted that the Committee had:

- considered the SACN report at its last open meeting;
- noted that there were higher levels of NTD births seen in Wales, which were thought to be concentrated in more deprived communities; and
- strongly supported mandatory fortification of flour, as there had been such lack of success with voluntary fortification campaigns.

50. The Chair of the Scottish Food Advisory Committee noted that the Committee had:

- discussed this issue in public recently and considered that more evidence on the issue of vitamin B12 masking was needed;
- been concerned that as the population aged the potential risk to the elderly would become more important;
- noted that men would be exposed to increased folic acid intakes with no guaranteed benefit;
- noted there was a need to improve the position with regard to the number of NTD pregnancies;
- noted the need for a full public consultation;
- raised the issue of “mass medication”; and
- taken the view that the scientific evidence supporting fortification was not compelling.

51. Board members raised the following further points during discussion:

- more information was needed on why it was considered a voluntary approach to fortification would not work;
- more information was needed on the potential risks to elderly people;
- the benefit of mandatory fortification was questioned in view of the continued need for women to take folic acid supplements;
- the impact of voluntarily fortified fat spreads on exposure needed to be considered further;
- the role of Health Departments, groups representing the elderly and deprived groups in the development of these options and consideration of the issues was not clear (it was suggested that the groups and communities the FSA had established contact with as a result of the Sheila McKechnie Awards could help here);
- the reliability of the NTD prevalence data was questioned, specifically the Scottish data collected in the past;
- consistency across the UK would be important;
- there was concern for young women, particularly in low income or deprived groups, that were more likely to suffer from NTD pregnancies and a need for more information about the mechanisms used by Health Departments to get messages about folate to this audience;
- more evidence was needed on the potential link between vitamin B12 deficiency and dementia; was there a chance that, as the programmes of mandatory fortification elsewhere had not been running for very long, the long term effects had not yet been seen.
- the effect these proposals would have on intra-community trade and how they would fit with EU legislation on fortification.

52. Board members generally considered that the planned consultation should not put forward a preferred option.

53. Responding to questions from Board members, Alison Tedstone informed Board members that industry had indicated a preference for a consistent approach across the UK. In relation to NTD data, she noted that information collected in larger countries tended to be more robust than in smaller populations like that in Scotland, and that there had been changes in the way data were collected. In terms of benefits to the population as a whole, the Chair of SACN explained that increased homocysteine levels might be beneficial for the population as a whole as it might reduce cardiovascular disease, but the available evidence was not robust.

54. In summary, the Chair noted that the Board had:

- agreed that the consultation should not put forward a preferred option;
- requested additional information on:
 - the most appropriate vehicle for fortification;
 - the impact on trade;
 - how EU legislation would affect any decision by the UK to reduce voluntary fortification in products, were the UK to decide on mandatory fortification; and
 - the potential health impact on older people of mandatory fortification; and
- supported the proposal for research into consumer attitudes to mandatory fortification.

Item 8 – Progress Report: FSA’s Plan to Help Consumers With Food Allergies and Intolerances

55. Board members welcomed this paper and one Board member commented that the work around labelling for non pre-packaged foods might be usefully

incorporated into the existing Eat Safe Awards for catering establishments used in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Any Other Business

56. One Board Member suggested that, as part of the work being carried out on atypical scrapie, there should be additional opportunities, outside of the facilitated workshops referred to in the paper, for stakeholders to comment.

Date of next meeting

57. The next scheduled open meeting would be held in London on 15 June 2006.