

To: Interested Parties

16 December 2008

Reference: LRM/006/097

European Commission's Proposal for a Food Information Regulation Council Working Group meetings – 14 & 26 November 2008

Dear Interested Party

The latest meetings of the Council Working Group on the Food Information Proposal took place on 14 and 26 November at which the general labelling aspects of the proposal for a Food Information Regulation were discussed.

The second read through of the proposal commenced, with in-depth discussion on the meaning and scope of the proposal, implications for enforcement authorities and food business operators at each stage of the food chain.

The meeting of 26 November was the last meeting under the French Presidency, with the afternoon devoted to the Presidency progress report, taking stock of discussions, before its submission to the Health Council on 15/16 December.

The main points of discussion were:

14 November

- **National (Voluntary) Schemes** – This article generated a great deal of debate. Discussions seemed to raise more questions than answers and there was not consensus view.
- **Clarity** – The UK presented a summary of the legibility mini group discussion and the resulting amended text which had been drafted. This proposed a minimum font size of 1.2 mm, based on the height of a lower case 'x'. An annex also sets out criteria to be considered by businesses in label design. These include contrast, layout and line spacing. The draft text was welcomed as a step in the right direction and would facilitate further discussions.
- **Responsibilities** – There was considerable debate on this article, with no consensus view. This article stipulates the responsibilities of food business operators at each stage of the food chain. The



Presidency summarised the discussion and asked Member States to submit written proposals since the article needs simplification. However, all operators must have responsibilities, ensuring compliance within the limits of their activities.

26 November

- **Responsibilities** – There was further debate on this article, once again with no consensus view. Although, the article stipulates the responsibilities of food business operators at each stage of the food chain, Member States were unclear on its intention and interpretation.
- **Mandatory Provisions** – Member States proposed a few changes to the list of mandatory requirements, including mandatory origin labelling and the inclusion of 'lot marks'. Neither suggestion received much in the way of support.

This was the last meeting to be held under the French Presidency. The Presidency tabled its draft progress report which will go to the Health Council on 15/16 December but indicated this would be for information and no debate would take place on this proposal.

Next Steps

Discussion is still at a very early stage, with many key issues, such as country of origin and labelling of alcoholic drinks, yet to be discussed in detail. The next Council Working Group meeting will take place under the new Presidency of the Czech Republic. Meetings have been scheduled for 26 January, 12 and 26 February 2009 to address the outstanding issues.

Yours faithfully



Stephen Pugh