

Summary of discussions at the FSA Board meeting, 21 June 2023

Risk Analysis Process and Regulated Products Service

The Board discussed the update on the performance of the FSA's risk analysis process. This is the process of assessing, managing and communicating food and animal feed safety risks, ensuring high standards of food and feed safety to protect consumers. The Board noted both the steady progress with regulated products authorisations and risk analysis issues, while also recognising the pressure on resources at this time. However, the Board also asked for greater pace and ambition in the longer-term reform agenda to better support innovation in this sector.

Professor Susan Jebb, FSA Chair, said:

"Although we know we need to work within the current system for the next two years, we do need to think differently. So, while the team prioritises the current work, we'll look at this again closely in September and look forward to considering a paper on radical reform of the FSA's risk analysis process and the regulated products service."

Import Controls and the Target Operating Model (TOM)

The Board discussed a paper updating on the process that has been followed for determination of the Target Operating Model, risk categories, and the next steps. The Board was pleased to see the risk-based approach to controls and reassured by the continuous improvement review processes in place to ensure we can react quickly as new evidence is gathered, to ensure the system remains proportionate to the risks.

The discussion focused largely on ensuring the implementation of the model for the protection of public health. The 'Trusted Trader' schemes were supported, and the Board was reassured that the FSA's experience of food fraud incidents is being fed into the scheme designs to ensure consumer protection is high and that there is adequate enforcement to ensure the scheme does not protect bad actors in the system. A commitment was made to further update the Board on how the risk model operates in practice and how success will be measured in the Trusted Trader scheme pilots.

FSA Chair, Professor Susan Jebb, said she was proud of the innovative nature of the model and its use of science and evidence. She noted that the absence of import controls from the EU was identified as a risk in last year's annual report and that bringing the controls into force from autumn is critical to maintaining the UK's high food and feed safety standards and consumer confidence.

The FSA's independent Scientific Advisory Committees

In her report to the Board, Chief Executive Emily Miles talked about the role of the FSA's independent Scientific Advisory Committees (SACs) and particularly the role of the Committee on Toxicity (COT) - whose members work in a range of sectors including academic departments and industry - providing expertise in specialist areas of toxicology.

In her report, Emily added:

“Our Scientific Advisory Committees’ members’ interests are managed in accordance with the Government Code of Practice for Scientific Advisory Committees. COT members are required to declare their interests for each item under discussion and decisions around the levels of the member’s participation can be taken accordingly. Many interests are very indirect and only need to be recorded.

“However, depending on the nature of the interest, members may not be able to contribute to the conclusions of the Committee on a particular topic or they may have to leave the discussion altogether; this is recorded in the minutes. COT meetings are also held in open session as far as possible, so interested parties can and do apply to observe.”

FSA Board Member Lord Blencathra thanked Emily and her team for “defending the integrity of our scientists” following some recent criticism in the media.

Lord Blencathra said:

“If Government departments want top range scientists to serve on their committees, it is inevitable that the best ones will have done work for other departments, for learned institutes such as universities, or even the private sector.

“But that does not make them biased, and it’s terribly important that we defend their integrity. And, of course, we have our own internal systems to make sure that all their interests are declared. So, I congratulate you on defending that, as it is terribly important.”