

Minutes of the 143rd meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Board
Held on Thursday, 20 August, 2020 at 10:30am
Zoom

PRESENT:

Ms Helen O'Donnell (HOD) (Chair)
Dr Eddie Rooney (ER)
Mr Brendan Kehoe (BK)
Ms Wendy McIntosh (WMI)
Mr Alan McGrath (AMG)
Mr Stephen Moutray (SM)
Mr Mervyn Oswald (MO)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Ray Dolan, Chief Executive (RD)
Dr Gary Kearney, Director, Food Science (GK)
Ms Patricia Fitzgerald, Director, Corporate Operations (PF)
Dr Aileen McGloin, Director, Marketing and Communications
(AMcG)
Dr Marian O'Reilly, Manager, Human Health and Nutrition (MOR)
Dr Mairead McCann, Technical Executive, Food Science (MMcC)
Ms Alison Dries (secretary) (AD)

APOLOGIES:

Dr Mary Upton (MU)

1. Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present

Noted: Board members agreed it was not necessary to meet without the Executive present

2. Matters arising from the Meeting of Advisory Board members – without Executive present

Noted: N/A

3. Introduction and apologies

Noted: The Chair welcomed all members of the Advisory Board to the meeting hosted by zoom.

Noted: The apologies of MU were noted.

4. Conflicts of interest

Noted: The Chair asked members if there were any conflicts of interest relating to the agenda. No conflicts of interest were raised.

5. Minutes of meeting held on Thursday, 18 June 2020

Agreed: The minutes were adopted with no amendments

Proposed: BK

Seconded: AMG

6. Matters arising from the minutes

Noted: There were no matters arising.

7. Presentation

Noted: Dr Gary Kearney and Dr Mairead McCann from **safefood**'s Food Science Directorate presented on **safefood**'s research strategy and the recent research on meat thermometers. There was discussion around the use of thermometers for cooking fish, international usage patterns and the level of accuracy.

Noted: The Chair thanked GK and MMcC for the presentation and congratulated all involved on the project's success.

Noted: ER complimented **safefood** for the rigorous approach adopted to the management of its research programme.

8. Dublin office lease

Noted: The CEO informed the current lease on the Dublin office is due to expire at the end of 2021. Various options were considered and an extension of the lease in the current offices is the preferred option. A business case will be put to the sponsor departments shortly once the details are negotiated.

Approval: The Board approved **safefood**'s approach and reiterated the vital importance of negotiating the best option for renewing lease on the Dublin office to be close to media, PR and marketing agencies.

9. Chief Executive's report

Corporate

Noted: **safefood** is responding to Covid-19 in line with the Government's advice.

Noted: The 24th plenary meeting of the NSMC took place in Dublin Castle on 31st July. The Council noted that the work of the North South Bodies has continued to make a significant contribution to communities, society and the economy in both jurisdictions, and expressed appreciation to the Boards and staff of these bodies for their work since 2016. The CEO invited the Chair to attend the Health NSMC meeting scheduled for 2 October.

Noted: A paper has been issued to the NSMC with 12 nominees to form the **safefood** Advisory Committee. These nominations have been approved by the sponsor Departments.

Noted: **safefood** has been informed of no issues in relation to the financial audit fieldwork and awaits sign off for the 2019 Financial Accounts from the C&AGs.

Campaigns/communications

Noted: AMcG informed of the following marketing activity

- The new phase of the START campaign launched today. Informed by qualitative research, the focus of this phase is routine (sleep, mealtimes etc) as parents are reporting a lack of routine in children's lives due to lockdown. Media interviews to date were positive.
- The Rufus handwashing campaign will launch on 1 September. The Minister for Education NI, Peter Weir MLA has endorsed the campaign. The handwashing pack supports the efforts of the Departments of Education to open schools safely.
- The last few months have been busy on the digital side for **safefood**. In August its new website was launched with a domain name change to **safefood.net**. The site was redesigned to provide a clear navigation structure allowing people to reach the information they need, quickly and responsively. **safefood** also launched its first series of podcasts as a cost-efficient means to reach new and existing audiences, to drive brand recognition and to engage audiences where they are consuming media. On the social media platform, Instagram, **safefood** was verified with a blue tick and reached 5,000 followers.
- Both the summer BBQ campaign and world food safety day advising consumer not to wash raw chicken are currently being evaluated.

Healthy eating

Noted: MOR informed that **safefood** has provided support for the development of new healthy eating guidelines for 1-5 year olds. The guidelines, which are new, are expected to be launched by the Department of Health in October. **safefood** are happy to be involved in the project and welcome the guidelines which will feed into the START campaign.

Knowledge Network (KN)

Noted: GK informed that the Expert Group held their 4th meeting in July. The group provided assistance to the Food Science Directorate on planning and content for virtual events due to Covid-19. KN membership is increasing with members enjoying access to many topical events including;

- 1 half day workshop titled 'Effective Food Safety' which will address practical aspects of food microbiology, hygiene, cleaning and HACCP.

- 1 half day workshop titled 'Effective Food Allergen Management & Control' to increase awareness and training around food hypersensitivity and food allergen management.
- Webinars covering topics such as food packaging, SARS-CoV-2 and foodborne viruses in the food industry.
- Podcast topics such as the impact of Covid-19 on the food industry and milk allergy and milk intolerances.

Research

Noted: GK informed of four new research projects are being considered under a tender process.

10. Financial Report

Noted: PF referred to the summary Financial Results for five months Jan – July 2020. **safefood** is currently behind budget but at a comparable level to this time last year. The forecast is to end 2020 under budget.

11. Update from Audit & Risk Committee

Noted: ER and AMG provided a summary of the Audit & Risk Committee (ARC) meeting which was held on 13th August.

- **safefood's** risk register is comprehensive and incorporates colour-coding to denote perceived risks for the organisation. The ARC is suggesting some changes to highlight the role that advisory board members can play in mitigating certain risks. Given the fixed headcount, it was also noted that **safefood** needs to invest in training/retraining staff to deal with developments and changes in legislation/guidance/rules etc.
- Information sharing between the ARC Members who work in different North South (N/S) is proving very beneficial to all concerned.
- The C&AG audit is complete but not signed off. This is the case for all N/S bodies.
- Due to staff changes in the C&AG, more responsibility has fallen to **safefood** to bring their staff up to speed.
- A tender competition to appoint a new internal auditor is underway.
- The Audit & Risk Committee will meet again on 31 October.

Noted: The Chair thanked ER and AMG for their update.

12. Tour de table

Nothing to note.

13. AOB

Noted: The Chair and CEO thanked BK for sitting on the independent panel for the selection of nominees for the new **safefood** Advisory Committee.

Noted: PF advised that **safefood** can accommodate a limited number of Advisory Board members at its offices for the next Advisory Board meeting.

Date of next meeting: Thursday, 22 October 2020