

Meeting of the **safefood** Advisory CommitteeThursday, 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2016**safefood** Dublin offices

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**MINUTES****SAC members present:** Prof Margaret Patterson - Chair

Mr Robert Huey  
Ms Maria Jennings  
Dr Christine Domegan  
Ms Amanda McCloat  
Mr Michael Bell  
Mr Martin Roper  
Mr Dermott Jewell  
Ms Therese Coleman

**SAC apologies:**

Prof Martin Caraher  
Dr Moira Dean  
Mr Kenneth Carroll

**safefood staff:**

Mr Ray Dolan, Chief Executive  
Dr Clíodhna Foley Nolan  
Ms Fiona Gilligan  
Dr Gary Kearney  
Ms Patricia Fitzgerald  
Dr James McIntosh  
Dr Linda Gordon  
Ms Colette O'Shea  
Dr Sarah Norberg

**Invited guests:**

Ms Sinéad Hewson, TpBO  
Dr Anthony Soares, Centre for Cross Border Studies

## 1. Welcome, Introductions & Apologies

The chairperson welcomed all members to the meeting of the **safefood** Advisory Committee (SAC), and a special welcome was extended to the four new members. Following a tour de table for introductions, apologies were noted from three SAC members.

## 2. Minutes of the October 2015 SAC meeting & matters arising

The minutes from the last SAC meeting held on Friday, 23rd October, 2015 were reviewed and there were no matters arising.

## 3. Presentation: Overview of 2016 Business Plan

Presented by Ray Dolan, CEO, **safefood** who gave a brief overview of the events, campaigns and resources planned for 2016 and also an account of the budget for the year.

## 4. **safefood** research

### 4a. Background to **safefood** research

A brief overview on **safefood** research was given by Dr Gary Kearney, Director of Food Science. The members received a document describing the research process, case studies on the application of research outcomes and a comprehensive list of funded research projects dating back to the year 2000.

**Noted:** A discussion followed on possible approaches to ensuring the successful implementation of research outcomes including the involvement of target audiences from the outset in the design of the research (including food industry personnel where relevant), and leveraging greater returns on research investment through partnerships with other funding agencies (given the size of the **safefood** research budget). It was highlighted that **safefood** could provide a focal point for collaboration between those with an interest/concern in particular topics and, in so doing, could clarify where research was needed. One such issue was the use of supplements in sport. Other issues mentioned include anti-microbial resistance and cryptosporidium contamination of water.

**Noted:** The absence of a database of food safety research on the island of Ireland was discussed, particularly given that the number of players in this area is quite limited. There is a considerable volume of research data already generated but which has not been fully exploited. There may be a role for **safefood** here.

**Noted:** The implementation of research outcomes was highlighted and not just in the area of agri-food research. An intimate knowledge of the food environment would help in clarifying where research data could best be utilised and implemented.

**Noted:** Many research projects already completed proffered recommendations and these may be worth revisiting for research themes. Also, the broad range of expertise harnessed under the Knowledge Networks could be worth exploiting for this purpose.

**Noted:** The strength of the **safefood** brand should not be underestimated when it comes to the value placed on **safefood** research outcomes by third parties. Capturing this information is important to

**safefood.** Collaborating with stakeholders can be used to promote the **safefood** mission and further underpin the **safefood** brand.

**Action:** The potential role for **safefood** in establishing a database of food safety research on the island of Ireland to be investigated.

#### 4b. **safefood** initial research ideas

Three top level ideas for research were presented by **safefood** staff. One had been sent out to the members prior to the meeting and two were tabled on the day. All were for the members' consideration and feedback.

##### *(1) Food labels should include the exercise needed to expend its calories?*

**Noted:** This concerns the potential for inclusion of 'activity equivalents' on food labels and their possible effectiveness in encouraging consumers to include more exercise opportunities in their daily routines.

**Noted:** Obesity levels are roughly the same in ROI and the UK. The messages to consumers re food are invariably negative. Positive messaging may be worth investigating as a conduit to getting our messages and advice across.

**Noted:** The discussion focussed on the potential for some application to previous and ongoing **safefood** research. It may create a greater awareness among (some) consumers of their calorie intake. Some local endeavours where this concept is being applied successfully were highlighted.

**Action: safefood-Human Health & Nutrition** to consider the potential for using focussed research to build the evidence base on this issue.

##### *(2) Supporting food safety in the lol agri-food industry: An investigation of the capacity of food manufacturing businesses on the island of Ireland to perform adequate Food Defence analyses of their production systems*

**Noted:** The exploitation of vulnerabilities in the food chain for ideological purposes is now a distinct possibility and very much linked to geopolitical instability. Food businesses need to proof their supply chains against these vulnerabilities to prevent fraudulent/ideological exploitation.

**Noted:** A Food Crime Unit has been established in the UK FSA. There is no structural equivalent in ROI.

**Noted:** The Agri-food industry on the lol is growing substantially but so are the associated risks.

**Noted:** The idea can be informed by approaches taken in other countries including the USA.

**Action: safefood-Food Science** to further develop this research idea.

##### *(3) An investigation of the ability of Campylobacter in biofilms to transfer to surfaces in a domestic kitchen and the effectiveness of decontamination methods.*

**Noted:** The research question is how resistant *Campylobacter* present in biofilms is to biocides, the dynamics of *Campylobacter* transfer in these biofilms, and effective cleaning of these biofilms particularly in a domestic setting.

**Noted:** Biofilms, particularly in drinking water, is a topical issue for the poultry industry in particular.

**Action:** safefood-Food Science to scope key issues in regard to this topic, how potential outcomes can be imparted to consumers and whether other organisations are currently investigating this topic.

4c. SAC research ideas

*An investigation of the regulatory burden and available supports for SMEs on the island of Ireland*

**Noted:** The supports available for SMEs are very fragmented and very often difficult to locate or navigate.

**Noted:** There has been little investigation into the problems faced by SMEs in this regard. There is scope for inter-agency collaboration to address these issues.

**Noted:** It would be necessary to determine what work is being done, especially at government level and possibly representative bodies, with regard to addressing the regulatory burden experienced by SMEs. This is a priority for government both in the UK and ROI.

**Action:** **safefood-Food Science** to consider efforts to support SMEs with regard to their food safety obligations.

4d. SAC research ideas tour de table

**Noted:** Antimicrobial resistance is a critical food safety issue worldwide.

**Noted:** *E. coli* is now an important cause of food poisoning incidents in the UK. We need data for ROI.

**Noted:** We need to find ways to exploit Big Data to get a more accurate picture of consumer attitudes, habits, and associated hazards. There are multiple sources of Big Data; however, accessibility is one issue, another is how to use it effectively.

**Noted:** Food waste, and its relationship to food poverty, are ongoing issues that need further attention. Some schemes are in place that make end-of-shelf life food products available to those who sign up thereby reducing waste. There has been a 3-4% reduction in waste in recent years in the UK.

**Noted:** The development of methodologies for knowledge gap determination in all spheres of food safety continues to be important.

**Noted:** Members were invited to forward any further ideas to the secretariat

**Action:** Based on these discussions, **safefood** to determine potential research ideas that can be taken forward.

## 5. Workshop: Leveraging expertise, resources & effectiveness

Facilitated by: Sinead Hewson, TpEBO

The purpose of this facilitated session was to clarify the future direction for the SAC in the context of **safefood**'s expectations and how best to capitalise on the expertise the SAC represents. The key recommendations are:

- All SAC activities to be aligned to the **safefood** strategy.
- SAC members will be called upon to provide input and share knowledge on food chain issues, and for their advice /expertise for in-depth analyses of specific topics.

- **safefood** directors will identify priority areas in 2017-2018 and document what they specifically want from the SAC in this regard.
- **safefood** will assess the feasibility of a virtual repository for SAC communications.
- Greater connection with SAC members on a one-to-one basis between meetings when specific expertise are required.
- Agenda, in-depth topics & pre-reads to be circulated 7-10 days prior to the meeting.
- The new meeting structure will contain update, discussion and perhaps decision segments.
- Actions from each meeting will be specified and tracked between meetings.

## 6. **safefood Media Campaign updates**

Updates on three **safefood** media campaigns – Folic acid, Childhood obesity and 4C's of food safety – were scheduled for information. However, due to time constraints these were deferred to a subsequent meeting.

## 7. **Guest speaker**

*The potential implications of Brexit for cross-border bodies*

Presented by: Dr Anthony Soares, Deputy Director at the Centre for Cross-Border Studies in Armagh

**Noted:** There is uncertainty as to the potential impacts on current British-Irish relationships and possible roles following a Brexit.

**Noted:** There is no existential threat to the majority of the Cross-Border Bodies from a potential Brexit, however, their ability to operate may become more challenging, particularly with regard to the impact on their stakeholders who may be impacted significantly by reduced EU funding, etc.

**Noted:** There is no guarantee against future policy divergence following a Brexit and this could impact negatively on cross-border cooperation.

**Noted:** The legislative basis for the establishment of the Cross-Border Bodies is formulated in the context of the broader membership of the EU. This includes the Northern Ireland Act and there could be short term political instability as a whole body of legislation in the UK will need to be extracted from its current EU framework.

**Noted:** In the event of a Brexit, there may be interest in revisiting the framework for the establishment of the Cross-Border Bodies.

## 8. **AOB & date for next meetings**

Noted: The dates of for subsequent meetings of the SAC in 2016 will be established in the short term.

Close of meeting