Role of European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and current tasks related to FMD

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Objectives: to present the risk assessment tasks of EFSA and the FMD related activities.

Introduction: Following a series of food scares in the 1990s (eg BSE, dioxins... which under-mined consumer confidence in the safety of the food chain, the European Union concluded that it needed to establish a new scientific body charged with providing independent and objective advice on food safety issues associated with the food chain. Its primary objective as set out in the White Paper on Food Safety would be to: “contribute to a high level of consumer health protection in the area of food safety, through which consumer confidence can be restored and maintained.” The result was EFSA. EFSA was legally born from the European Parliament and Council regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of 28 January 2002. The new Authority quickly found its feet, organising its first Management Board meeting 9 months later under the Chairmanship of S. Slorach. Shortly afterwards it nominated its first Executive Director, G. Podger, and created the Advisory Forum, made up of representatives from food safety bodies in the Member States.

EFSA truly opened for business in May 2003, with the establishment of its Scientific Committee and Panels. World-class scientists from all over Europe were appointed to eight Panels, covering everything from food additives to animal health, and to a Scientific Committee with oversight of these panels. Now as we approach the end of 2004, staff numbers have doubled and continue to increase, EFSA has published over a hundred opinions and steadily carries on with its push to establish itself permanently in Parma, Italy.

EFSA provides independent scientific advice on all matters linked to food and feed safety -including animal health and welfare and plant protection - and provides scientific advice on nutrition in relation to Community legislation. The Authority communicates to the public in an open and transparent way on all matters within its remit. EFSA’s risk assessments provide risk managers (consisting of EU institutions with political accountability, i.e. European Commission, European Parliament and Council) with a sound scientific basis for defining policy driven legislative or regulatory measures required to ensure a high level of consumer protection with regards to food safety.

Overall capacity-building is set to continue, enabling the Authority to meet work programme commitments including the significant expansion of both its scientific and communications activities as well as the development of its institutional, stakeholder and international relations. EFSA is currently dealing principally with requests for risk assessments from the European Commission and plans to take on a wider brief from other European institutions in the near future. Notwithstanding the important needs of its key customers, EFSA is already undertaking its own work in order to look ahead and address broader issues of importance to its mandate. For example, through such “self-tasking”, the Authority’s Scientific Committee has initiated work in relation to the identification of emerging food safety issues.

Discussion on FMD activities: For many years now in Europe and worldwide, the most commonly accepted way of protecting disease-free areas from the risk of outbreaks of epizootic animal diseases has been to guard borders through strict controls on imports of live animals and products of animal.