HEALTH AND COMMUNITY CARE COMMITTEE

Thursday 14 October 1999
(*Afternoon*)

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HEALTH AND COMMUNITY CARE COMMITTEE
8th Meeting

CONVENER:

*Mrs Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

*Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
*Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP)
Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab)
Margaret Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
Ms Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Dr Richard Simpson (Ochil) (Lab)
*Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP)
*Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con)

*attended

WITNESSES:

Marion Baldry (Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department)
Stephen Rooke (Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department)

COMMITTEE CLERK:

Jennifer Smart

ASSISTANT CLERK:

Irene Fleming

Scottish Parliament

Health and Community Care Committee

Thursday 14 October 1999

(*Afternoon*)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:05*]

The Convener (Mrs Margaret Smith): Welcome to this meeting of the Health and Community Care Committee. There is one item on the agenda; I thank the committee members who have managed to attend during the recess.

Food Additives

The Convener: From the Scottish Executive, we welcome Stephen Rooke, who is head of the food safety unit, and Marion Baldry, who is a policy analyst on food safety. They will give us a talk about a directive from the European Parliament on food additives. After the talk, committee members will be able to ask questions.

Stephen Rooke (Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department): Thank you. As this is the first opportunity that we have had to explain what is going on with additives and directives, we thought that it might be helpful to give members a couple of minutes of background information on the processes and their history.

It all goes back a long time—to 1988, when the framework directive 89/107/EEC on additives was adopted. That framework directive provides for the adoption of specific directives to harmonise the use of different categories of additives in foodstuffs. There are three specific directives: one covering miscellaneous additives in food, one covering colours and one covering sweeteners. They were adopted in 1994 and 1995. Since then, all mechanisms and instruments relating to the use of additives in food have been the same in all member states. That is part of the single market—such a structure guarantees the free movement of foodstuffs, ensures a high level of consumer protection, and offers the consumer greater freedom of choice between different foodstuffs.

Directive 95/2/EC on food additives other than colours and sweeteners was adopted in 1995. It is based on the principle of a positive list—in the annexes to the directive, there is a list of food additives together with a list of the foodstuffs in which the additives may be used. The conditions of their use are also given. All food additives that are not included in the list are prohibited for use in food within the European Community.

Once the period for transposing the directives has expired, member states will not be able to use new additives—except, during a limited period of two years, for new additives that are not included in the positive lists. Neither will member states be able to amend the rules that govern the use of additives on their own initiative. That means that there is a two-year period when national rules can apply. After that period, all those approvals will lapse unless approved by the Community. There is therefore a two-year period during which the United Kingdom can nominate new additives for our use in this country.

The European Commission's proposals are based on the principle of complete harmonisation at Community level, which is described in the framework directive on food additives. Uniform rules are needed because additives have an impact on public health. There must be a high degree of transparency between the member states to establish a reasonable level of safety and to allow trade in foodstuffs within the Community.

I want to talk about the Miscellaneous Food Additives Regulations 1995. Those Great Britain regulations were required to implement directive 95/2/EC. They were made under the Food Safety Act 1990 and came into force on 1 January 1996. Again, to follow the framework directive, they provide a list of authorised food additives together with a list of the foodstuffs in which they may be used and the conditions for their use—for example, the maximum quantities of additive allowed per gram or per litre of foodstuff.

Following those 1995 regulations, two new directives were adopted to allow for technical developments in the field of food additives. The new directives were to cover cases in which additives that had already been authorised were used in new categories of food that were not included in the original directive. They allowed for an amendment to cover those developments. They also took into account the fact that certain food manufacturers in new member states were not included in the original directive. Certain additives were being used in those member states.

All the work takes account of advice from the scientific committee on food, which looks at additives on a European level and gives an opinion on their safety.

The Miscellaneous Food Additives (Amendment) Regulations 1997, which came into force on 1 July 1997, implemented the requirements of the previous directives. The first directive, 95/85/EC, authorised the use of a new additive, processed eucheuma/seaweed—E 407a. The second, 96/77/EC, laid down specific purity criteria for certain permitted additives, mainly preservatives and antioxidants. In addition, those amending

regulations authorised a variation to the two-year national authorisation to permit certain hydrocarbon propellants—propane, butane and isobutane—to be used in an additional food category, water-based emulsion sprays, in Britain until December 1997.

Those proposals were accepted by the Food Advisory Committee and cleared by the appropriate safety bodies as safe in relation to any fire hazard. The Food Advisory Committee advises the Government on the use of additives in food, while the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment looks at the toxicological consequences of such additives. The gases were permitted for use only until December 1997, in garlic oil sprays and in the professional use of vegetable oil pan sprays.

The regulations amended the Fruit Juices and Fruit Nectars (Scotland) Regulations 1977 to reflect an EC prohibition on the simultaneous additions of acids and sugars in fruit juices.

The Miscellaneous Food Additives (Amendment) Regulations 1999, which further amended the 1995 regulations, came into force on 28 May 1999. Those regulations added flour treatment agents to the list of miscellaneous additives, placed restrictions on the use of additives in plain, pasteurised cream, reduced the level of sulphur dioxide in certain sugars, allowed four new additives to be permitted in the lists, provided for additional uses of additives in foods, added a number of new substances to a list of permitted carriers and solvents and provided for additional uses of certain additives in specified food for infants and young children, including foods for special medical purposes.

In addition to the additives regulations, there are the Colours in Food Regulations 1995, the Sweeteners in Food Regulations 1995, the Sweeteners in Food (Amendment) Regulations 1997 and the Sweeteners in Food (Amendment) Regulations 1999. Those regulations refer to colours and sweeteners in food, but they do not relate to the proposal before the committee today.

Council Directive 95/2/EC, which harmonised the use of food additives other than colours and sweeteners throughout the Community, has been amended twice and lists the authorised additives, the foods that may be used and the conditions of use. Food additives that are not listed are prohibited. The Commission proposal before the committee would permit the following nationally authorised additives to be used at Community level: ethyl hydroxyethyl cellulose, butane, isobutane and propane.

The proposal takes account of the views of the scientific committee on food, which recently evaluated hydrogen for use in food and found its use as a packaging gas toxicologically acceptable. The committee considered unnecessary the establishment of an acceptable daily intake level of hydrogen. The proposal would permit some authorised food additives—sodium algenate, glycerol esters of wood rosin and zinc acetate—to be used in certain new applications and would allocate an E number to the authorised additive propan-1, 2-diol—propylene glycol.

That gives committee members a background of the controls at British and European levels. I am happy to take questions on specific additives and additives in general.

The Convener: Thank you, Stephen. We are talking about food additives, and there is general concern about the public health implications of the food that we eat.

Questions that were tabled before the meeting, which can be found on the second-last page of the committee papers, are as follows. Why is there no impact assessment form for the food industry in Scotland? Could the committee have a copy of the responses to the consultation exercise? Has there been research on E 445, E 650 and E 1520?

Before members ask general questions, perhaps Mr Rooke will comment on the three questions that have been tabled.

14:15

Stephen Rooke: Often the industry has asked for the additives, or extensions of additives approved for other uses, to be approved. In this case, our assessment is that as industry has made the request, the impact on it is neutral. That is why there is no impact assessment form. The consultation exercise allows us to check the assessment; the industry can come back to us if it is wrong.

A copy of the consultation responses is available in the library; it excludes responses in which commercial confidentiality is asked for by the industry or individual respondent.

The Convener: However, the consultation exercise is continuing and we are part of it.

Stephen Rooke: Yes. The views of the committee are part of the exercise, and we will feed them into the negotiations at Brussels.

Kay Ullrich (West of Scotland) (SNP): The end date of the consultation exercise is 26 October. I was led to believe that we had to come to a conclusion before that.

The Convener: We have to pass our views to the European Committee, because it is putting forward the Parliament's point of view. It meets on 19 October.

Kay Ullrich: Although the consultation exercise will not end until 26 October.

The Convener: The European consultation exercise will not finish until 26 October, so the Parliament can comment. We had to give our comments to the European Committee before 19 October because that is when it will look at the matter. That is why we are meeting prior to that date.

Kay Ullrich: In that case, we cannot have a copy of the responses because the consultation is not finished yet.

The Convener: We are part of the consultation exercise. We can make sure that when the responses are finalised, the committee is sent a copy or is informed in some other way of the responses.

Stephen Rooke: E 445 is glycerol esters of wood rosin. It is a preservative and already permitted for use as a surface treatment of citrus fruits and as a non-alcoholic, flavoured cloudy drinks additive—it gives the cloudiness in cloudy lemonade.

Kay Ullrich: I was trying to think of a cloudy drink—thank you.

Stephen Rooke: In this case, a German spirit drinks company has asked for that to be included in a proposal so that it can make some of its alcoholic drinks cloudy—in addition to cloudy lemonade, we can have cloudy alcoholic drinks.

Dorothy-Grace Elder (Glasgow) (SNP): A fashion for cloudy beer has started.

Stephen Rooke: I think that beer is seen as being more natural if it is cloudy.

The Convener: Dorothy is obviously the committee expert on cloudy alcoholic drinks.

Kay Ullrich: My drinking habits must be old-fashioned.

The Convener: I like to see clearly through my drinks—at least at the beginning of the evening.

Stephen Rooke: That additive is already approved. The company is asking for its use to be extended into another category of foodstuffs.

E 650, zinc acetate, gives a bitterness to chewing gum. It has been considered in great detail by the scientific committee on food, which believes that it should be allowed as a flavour enhancer in chewing gum in concentrations of up to 1 mg, which is equivalent to 0.3 mg of zinc for every 1,000 mg of chewing gum. That level was acceptable because of the non-toxicity of zinc at the expected exposure level. The committee's assessment is that zinc is an essential trace element for humans. We need zinc to live. The average daily intake of zinc from food is between 5 mg and 22 mg. It was felt that an equivalent value of 0.3 mg of zinc in chewing gum would be an acceptable level.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Acceptable for whom? Some people are constant chewers of gum; others might have only one wad of gum a week.

Stephen Rooke: Assessments are based on a worst case scenario. A population reference intake and a lowest threshold intake are taken into account. Age group and the lactation of pregnant women are considered, too. The assessment includes all the factors that the committee has raised.

The committee has examined the worst case scenario, which is about 10 g of chewing gum centres—equivalent to about 10 strips—and has worked out the uptake of zinc into the body from that amount of gum. The safety assessment is pretty comprehensive.

The Convener: Would it be fair to say that such an analysis would have been done on any food additives that the committee might come across?

Stephen Rooke: That is right. The scientific committee on food examines the most exposed group of the population.

Kay Ullrich: When you say chewing gum, are you talking about Nicorette chewing gum, which might be used by someone who was trying to give up cigarettes? I think that more than 10 pieces of that gum might be chewed in one day.

Stephen Rooke: The proposal refers only to chewing gum and the use of zinc acetate as a flavour enhancer.

Kay Ullrich: If someone substitutes a piece of Nicorette gum for a cigarette, they might well use more than 10 pieces a day.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: That should be checked. I once worked with a TV director who collapsed after taking too many pieces of Nicorette gum.

Kay Ullrich: That would have been because of the nicotine content.

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): He had probably been smoking as well.

The Convener: Dorothy makes a relevant point. We can suggest to the European Committee that that point be clarified.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: With the decrease in smoking among many people, sales of ordinary chewing gum have increased. We therefore do not know whether the supposed upper limit of 10 strips is the scenario nowadays. Some people might be on a much heavier dosage, particularly in non-smoking offices. Zinc is a poison if it is over-

used.

The Convener: We will bring it to the committee's attention that it is our belief, according to anecdotal evidence, that there has been an increase in the use of chewing gum and that we therefore believe that the maximum levels must be kept under review.

Kay Ullrich: We should also ask whether chewing gum with nicotine substitute is affected.

The Convener: At the end of the meeting I will go over the various points that have been raised. We can then pass them to the European Committee.

I call Ben Wallace, who I hope will mention his phone-round to industry. It is good that he has done that research.

Ben Wallace: We are the Health and Community Care Committee. I see it as our role, therefore, to ensure that food additives are for the health—or the better health—of the people. I am not an expert on butane or hydrogen and I do not even pretend to know what Stephen is talking about half of the time. However, the scientific committee presumably has members of the scientific and medical communities on it.

Stephen Rooke: That is correct.

Ben Wallace: The scientific committee has said that the proposal is safe for the people of Britain. It is a British committee—is it not? I hope that I am not mistaken.

Stephen Rooke: It is a European committee. The scientific committee on food was originally established by the European Community in 1974 and comprises experts from all member states.

Ben Wallace: Is it, therefore, an expert committee?

Stephen Rooke: It is. Three UK experts are on the committee: Dr Susan Barlow, who is a consultant to the Medical Research Council; Dr Bevan Moseley from Reading food research association; and Professor Ronald Walker from the University of Surrey School of Biological Sciences. Dr Albert Flynn, who is a senior lecturer from the Faculty of Food Science and Technology at University College, Cork, Ireland is also involved.

Ben Wallace: Must the chief medical officer rubber-stamp or take a view on the committee's position?

Stephen Rooke: Not directly. In the UK, at the same time as we go out for consultation, the proposals and the assessment made by the European scientific committee on food go to the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, which is a UK expert committee and to the Food Advisory Committee, which is a second UK committee that advises the Government. Both committees consider the proposals, as this committee is doing today.

Ben Wallace: Have those committees' responses come back?

Stephen Rooke: We have not yet received their responses to the proposals.

Ben Wallace: I am concerned by the comment made earlier about our being part of the consultation exercise. As we are not experts on toxicology, food additives or the food industry, our role must be to examine the procedures that have been gone through to decide whether such additives are healthy. As Kay said, we are not here to give our views, but we should go back to the scientific committee to ask whether the additive goes into tobacco chewing gum. I am on the European Committee and the question will arrive on my desk in a few weeks. What will I do with it?

The Convener: My understanding is that the proposals will go from here to the European Committee, which might have other comments to append to our view. Our comments will go forward to the scientific committee and others to be examined and taken on board. I did not expect the European Committee to be able to answer the question.

Ben Wallace: When the health committee's response is sent to the European Committee, could the scientific committee come back on the chewing gum question?

The Convener: Prior to next week?

Ben Wallace: Yes. Prior to the matter coming before the European Committee.

Stephen Rooke: The proposal that was considered by the scientific committee on food related only to sugar-free chewing gum. If there is a concern about Nicorette, we will pass it on.

Ben Wallace: To the scientific committee?

Stephen Rooke: Members have raised a concern; we can take that forward through our proposals, as well as going through to the scientific committee.

14:30

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Will you note my point as well? Is the assumed upper limit, of roughly 10 strips of ordinary chewing gum, realistic if the statistics on smokers are taken into consideration? Companies such as Wrigley have done some work on increased purchases of chewing gum in relation to giving up smoking.

The Convener: We have noted two points already and others may appear. Are we finished with E 650?

Ben Wallace: I want to finish an earlier point. I would like to hear health bodies' views of the consultations, if we are allowed to have them. That is when we can form opinions. For example, I cannot form an opinion on propane but I can form an opinion that the health committees have been correctly consulted and their views taken into account.

Stephen Rooke: The difficulty is that decisions on proposals from the Commission move very rapidly. There is a meeting on Monday next week at which the Commission will further consider the proposals. Within the procedures, we have to try—at the earliest possible stage—to get consultations out and take a view. We have to brief our negotiating team in Brussels to communicate, at the earliest point, any views that have been expressed. When we have a three-month, or an eight-week, consultation period, it is very difficult to keep in phase with the negotiations in Brussels. There are meetings on Monday and the points that members have raised today will be passed on to the UK negotiators who are going to Brussels. They will make the points for us on Monday.

The other difficulty that we have in Brussels is that voting on this is by qualified majority voting, so we have to ensure that we have support from other member states if we want to change anything in the proposal. We have to aim at a moving target; that is what we are trying to do today. Members' views are very welcome and if members want to return to look at the consultation documents, we will provide those. However, I am afraid that things will have moved on by that time.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: May I ask a bit more on citrus fruits? I apologise for being late—I was at another meeting earlier. The explanatory memorandum states that the proposal aims to

"permit some already authorised food additives (sodium alginate, glycerol esters of wood rosin, zinc acetate) to be used in certain new applications".

First, what are those new applications? The treatment of citrus fruits was mentioned. Secondly, does this relate to the process commonly known as waxing?

Stephen Rooke: This is part of the waxing process.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: The waxing process is already quite controversial. The proposal says

"to be used in certain new applications".

Is it specified which fruits are affected, or how far the proposal might extend?

Stephen Rooke: No. The application is already approved. E 445 is already approved, within the UK regulations, for surface treatment of citrus fruits to a level of 50 mg/kg.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Did that happen some time ago?

Stephen Rooke: Yes. E 445 is also allowed in non-alcoholic, flavoured, cloudy drinks, to a level of 100 mg/litre. One spirit company has said that it wants to use E 445 to make some of its alcoholic drinks cloudy. That is the new bit.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: First, I wonder why we should go along with yet another fashion. Alcoholic drinks, such as lager, used to be praised for their clarity. Manufacturers are now making drinks cloudy. Should we be inflicting this on the population of Scotland purely to go along with fashion in the drinks trade?

Secondly, the waxing of fruit is already controversial.

The Convener: The point for the committee, Dorothy, is public health. I prefer clear drinks, but it is not for me to impose on the people of Scotland that they should all drink clear drinks because I like it that way. If we were to find a public health reason why people should drink only clear drinks, we would be beholden to do something about that. It is not up to us to comment on fads.

As we heard, some of this has come about as a result of requests from the industry—which obviously means jobs and so on—but the public health angle is our remit. Beyond that, we have no remit.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Are not we going along with yet another invasion by chemicals? Some quite alarming chemicals—albeit in small doses—are mentioned: cellulose, butane, isobutane and propane are mentioned.

Ben Wallace: I understand that butane and isobutane are used in vacuum packing. Is that the case?

Stephen Rooke: It is complicated; allow me to explain. A lot of the additives that we are talking about today occur naturally in foods. Potatoes, for example, are cellulose and starch. Food is composed of chemicals, as are we, and the industry uses the best bits, if you like, taking cellulose out of plants and using it for other purposes. In those circumstances, it becomes an additive. An additive can be naturally derived from plant material or it can be artificially produced. It is something that we have been doing for many years. There is a long list of artificially produced chemicals that were naturally derived from plant material in the first place but are now manufactured.

Butane, isobutane and propane are merely propellants, used as an environmental measure to replace chlorofluorocarbons to avoid depleting the ozone layer. The alternatives to CFCs in most propellant sprays for such things as deodorants and household products are butane, isobutane and propane. The food industry has a similar problem when putting a product into a spray; a propellant is needed to discharge it. The gases that have been mentioned are merely propellants for that purpose. They are the same as the ones used in under-arm deodorant, shaving foam or any other aerosol. In this case, manufacturers want to use propellant in a vegetable oil pan spray and in a water-based emulsion spray, just to give it a bit of a lift.

Kay Ullrich: We are not eating under-arm deodorants, though—at least, I hope not.

Stephen Rooke: We would not be eating the propellants in this case either; they disperse into the atmosphere.

Kay Ullrich: I use a pan spray for cooking. One sprays the product directly on the pan and cooks directly on top of that. Are you saying that, by the time it hits the pan and the food is in the pan, the propellant has been lost?

Stephen Rooke: One would have breathed it in or absorbed it. As in the case of the under-arm deodorant, it disperses into the atmosphere. That is why CFCs were a problem as propellant gases. What is seen on the pan is the oil that was propelled on to the pan, not the propellant.

Gases such as carbon dioxide, nitrogen and modified gases are already used to package foods and give them a nice healthy glow on the shelf. If food is packed using cling-film, it soon discolours. Meat goes very dark and chicken goes a bit greenish round the corners, and it soon looks unattractive. The gases that are put in the packaging protect the food and stop the organisms that cause the discolouring from having an effect. Hydrogen is just another of those modified atmosphere packaging gases that the industry would like to use so that the food that we eat is safer and, without the discolouring, more attractive.

Kay Ullrich: The aesthetic aspects should not really matter. We should concern ourselves with the effects on health of the additives that are used to make the food look better. Are you saying that the gases also protect the food?

Stephen Rooke: Yes. The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment and the European committees have considered the safety aspect of the products in question and have found that, at the levels used, they are safe for that purpose. That is why they have been previously approved.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Are you saying that the packaging prolongs the life of the food only in so far as it looks all right, rather than going slightly greenish or off looking, but it is not necessarily protecting it because it is still decomposing?

Stephen Rooke: It delays the onset of decomposition. There are certain organisms that are not harmful to us but cause food to decompose. By changing the atmosphere, one can stop such organisms growing so quickly, and therefore can extend the shelf-life of the product, which will remain safe to eat during that extended shelf-life. There is a preservative as well as an aesthetic effect.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Is this a kind of cling-film, or is it something more?

Stephen Rooke: It is not cling-film; it is a special film that goes over trays of food. The film can be breathable—it can allow gases to seep out of or into packaging over time. Food technologists have to work on this to ensure that food is both safe and aesthetically pleasing while it is on the supermarket shelf.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: There has been controversy about that type of wrapping as well—about materials being absorbed by the food.

Marion Baldry (Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department): There are separate regulations that cover materials and articles in contact with food.

The Convener: If we ask questions that stray over the boundaries of this matter, please tell us.

The one E number that you did not discuss was E 1520.

Stephen Rooke: That is propylene glycol. This proposal is not an addition, but gives this additive an E number. It is approved for use and has been through the safety assessment. The Danish Government has asked that it be given an E number—that is the only effect of the proposal. On the packaging, it will become E 1520 rather than propan-1, 2-diol (propylene glycol)—that will make labelling a bit easier.

The Convener: It will not have its Sunday name.

The fax that we have from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food says that E 1520 is not an additive that is permitted in the European Community, but you said that it has been approved.

Stephen Rooke: The situation is complicated. The Commission said that propylene glycol did not meet the definition of an additive and, therefore, is not an additive. The Danes think that it is an additive and that it should be given an E number and put in the additives list. The only thing that we

can think of is that the Commission has accepted the Danish Government's representation that it is an additive and should be put into the list to allow manufacturers to use it.

The Convener: This is a problem of definition; when is an additive not an additive.

Stephen Rooke: The directives and regulations are extremely complicated. The list is positive: if something does not appear in the right form on the right page, it cannot be used, even though it has been evaluated and may be legally used for another purpose.

The Convener: Are there any other points or questions?

Ben said that he had contacted a number of food manufacturers in Scotland to get their input. If members do background research like that, they should tell me, as it is worthwhile acknowledging it and making use of the information.

In answer to our first question about the lack of an impact assessment form, it seems from Ben's conversations that the industry has asked for these changes and is happy with these additives.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): Have any significant concerns been raised during the consultation?

Marion Baldry: To date, we have had three responses: from the Scottish Consumer Council, the Meat and Livestock Commission and the Royal Environmental Health Institute for Scotland, all of which confirmed that they have no comments.

14:45

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Is not that a rather curious response?

Marion Baldry: They are on our consultation lists for various subjects. On this occasion, they have no comments to offer but, as they want to be kept on our lists, they were being courteous by saying that.

The Convener: It is also a positive affirmation that the documentation has not got lost in the post and that the organisations have given some thought to the matter, rather than that they have not looked at it at all. It is useful for us to know that.

Are members happy with that?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I suggest that we note the proposal and that we make the points that members have raised on chewing gum. There is certainly anecdotal evidence—probably more than that, as Dorothy mentioned that research has been undertaken by chewing gum companies—on the increased use of chewing gum generally and in particular by people who are attempting to give up smoking. I welcome those attempts.

We want to ensure that the scientific committee on food takes into account the possibility of an increased use of chewing gum. We also want to ensure that the scientific committee on food monitors that situation. We raised the question, which has become a point that we wish to make, whether the additives that are put into chewing gum are also put into Nicorette—into the type of chewing gum used to wean people off their nicotine addiction. While we want our negotiators to take that issue with them into next week's negotiations, we may not get an answer.

Kay Ullrich: I wish to stress the point that I made earlier. The chances are that the average person who uses Nicorette gum uses more than 10 pieces a day, because it is a substitute. If they smoke 20 cigarettes a day, the chances are that they will use 20 pieces.

The Convener: Rather than giving the negotiators our points, it would be useful if a copy of the *Official Report* of today's meeting could be given to them by Monday, although I am not sure if that is possible. The comments that we have made during this general discussion would be useful to them.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: I wish to record that most of this appears to be driven by the manufacturers, rather than the people who are employed to care for the health of Europe. The proposal seems to extend considerably the injection of artificial substances, leading to more force feeding of substances whose contents seem quite alarming. I will call them industrial substances. Should we really approve of that approach? Can we add that comment as a rider?

The Convener: Public health is this committee's key remit. The scientific committee on food, the Food Advisory Committee and the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment said that these additives have already been examined. I do not have the scientific background to be able to say whether this particular additive is safe, but members of those committees do. The suggestion that the additives are unsafe has not been made to this committee. If that suggestion had been made, Dorothy, we would have a different attitude. However, this range of additives seems to have perfectly healthy uses, in terms of public health, although it may be questionable from an aesthetic point of view, or because it may not be what you or I would like to eat.

We must keep in mind the remit of this committee. We have highlighted the issue of

chewing gum. The committee clerk has pointed out to me that, despite what I was saying about negotiating teams next week and so on, our job at this stage is forward our comments to the European Committee, which will meet on 19 October. The points that we have made will be passed on to that committee, which will formulate this Parliament's view on the proposal. Is that acceptable?

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Yes, but the process seems to be led by industry. I am not a purist about food, but this is an overwhelming encroachment of artificial items. I respectfully suggest that we add that we ca' canny on that, or that we recommend that pressures from the food industry are kept to a minimum. The poor public has already been force fed genetically modified foods without knowing that that was happening.

Kay Ullrich: I accept much of what Dorothy-Grace is saying, but that is not within our remit as regards this item. We will get our chance on GM foods later.

The Convener: The points that Dorothy raises about public concern about the food that we eat are for another day. Our discussions of this agenda item have reached a conclusion—or have they?

Ben Wallace: When is this directive due to come before the European Parliament?

Marion Baldry: It has some way to go yet.

Ben Wallace: Does it?

Marion Baldry: Yes, it is still at a very early stage.

Ben Wallace: Has a date been set for it to be discussed in plenary session?

Marion Baldry: Not yet, as far as I am aware. It is still just a Commission document.

Ben Wallace: Just a Comdoc?

Marion Baldry: Yes.

Ben Wallace: I have learnt today that there is a committee on toxicity. Food safety and pharmaceuticals will be a major subject for this committee. Could we be given a briefing document setting out the process for the introduction of pharmaceuticals, additives or chemicals? It is quite clear that this proposal has been through plenty of Government committees before reaching us.

The Convener: I accept Ben's suggestion. Our papers informed us of the dates on which particular committees have considered the proposal. We were not informed whether they discussed it in depth and been able to question experts, or whether they had simply nodded it through. One of our concerns when this directive was first put to us last week was that everyone who had considered it prior to us might have approved it on the assumption that it was okay. We would like some indication of what kind of scrutiny is possible and is most likely to have been carried out by the time measures of this sort come before us. That will give us a better idea of whether we need to go back to stage one, or whether we can assume that stages one, two and three have already been completed.

Ben Wallace: I will raise that at the European Committee as well. All that we are given there is the text of the directive.

The Convener: Sometimes I think that there have probably been a number of useful discussions before a document hits our desks. It would be useful for us to know whether that is the case. It would also minimise the time that we need to spend discussing such documents.

Stephen Rooke: There are about 14 expert committees considering various aspects of food. The committee may wish to set aside some time at another meeting for us to give members a background briefing on how food safety works in Great Britain and Europe—across a wider front than just additives—and on how the expert committees interrelate. Would that be helpful?

The Convener: Yes, that would be valuable.

Ben Wallace: The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee and the Rural Affairs Committee would be interested in that, so maybe a paper should be written rather than a presentation given.

The Convener: Not only a paper should be produced; an informal briefing aimed at this committee should be held which would be open to MSPs who have a particular interest in the subject but who are not on this committee. There are other aspects that should be examined. We could take that forward.

Food safety and public health issues have dominated our previous agendas. We are trying to move forward into other substantive work. It will, however, be an area that continues to be of interest to this committee and so it would be useful to act on suggestions such as that made by Mr Rooke.

Dorothy-Grace Elder: Would it be possible to include some discussion of colourants in the paper?

The Convener: It would be useful if members e-mailed me with any other suggestions about the components of an informal briefing day.

I thank members for attending during the recess—I am pleased to get in a reference to that.

Thanks also to Stephen and Marion for coming along today and sharing their knowledge with us. It looks as if we will see you again in the not too distant future.

Meeting closed at 14:56.

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