

**STANDING COMMITTEE
ON THE FOOD CHAIN AND ANIMAL HEALTH**

**Section on Toxicological Safety of the Food Chain
Summary record of 5h meeting –April 7th 2003
Chairman : Mrs Patrica Brunko**

1. Tin in canned foods – draft working document proposing an amendment to regulation (EC) No. 466/2001 setting maximum levels for certain contaminants in foods.

A draft document proposing possible maximum levels for tin in canned foods was discussed. Following the opinion of the Scientific Committee on Food of 12 December 2001, this proposal has been developed to protect consumers from gastric irritation due to tin in canned food.

2. Updates on acrylamide in food.

The Commission gave an update on various activities and initiatives on acrylamide in food, in particular with regard to the database set up by the Commission on relevant research activities. The Working Group of Experts on Contaminants would discuss developments at its next meeting.

3. Exchange of views on the possible revision of Commission decision 2000/75/EC laying down special conditions on the import from third countries of star anise.

The Committee examined the situation concerning the implementation of the above Decision and discussed if there are still reasons for maintaining these measures in force for a further period of time. In this context, the fact that there are no new cases of intoxication and that all checks carried out during the last year on imports of Star anise have never revealed the presence of contamination were taken into account.

From the debate it was concluded that all the Member States were of the opinion that it is now time to repeal the Decision. However, some delegations expressed the view that a heightened attention from the Member States should be maintained in order to avoid a relaxation of the controls. In particular, it was suggested that the Member States should alert all concerned food operators requesting them to pay attention when importing or using Star anise.

4. Any other business

Official controls in the field of food additives, flavourings and food contact materials

The Commission presented two questionnaires that had already been sent to the Member States' contact points on the above issues. The aim of these questionnaires is to gather information in order to begin the assessment of the control systems in place in the Member States. The deadline for reply was 8 May 2003.

4.2 Use of carbon monoxide in tuna fish

NL gave a presentation on the use of carbon monoxide in tuna fish. The process has an effect on the colour of the fish by maintaining a bright red appearance. Consumers can therefore be misled as to the freshness of the product, as the colour remains even when the fish deteriorates. NL had refused the use of carbon monoxide as this gas is not in the list of authorised food additives. The producers then switched to so-called "cold smoking" or "clear smoking", i.e. treatment with filtered smoke. The fish is labelled "lightly smoked". However, the technique does not impart a smoky flavour or the typical colour which results from smoking, but is nevertheless considered as a smoking process by the Courts in the Netherlands.

The Committee expressed concern that consumers were being misled as to the freshness of the product. Carbon monoxide would fall under the definition of a food additive and was thus not authorised. The Committee also agreed that if a product was labelled as "smoked", it must have a smoky flavour. Finally, reference was made to Directive 91/493/EEC on fishery products, which requires that treatments applied to inhibit the development of pathogenic micro-organisms or constituting an important element in the preservation of the product must be scientifically recognised or formally approved.

The Commission asked the other Member States to provide before 8 May 2003 information on whether products processed in this way are on their market, as well as any other relevant information.

4.3 The use of nitrates and nitrites as food additives

The Commission explained the recent ruling regarding the Commission Decision 1999/830/EC with regard to the national provisions notified by Denmark concerning the use of nitrites and nitrates in foodstuffs. The Commission informed the Committee on the steps to be taken:

- The Commission would ask the European Food Safety Authority to urgently give an opinion on the minimum levels of nitrites and nitrates required in meat products to achieve the necessary preservative effect and to guarantee microbiological safety, in particular with regard to the development of *Clostridium botulinum*. In addition, the Commission would ask to be informed about the correlation between in-going and residual amount of nitrites and nitrates and the microbiological safety of the food.

- Member States were asked to provide data on the technological need and real amounts of nitrites and nitrates used in meat products in their country. At the request of several member States, the deadline for submission of this information was set at the end of June 2003.
- A similar request would be made to the Liaison Centre for the Meat Processing Industry in the EU.

4.4. Dried figs, hazelnuts and pistachios originating from Turkey entering the EU via Switzerland

The special conditions laid down in Commission Decision 2002/80/EC for import of dried figs, hazelnuts and pistachios originating from Turkey provide that, *inter alia*, consignments can only be imported into the EU if they are accompanied by:

- the results of official sampling and analysis and
- by a health certificate completed, signed and verified by a representative of the General Directorate of Protection and Control of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the Republic of Turkey.

A consignment of these products from Turkey with destination Switzerland does not have to be accompanied by a health certificate. Nevertheless, a consignment transiting through Switzerland but with the EU as final destination has to be accompanied by this health certificate, issued by the Turkish competent authority.

Austria asked how to treat the case of repackaging of dried figs in Switzerland for export to the EU. The following possibility was discussed: The Swiss company would inform his supplier in Turkey that the consignments of dried figs have to be accompanied by the health certificate as required by Commission Decision 2002/80/EC. Upon export to the EU, the link between the certificate and the consignment would have to be established. However, for consignments that are already on the Swiss territory or on their way, this approach is not applicable. Therefore, for a transitional period, official control could either be carried out by the Swiss authorities or under their supervision. The Commission will explore this possibility and inform the Member States in writing.

4.5 Mineral oils in jute bags

Austria raised the point that peanut oil had been found to contain paraffin compounds which had been traced back to the mineral oil used to coat the jute bags for transporting the peanuts. The mineral oil used on the jute bags appeared not to be food grade oil. Austria was asked to provide more details of the contaminating substances. The Commission would then be in a position to follow-up the issue.