

Advice 03-2013 of the Scientific Committee of the Belgian Food Safety Agency (FASFC) on two proposals of law:

- on the reinforcement of the credibility, the transparency and the independence of decisions related to public health**
- on the introduction of a uniform procedure to conduct expert investigations and to institute an Upper Council for Expert advice (dossier Sci Com 2013/02: self-tasking initiative)**

The Scientific Committee has assessed, on its own initiative, two proposals of law which are made up by the Chamber of representatives' Commission for Public Health, Environment and Social Renewal. These proposals of law deal with the prevention of conflicts of interest in regard to public health and to assure that opinions in regard to public health are issued by "truly independent experts".

On one hand, the Scientific Committee subscribes the concern of the Commission and supports the necessity to guarantee, as maximally as possible, independent expert advice to support public health policy and more specifically in regard to public health and food safety. On the other hand, the Scientific Committee is aware of the necessity to dispose at all times and in an uncomplicated way of the best possible expertise. Hereby it is crucial that top-scientists are encouraged to share their expertise for public policy preparation rather than being frightened by the creation of legal insecurity due to the unclear definition of the terms 'interest' and 'conflict of interest', the application of severe sanctions and a complex administrative procedure threatening moreover to paralyze the efficient functioning of advisory bodies.

In this advice the different measures taken by the FASFC and the Scientific Committee are taken into consideration in order to guarantee the independent functioning of the Committee and to deal in a transparent and structured way with eventual conflict of interest of experts. It is reminded that the role of the Scientific Committee consists of assessing the risks and to give advice whilst that of the Food Safety Agency is to manage the risks, to take decisions and to communicate about that.

Furthermore a number of comments were given on the respective proposals of law.

In conclusion, the Scientific Committee is of the opinion that it is perfectly feasible for scientific advisory bodies to deal themselves in a transparent manner with the issue of conflicts of interest of experts with the purpose of providing independent advice to the authorities by correctly applying procedures and provided intern and extern control there-off.

The full text is available on this website in dutch and in french, respectively under the section "Wetenschappelijk Comité/Adviezen" and "Comité scientifique/Avis".