

Press release

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NGOs demand dismissal of two EFSA experts who failed to declare food industry links

Brussels / Paris, 13 September – New research has today revealed further conflicts of interest among experts advising the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) about the safety of food additives, including aspartame [1].

Research by Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) and Réseau Environnement Santé/French Network on Health and Environment (RES) found that two of the new experts appointed by EFSA to the panel responsible for looking at food additives have failed to declare consulting activities for the food industry-funded think tank and lobby group International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI).

CEO and RES have written to EFSA to demand the dismissal of the two experts. They have also written to EU Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič to urge tighter new rules governing conflicts of interest within the EU's agencies [2].

According to the new research, Riccardo Crebelli, a research director at the Italian Institute of Health, and Ursula Gundert-Remy, a former medical expert at the German Institute for Risk Assessment, have both acted as advisers for ILSI in the past five years. Gundert-Remy was appointed a scientific adviser at the ILSI Research Foundation in Washington in 2005, and Crebelli was a member of a scientific committee on the safety of food packaging set up by ILSI in 2008.

The new evidence follows similar breaches of trust towards EFSA in June this year. Four members of the same scientific panel “updated” their declarations of interests following a CEO report revealing their undeclared consulting activities with ILSI [3]. The report also found that 11 out of the 20 experts on the panel had a conflict of interests, as defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Questions have been raised about EFSA's advice in recent months and EFSA was recently asked to re-examine its advice on aspartame following concerns about health impacts [4].

Nina Holland, speaking for Corporate Europe Observatory, said:

“EFSA has clearly failed to learn from previous scandals. Under EFSA's own rules, members of the scientific panels are required to declare potential conflicts of interest. Two new members of the ANS panel appear to be in breach of the rules -- and we believe that as a result they should be dismissed.”

André Cicoella, from Réseau Environnement Santé, said:

“The Commission must introduce much stricter rules to prevent these recurrent scandals which undermine public confidence in our food safety body. Experts having done consultancy and advisory work on a paid or unpaid basis for food companies, food industry associations,

or think tanks funded by the food industry these last five years should not be allowed to sit on EFSA's scientific panels.”

EFSA rules on conflicts of interest require members of its expert panels to report any work for industry in the past five years which could affect their independence [5]. Under these rules, failure to disclose “advice or services in a particular field falling within EFSA's remit” -- even if unpaid -- is considered as a “prima facie breach of trust towards EFSA” that could lead to these two experts' dismissal [6].

ILSI Europe describes itself as “a key partner for European industry” and provides funding to “build science in regulatory areas” [7]. Its funders include Nestlé, Unilever, Kraft Foods, Danone, Mars, Coca-Cola, and Mc Donald's. ILSI aims to influence the development or revision of standards and procedures for risk assessment for food, chemicals and biotech products, in order to make them more industry-friendly [8].

ENDS

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Notes:

[1] [LINK TO THE TWO-PAGE REPORT](#).

[2] [LINK TO THE TWO LETTERS](#)

[3] Exposed: conflicts of interest among EFSA's experts on food additives, Corporate Europe Observatory, 15 June 2011.

http://www.corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/publications/EFSA_ANS_panel.pdf

[4] “EU food safety agency to test aspartame”, EurActiv, 30 May 2011.

<http://www.euractiv.com/cap/eu-food-safety-agency-test-aspartame-news-505236>

[5] Guidance document on declarations of interest, EFSA, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, 8 September 2009, page 4: “Past period is to be interpreted as meaning activities that are no longer ongoing and that have been completed in the five years preceding the filling in of the DoI.” <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/keydocs/docs/doiguideance.pdf>

[6] Guidance document on declarations of interest, EFSA, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, 8 September 2009. Page 3: “Consultancy/Advice is to be interpreted as an activity in which the concerned person charges or does not charge a fee for providing advice or services in a particular field falling within EFSA's remit. Any contracts or collaborations with the EFSA falling outside the work of the Panel/Working Group/Scientific Committee as identified above should also be specified under this activity. The subject matter should only indicate the domain in which the consultancy is/has been active.” Page 6: “Failure to fulfil in a timely and complete manner any of the obligations outlined in this act will be considered as a prima facie breach of trust towards EFSA. Because of that failure, appropriate actions, including the dismissal of the concerned persons, might be taken by EFSA.”

<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/keydocs/docs/doiguideance.pdf>

[7] ILSI Europe Membership, ILSI website.

<http://www.ilsio.org/Europe/Pages/Membership.aspx>

[8] Europe's pesticide and food safety regulators – Who do they work for?, Earth Open Source, April 2011. <http://www.earthopensource.org/index.php/reports/10-europes-pesticide-and-food-safety-regulators-who-do-they-work-for>