Food safety: action plan, European Food Authority. White Paper

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The committee adopted the report by John Bowis (EPP-ED, UK) on the Commission white paper on food safety, containing proposals for the establishment of a European food safety body. Instead of the name proposed by the Commission (European Food Authority), the committee felt that the word which specified the responsibility of this body was 'safety' and that the nomenclature 'European Food Safety Authority' (EFSA) should therefore be used. The committee believed the EFSA's remit should firstly be to assess risks in the field of food safety and to give scientific advice. It should also provide information to the public about its scientific conclusions and recommendations, although the Commission would remain responsible for explaining risk management decisions. The EFSA should play a key role in the existing Rapid Alert System, which should be improved and extended to cover all areas of food safety, including animal feed. The Director of the EFSA should be appointed by the Commission after a public hearing before the relevant Parliament committee. The committee also felt that the EFSA, which should work in close cooperation with national food safety agencies, must be given powers to require Member States to provide such information, statistics and research reports in their possession as the EFSA Board may consider necessary to assess a particular risk. It called for the EFSA to develop close contacts with the main consumer protection organisations to promote the exchange of information on risk assessment. Member States that did not yet have independent food agencies were asked to establish them. In addition, the committee felt the EFSA should establish a close relationship with other bodies such as the US Food and Drug Agency, the Codex Alimentarius, the WHO, the FAO and the WTO. Finally the Commission was asked to consider a number of legislative priorities in addition to the establishment of the EFSA. These included a General Food Law Directive and amendments to existing EU legislation on feedingstuff ingredients, pesticide and dioxin levels, BSE, the addition of nutrients to food and processed baby foods.