

European Commission nominates food lobbyist to EU food safety agency's Management Board again

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The European Commission's Health and Consumers Directorate (SANCO) has short-listed a Director of the biggest EU food industry lobby group FoodDrinkEurope among the candidates to the Management Board of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Ms. Beate Kettlitz works in a leading position for the lobby group, which represents all major European food and drink corporations. It is the second year in a row that the Commission has tried to appoint representatives from FoodDrinkEurope as Members of EFSA's Management Board: just one year ago, the European Commission nominated FoodDrinkEurope's executive director Mella Frewen (a former Monsanto lobbyist). Her appointment was rejected by the European Parliament and the Member States.

EFSA is responsible for the risk assessment of all issues related to food and feed safety including genetically engineered plants, pesticides and food additives. Its Management Board is the food agency's governing body, also in charge of its independence. EFSA's independence remains problematic today, with numerous conflicts of interests with industry reported among its scientific panels.

"The fact that the European Commission shortlists a food industry lobbyist, once again, for EFSA's Management Board is an incomprehensible signal for all those concerned about the protection of consumers and the environment. A lobbyist for the food industry is by definition a threat to the EU's food safety agency's independence" says Martin Pigeon, a researcher at Corporate Europe Observatory.

Seven seats on EFSA's Management Board are up for renewal in June 2014. The European Commission has published a list of 23 names, mostly from national food safety agencies, research institutes and academia for the EU Parliament's consideration and the Member States' decision. But four persons among those short-listed also have interests in the food industry:

- Jan Mousing, re-applying for the position, is the CEO of the Danish Knowledge Centre for Agriculture, a private company describing itself as the "main supplier of professional knowledge for the agricultural professions" in Denmark.
- Piet Vanthemsche, who is also re-applying for the position, holds a leading position in industrial farmers union COPA and also sits in MRBB holding, an agri investment fund which also has shares in companies selling GMOs.
- Alan Reilly, Chief Executive of the Irish Food Safety Authority (Ireland's public food safety administration), is also a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the European Food Information Council (EUFIC), a Brussels-based food lobby group financed by some of the largest private food and drink companies in Europe.
- Milan Kovac, from the Slovak Ministry of Agriculture, was a board member of ILSI Europe until 2011. ILSI Europe, an industry research institute supported by all the biggest agrofood multinationals, is a central actor in the agrofood industry's scientific influence over EFSA.

The Commission's justification for these nominations is a industry-friendly interpretation of EFSA's founding regulation 178/2002, which states that four of the 14 board members "shall have a background in organisations representing consumers and other interests in the food chain". But nowhere is it mentioned that the food industry should be involved, in fact quite the contrary: EFSA's 2011 independence rules stipulate that "persons employed by industry shall not be allowed to become members of EFSA's Scientific Committee, Scientific Panels and working groups."

Contact:Corporate Europe Observatory: Martin Pigeon, Tel. +3228930930, martin@corporateeurope.org [1]Testbiotech: Christoph Then, Tel. 0151/54638040, info@testbiotech.org [2]**Further information:** [The Mella Frewen case](#) [3][Unhappy meal. The European Food Safety Authority's independence problem](#), Stéphane Horel & CEO [4]

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