

ANDROULLA VASSILIOU
MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 20. 08. 2008

Dear Minister,

Last 15 July, in the margins of the Agriculture Council, we have had the opportunity to briefly discuss the letter which you have transmitted to me at that occasion concerning the EFSA opinion on the azo-colours tested in the Southampton study.


As discussed then, EFSA has assessed the results of the Southampton study and in its opinion of 7 March 2008 concluded that the study provides limited evidence that the two mixtures of the additives tested had a small and statistically significant effect on activity and attention in children. The Panel also considered that the findings of the study cannot be used as a basis for altering the Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI) of the respective food colours.

Concerning the possible effect on activity and attention in children, the European Parliament and the Council have agreed to introduce additional labelling for the food colours assessed in the study, regarding their potential adverse effect on children's behaviour. Considering the sensitivity of the case since it concerns children, the Commission and myself supported the introduction of such labelling which will ensure that adequate information is provided to consumers who may wish to avoid these colours. On the other hand, the fact that EFSA did not alter the ADI for these additives means that their use in food within the maximum permitted levels remains safe.

At the request of the Commission, and within the re-evaluation programme of all authorised food additives, EFSA is currently re-evaluating the food colours with priority. I have drawn EFSA's attention to the importance of the re-evaluation of the azo-colours in particular and urged for the completion of their evaluation as soon as possible.

I would like to assure you that, if at any point, EFSA would advise that any of the above mentioned food colours is not safe for consumers, the Commission would take immediately appropriate action.

Yours sincerely,



Ms Eva Kjer Hansen
Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries
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