

Background Paper

On closer alignment of AF/AFCWG for improved preparedness and handling of diverging views

The AF and the AFCWG are well-established networks that can be leveraged more robustly to improve the coherency of communications in the case of diverging views and opinions. Scientific divergence, although a normal and expected occurrence in a complex, scientific landscape, can lead to confusion and deteriorate trust in regulatory scientific bodies and the scientists that support them.

The AF and the AFCWG can improve their collaboration on addressing diverging works in several ways. Both groups are making efforts to identify shared priorities and inform the other members of upcoming activities, both scientific and communications. For example, the AF has launched the EU Risk Assessment agenda and share a calendar of forthcoming risk assessment activities. The AFCWG has also started sharing upcoming communications activities and requesting input from its members as well as relevant Lines to Take, and media monitoring.

In order to leverage these groups more and improve the management of diverging views, some development areas have been identified by the AFCWG and the AF members. Early June, 2016 at the joint AF/AFCWG meeting in the Netherlands, these recommendations will be discussed to achieve agreement and a common understanding of the best way forward. Only with commitment from all parties – EFSA, the Advisory Forum and the Advisory Forum Communications Working Group members – will it succeed in achieving the objectives set forth.

Objectives

- **Preparedness:** Create mechanisms that improve preparedness and coherency in the case of diverging views
- **Coordination:** Improve coordination for potential prevention of diverging views or perception of diverging views
- **Strategic Alignment:** Greater leverage the AFCWG to support and align with the identified priorities of the AF

Throughout 2015 various discussions took place regarding the relationship of the AFCWG with the AF. In general it was viewed that the AFCWG, although highly valued by the Members and regarded as a global reference point for risk communications, it was not seen as directly serving the needs of the AF and that this should be reviewed. There have also been discussions regarding the type of governance for the AFCWG and whether it should continue to be a Working Group of the AF, or whether the activities are better suited to a more independent structure, similar to a scientific network. Three main development areas were identified:

1. Coordination and contact at National level is inconsistent per Member State—between the members of Focal Points, Advisory Forum and the AFCWG. There is a need at a national level to strengthen contact/information flow
2. Coordination of information at EU Level – there are currently not well-developed tools or policies to effectively share relevant information in a timely manner leading to a lack of preparedness and the ability to respond coherently. There is a need to strengthen coordination regarding upcoming scientific and communications activities where there may be
 - a. Potential divergence of opinions
 - b. Potential synergy and efficiency, sharing of materials, messaging, joint media outreach, social media cooperation.
3. Currently there is no mechanism for the AF to inform/mandate the AFCWG about its needs resulting in a lack of information for the AFCWG to effectively support the AF despite willingness to do so

The table below provides general recommendations to improve these development areas and create new mechanisms to achieve the objectives stated above. These recommendations can be supported by the recommended activities listed in the table.

Preparedness: Create mechanisms that improve preparedness and coherency in the case of diverging views	Coordination: Improve coordination for potential prevention of diverging views or perception of diverging views	Strategic Alignment: Greater leverage the AFCWG to support and align with the identified priorities of the AF
<p>Improve contact / coordination of the AFCWG/AF at national level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teleconferences/meetings between FP/AF/CWG prior to EFSA meetings to prepare contributions and input - Share agenda's and minutes between the various groups (already done) - Newsletter/email update regarding EFSA actions/activities at a national level (done in some countries) 	<p>Increase sharing of information regarding upcoming scientific and communications activities from all MS and EFSA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share calendars of communications activities and scientific activities on a regular basis (updated continually, discussed as needed) (initiated) - Share Lines-to-Take for contentious, complex topics or shared topics (eg. Glyphosate, AMR)(initiated) - Share media monitoring (EFSA with the MS, but MS when relevant for EFSA or EFSA is referenced) (initiated) - Bilateral and multilateral communications (email, teleconferences, Yammer, etc) between meetings to align/discuss approaches (initiated) - Dedicated agenda item at AFCWG meetings add to discuss potential diverging scientific topics - Inform of timelines, risks, determine approaches, share messaging, media outreach, comms tools and best practice - Create/update/disseminate guidelines for consistent approach to risk 	<p>Strengthen synergies between the AF and the AFCWG to improve preparedness and coherence and issue management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop mechanism for the AF to 'mandate' the AFCWG with issues that need communications support or advice - Increase the flow of information from the AF to the AFCWG regarding strategic priorities and issues of importance, that require communications support; - Share the Forthcoming Risk Assessment table with the AFCWG members - Organise a joint Crisis Communications Training with the AF and AFCWG members - Share table of upcoming EFSA Mandates with AFCWG members - Launch European risk perception survey(s) on topic of high priority for the EU, supported by the development of a European-wide communications plan, implemented by the MS and EFSA. - Organise joint sessions when appropriate on topics of relevance for both groups (eg. Public Engagement, AMR, etc) - Organise sessions with external leading experts or speakers on topics of

communications (done)	relevance for both groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Disseminate guidelines for crisis preparedness and maintain their relevance through training and updates (done)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Create a panel of Social Scientists to support the work of the AF and the AFCWG

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Document history

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