

Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications (AFCWG) Terms of Reference (ToR)

November 2013

1. Background

1.1 *Establishment of the group*

In 2003 the Advisory Forum (AF) established a working group to consider communications and in particular risk communications on matters within the remit of EFSA. Following an update of the Terms of Reference (ToR) in 2007, upon reaching its 10th anniversary and in parallel with its communications strategy review process, EFSA took the opportunity to consult with Member States on the need to further revise the ToR.

The updated ToR for the working group draws on the feedback of group members following a dedicated meeting session to discuss the group's objectives and working practices held in February 2013. The feedback received was subsequently shared with the Advisory Forum at its June 2013 meeting when, views of AF members were in turn sought on the role of the AFCWG.

2. Proposed updated ToR for the working group

2.1 *Role of the group*

The promotion of coherence in risk communications is identified as one of the four priority areas for strengthening the co-operation and networking between the EU Member States and EFSA. Co-operation in communications is facilitated by the Advisory Forum and its Working Group on Communications. This includes, but is not limited to, risk communications, recognising the importance for EFSA and Member States of wider corporate communications roles and responsibilities.

The AFCWG provides an important mechanism for exchange of information and experiences and is a basis for strengthening the coherence and co-ordination of communications activities between the national authorities and EFSA. Close involvement and participation of the European Commission also ensures more consistent communication and clearer messages on food safety taking into account the different but complementary roles of risk assessors and risk managers.

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The group also aims to support AF members, national authorities and designated national focal points in identifying appropriate opportunities and audiences for promoting scientific cooperation and communication on EFSA's work, food safety issues within Member States and the wider European food safety system.

2.2 Objectives of the group

- Develop co-operation and co-ordination of communications on all areas within EFSA's remit
- Explore opportunities and implement as appropriate joint communications activities with a focus on those issues having the greatest public health impact
- Support the development of best practices and guidelines in communications
- Facilitate acquisition of knowledge and training in communications and risk communications
- Exchange information and experiences gained both at Member State and European levels both through the network of AFCWG members and their respective teams
- Share information and knowledge on public perception on food and feed safety, nutrition, plant health, and animal health and welfare
- Evaluate communications activities and results in view of identifying lessons learned and in line with priorities defined by the Advisory Forum.

2.3 Working practices

The AF and its working group on communications will seek to build on working practices to foster co-operation in communications.

The AFCWG will:

- continue to develop EFSA's early warning on emerging and topical communications issues; and develop that further as a reciprocal arrangement by and between EFSA, the Commission and Member States (MS) communications teams
- strengthen the reciprocal pre-notification of press releases between EFSA and MSs under embargo to inform the network, with all parties working together to prepare for and support communications activity at European and national level (where prior notification is not possible, members will aim to inform each other at the same time as public announcements are made)
- strengthen cooperation through involving other members of communications teams in MSs, the Commission and EFSA, in liaison with the working group; to develop communities focused in specific communications areas and having shared responsibilities and expertise (eg press officers and web managers);
- strengthen cooperation through identifying specific issues where MSs, the European Commission and EFSA have a mutual interest to network, share intelligence and prepare communications

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- work together to develop coherent but tailored messages for national audiences; support AF members, focal points and other identified key players at a national level who can disseminate messages to appropriate audiences
- identify and utilise communications tools to strengthen understanding of the European food safety system and the work of national and European authorities on key issues
- use these communications tools to disseminate appropriate content (e.g. information on AF cooperation projects; advice and information on other major food safety issues of relevance across EFSA and MSs etc)
- develop a shared approach to the evaluation of communications activities and lessons learned to strengthen best practice
- organise workshops and training sessions to raise knowledge and share experiences on risk perception and communications
- work towards a common approach for assessing and monitoring public perception on food safety and nutrition in the EU
- develop annual work programmes including joint communications activities on topics of key public health interest

In addition to supporting the objectives of the group, through optimal management of the group's secretariat, EFSA will:

- Co-ordinate development of common positions where appropriate, and lines-to-take on key issues
- Co-ordinate risk assessment-related crises communications with members and the European Commission, ensuring timely access to information for all members.
- Develop the AFCWG into a leadership platform in risk communications, encouraging relevant third parties (e.g. ECDC, EMA, WHO...) to learn about and benefit from the network and its work
- Implement a multi-annual training programme

The working group will undertake all this work in close cooperation with national focal points and AF members, ensuring on-going interaction between the key players involved in cooperation between EFSA and MSs. Whilst safeguarding the independence of communications related to risk assessment, the working group involves and works closely with the European Commission to facilitate co-ordination of messages between risk assessors and risk managers, thereby promoting coherence of risk communications across the Community.