

Minutes

THIRTEENTH MEETING BETWEEN FOCAL POINTS AND EFSA VIENNA (AUSTRIA), 15-16 FEBRUARY 2012

Members

Chair: Bernhard Berger

Austria	<i>Roland Grossgut and Johann Steinwider</i>	Latvia	<i>Dace Vilcāne</i>
Bulgaria	<i>Bistra Benkova</i>	Lithuania	<i>Snieguolė Ščeponavičienė</i>
Cyprus	<i>Popi Ziegler</i>	Luxembourg	<i>Nathalie Welschbillig</i>
Czech Republic	<i>Petr Benes</i>	Malta	<i>Ingrid Busuttil</i>
Denmark	<i>Arne Büchert</i>	Netherlands	<i>Hubert Noteborn</i>
Estonia	<i>Piret Priisalu</i>	Norway	<i>Marie Louise Wiborg</i>
Finland	<i>Kirsi-Maarit Siekkinen</i>	Poland	<i>Iwona Wisniewska</i>
France	<i>Philippe Prigent and Rozenn Saunier</i>	Portugal	<i>Jorge Proença Reis</i>
Germany	<i>Brigitte Graf</i>	Slovak Republic	<i>Marica Theiszová</i>
Greece	<i>Stamatina Louka</i>	Slovenia	<i>Blaža Nahtigal</i>
Hungary	<i>Judit Sali</i>	Spain	<i>Cristina Alonso-Andicoberry</i>
Iceland	<i>Ástfríður Sigurðardóttir</i>	Sweden	<i>Anita Strömberg</i>
Ireland	<i>Anne-Marie Boland</i>	United Kingdom	<i>Alisdair Wotherspoon</i>
Italy	<i>Roberta Masella</i>		

Observers

Croatia	<i>Sandra Bašić</i>	Turkey	<i>Nurseren Budak</i>
FYROM	<i>Marina Popovska- Domazetova</i>	Switzerland	<i>Judith Beck</i>
Montenegro	<i>Tatjana Babovic</i>		

Invitees

<i>Herbert Budka</i> ¹	
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Staff of the European Food Safety Authority

<i>Bernhard Berger</i>	<i>Kerstin Gross-Helmert</i>
<i>Anne-Laure Gassin</i> ¹	<i>Sérgio Potier Rodeia</i>
<i>Torben Nilsson</i>	

1 WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

Bernhard Berger from EFSA's Advisory Forum and Scientific Cooperation (AFSCO) Unit and Chair of the meeting opened the 13th meeting between Focal Points (FPs) and EFSA. He introduced Roland Grossgut from the Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety (AGES) and Austrian Advisory Forum (AF) member.

Roland Grossgut welcomed the participants, highlighting the success story of the establishment of the Focal Point network. Finally he wished the participants a fruitful meeting.

The Chair thanked Roland Grossgut for hosting the meeting in Vienna and Johann Steinwider, Austrian FP, for the support provided in organising this event. The Chair welcomed the representatives from 32 countries, in particular Rozenn Saunier from France, Roberta Masella from Italy, Tajana Babovic from Montenegro, and Nurseren Budak from Turkey, who attended a FP meeting for the first time. Apologies were received from Belgium and Romania.

2 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

After distribution of the draft agenda to FPs before the meeting, some additional items were raised. France expressed the wish to report on a European Commission research project on harmonization and methodological improvement of Total Diet Studies (TDS). France also raised a question on the current procedures applicable to kick-off meetings for grants and procurement. From EFSA's side, two issues were proposed to be added to the agenda: email requests for information and future FP meetings in 2012. Participants agreed to the proposed changes and the agenda was adopted after inclusion of the first issue raised by France under "Subjects raised by Focal Points" and the last three abovementioned issues under "Any Other Business" (AOB).

The draft minutes of the 12th FP meeting were sent to FPs for comments on the 8th of December 2011. The minutes were approved without comments from participants and have been published on EFSA's website.

¹ Attended part of the meeting

In accordance with EFSA's Policy on Declarations of Interests, EFSA screened the Annual Declarations of Interest (ADoI) of the meeting participants. Arne Büchert (Denmark) informed participants of his current involvement in the consortia which will be delivering the training courses on principles and methods of food safety risk assessment, organised through the EC "Better Training for Safer Food" (BTSF) Programme. No conflicts of interests related to any issues to be discussed in this meeting were identified during the screening process or at the beginning of the meeting. Focal Points were also reminded to update their ADoIs, especially when they receive a notification that it will soon be one year old i.e. that it will no longer be valid.

The Chair informed participants of changes occurred or about to occur regarding the handling of the FP network. The Chair thanked Andras Szoradi for his very good collaboration with the Focal Point network, as meanwhile he moved to a new Unit in EFSA; the Chair thanked Kerstin Gross-Helmert for her excellent work and commitment in setting up and managing the Focal Point network over the past years, welcoming Torben Nilsson and Sérgio Potier Rodeia who will take over this activity; the Chair then informed participants that this would be his last Focal Point meeting, since he will be leaving EFSA.

3 PRESENTATION OF THE AUSTRIAN AGENCY FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY

Roland Grossgut provided participants with an insight of the Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety. Reference was made to its objectives, history, structure, risk assessment activities and work done in a European networking environment. Concrete examples of projects carried out for EFSA were presented, like the impact of metabolic and degradation processes on the toxicological properties of residues of pesticides in food commodities, the development of animal welfare risk assessment guidelines on stunning and killing, and electronic transmission of chemical occurrence data.

The Chair thanked Roland Grossgut for his presentation and pointed out the huge effort made in the setting up of AGES, which resulted from the merge of eighteen different federal institutes.

4 FOOD AND FEED SAFETY IN EU OVER THE LAST 10 YEARS

4.1 THE EUROPEAN RESPONSE TO BSE: A SUCCESS STORY

Professor Herbert Budka, member and Vice-Chair of EFSA's Panel on Biological Hazards (BIOHAZ), gave a presentation on the European response to BSE and to which extent such a story can be looked at as a success story. The presentation comprised an overview of the history of BSE in Europe, its epidemiology, eradication measures implemented over time and their effect, as well as its correlation with the increase on the incidence of a variant of the Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD). Given the success of risk management measures against BSE implemented during the last decades, and the recent relaxation of such measures at European level, the presentation concluded with some interesting reflections on the future of BSE worldwide. Questions such as the sufficiency of current measures, a possible horizon aiming at the eradication of the disease, the evolution of the vCJD at a global scale, and the potential risk offered by new strains, will certainly require the best scientific advice in the years to come.

For more in-depth information on the subject, the Chair recommended the reading of the editorial published on the subject and available on EFSA's website.²

4.2 EFSA PERSPECTIVE ON 10 YEARS OF GENERAL FOOD LAW

A ten-year perspective of the EU Food Law and how EFSA has underpinned the EU decision-process in the areas of food and feed safety, animal health and welfare, nutrition and plant health was presented by Anne-Laure Gassin, Director of Communications. EFSA's guiding principles and key achievements over time were highlighted, with more than 2,500 scientific outputs published by 2012. Special reference was made to the shift in the nature of the work requested from EFSA, in particular on the area of the evaluation of regulated substances, and to future areas that will impact on EFSA's risk assessment work, such as new technologies and methodologies, EU's 2020 Strategy on innovation, changing demographics, changing climate and newly emerging risks.

² <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/e991.htm>

5 EFSA 10TH ANNIVERSARY – EVENTS IN MEMBER STATES

Following up from the previous presentation, Anne-Laure Gassin provided FPs with an overview of planned activities for the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the establishment of EFSA. The publishing of a press release, the setting up of an EFSA dedicated web-section³ and the production of promotion material (such as a logo/banner/tagline) are some of the activities already ongoing/foreseen. EFSA will also organise in November, in Parma, a main scientific conference, focusing on risk assessment, as well as a joint institutional event with DG-SANCO, to take stock and look ahead to the future of food safety in Europe, building on the outcome of the external evaluation of EFSA. Specific anniversary-related joint events are also being planned. To this purpose, positive responses were already received from Finland, Denmark, Ireland and Italy.

Action 1: FPs to promote EFSA's 10th anniversary by (1) linking their national WebPages with EFSA's dedicated webpage on the subject; (2) using the available promotion material, in particular the success stories (case studies) that illustrate EFSA's work over the past ten years; (3) promoting the organisation of national or other FP events, with a focus on the 10th anniversary of the General Food Law and of EFSA.

6 MAIN ISSUES FROM THE ADVISORY FORUM COMMUNICATIONS WORKING GROUP (AFCWG)

Anne-Laure Gassin informed FPs about issues under discussion at the level of the AFCWG. An update on the Schmallenberg virus, the development of risk communication guidelines and EFSA's 10th anniversary were topics under debate. Special reference was made to the setting up of a strategy for communicating in a coordinated and consistent way on *Campylobacter spp.*, so to increase public awareness to this public health problem.

FPs welcomed and supported the idea of a glossary on food safety terminology. This topic generated an animated discussion amongst FPs, which expressed the view that work done at national level on this subject could be looked into by EFSA when developing such glossary.

FPs also indicated that reports from EFSA are often too long and, from a communications perspective, could be supported by condensed summaries. The issue of translating important risk assessment documents was also raised by FPs. The Chair informed FPs that it is possible to use the budget from the Focal Point Agreements for the translation of these documents into national languages.

Action 2: AFSCO to bring back to EFSA management the comment on the size of EFSA's reports and assess what can be done to obtain shorter, condensed versions.

³ www.efsa.europa.eu/en/aboutefsa/10thanniversary.htm

7 EFSA's 10TH ANNIVERSARY – EVENTS IN MEMBER STATES

Torben Nilsson informed participants on the current state-of-play of the so-called “Special Joint Events”. These are high level events co-organised by MS and EFSA and aimed at celebrating the 10th anniversary of the General Food Law and of EFSA's establishment. So far, the following Special Joint Events already scheduled: in Copenhagen (on health claims), in Rome (on botanicals); and in Helsinki (on Plant Health). Additional ideas for Special Joint Events organised at MS level are most welcome by EFSA.

FPs were also invited to promote the 10th anniversary of the General Food Law and of EFSA's establishment via FP events organised at national level. These may have the participation of EFSA and fall under the framework of the so-called “National FP Events” (where the organisation is fully under the responsibility of FPs).

8 FOCAL POINT ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS 2008-2011

An overview of the main Focal Point activities and achievements covering the period of 2008-2011 was presented by Kerstin Gross-Helmert. Special emphasis was placed on the exchange of scientific information, on activities carried out in the context of Article 36 of EFSA's founding Regulation, on the promotion of EFSA's database of external scientific experts (EDB) and on raising the scientific visibility of EFSA and Focal Points. Evidence of the success in the implementation of this network was clearly demonstrated by the increase on the number of members/observers of the network (from 27 countries in 2008 up to 33 countries in 2012), and particularly by the almost two-fold increase on the number of requests for information sent to Focal Points over this period, showing the increased use and importance of the network and MS level.

9 FOCAL POINT PRIORITIES 2012

9.1 PRIORITIES

The Focal Point priorities for 2012 were presented by Sérgio Potier Rodeia. These can be summarized as (1) to continue the exchange of scientific information, in particular via the Information Exchange Platform (IEP); (2) to maintain the Article 36 List of Organisations “fit-for-purpose”, stimulate applications for Article 36 calls, and foster the networking of Article 36 organisations via the Article 36 IT tools; (3) to promote EFSA's EDB and further stimulate the use of the EDB search tool at national level; (4) to extend national networks in cooperation with the AFCWG member; (5) to maintain and develop further the Focal Point websites as a central communication tool on all areas falling within EFSA's remit; (6) to continue the organisation of national scientific events, considering in particular the 10th anniversary of the General Food Law and of EFSA; and (7) to actively promote training on risk assessment by liaising directly with the national Better Training for Safer Food (BTSF) contact point. Following a brief discussion, the proposed priorities were agreed by FPs and will be included into the briefing note on “matters arising” shared with AF members on the coming AF meeting, to occur on 7-8 March of 2012.

9.2 TRAINING IN FOOD SAFETY RISK ASSESSMENT THROUGH THE BTSF PROGRAMME

An update on the current status of training activities on food safety risk assessment was presented by Sérgio Potier Rodeia. The main framework for the provision of these training sessions is the EC BTSF Programme. Eleven training sessions, with a duration of 4 days each, on five different risk assessment subjects (microbiological risk assessment, chemical risk assessment in food, pest risk assessment, risk assessment in nutrition and risk assessment in genetically modified organisms) will be undertaken between September 2012 and March 2013. This first set of training sessions intends to cover a total of 285 participants currently involved in food safety risk assessment activities on public institutions/organisations from MS, Candidate Countries and EEA/EFTA Countries. Sérgio Potier Rodeia informed that BTSF welcomes the support from Focal Points to actively promote the training sessions. To this purpose, Focal Points were asked to actively liaise with the BTSF national contact points⁴ for further details. In addition, EFSA will share with Focal Points the information package to be provided by BTSF to their national contact points on this subject.

FPs felt not sufficiently informed regarding the profile of participants that could attend these training sessions (junior staff involved in food safety risk assessment at national level as opposed to more experienced staff that may become trainers at national level) and on the nature of the support that can be provided to the BTSF national contact points, in particular with regards to the selection of candidates. The Chair proposed to invite an EU BTSF coordinator for the next FP meeting in order to clarify these doubts.

Action 3: FPs to liaise directly with the BTSF national contact points for the promotion of training sessions on food safety risk assessment, as well as to support their implementation at national level.

Action 4: AFSCO to share with Focal Points the BTSF information package on training sessions in food safety risk assessment as soon as it becomes available.

Action 5: AFSCO to invite a EU BTSF coordinator for the next FP meeting in order to clarify questions on the support that can be given by Focal Points to the national BTSF contact points.

9.3 INFORMATION EXCHANGE PLATFORM

The key role played by FPs on the uploading of relevant documents onto the IEP, the most recent technical improvements introduced on the IEP tool, and a list of current groups of users having access to the IEP tool were issues presented covered by Bernhard Berger during his presentation. The Chair highlighted also that a new postcard has been produced to promote the IEP. It is intended to be used in conferences and other types of national events. Additional copies of this postcard can be requested to AFSCO (scientific.cooperation@efsa.europa.eu).

With regards to the collection of relevant scientific information at national level, FPs were asked to target, as far as possible, all risk assessment bodies in their own countries. On the other hand, to further disseminate information uploaded onto the IEP, FPs were

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/food/training_strategy/participants/national_contact_points.pdf

asked to continue the regular distribution of the monthly IEP reports and, if possible, to expand the respective list of recipients. During the discussion of the presentation, FPs asked to receive a complete list of IEP users before they could take action in order to expand it. AFSCO will investigate the feasibility of obtaining and sharing such information.

FPs expressed the wish that some selected – particularly relevant - documents uploaded onto the IEP are translated into English. The Chair clarified that FPs may upload a summary of risk assessments translated into English and that the respective translation costs could be covered by funds origination from the FP Agreements.

Action 6: FPs to target, as far as possible, all risk assessment bodies, when collecting information on risk assessment activities at national level to be uploaded onto the IEP.

Action 7: FPs to continue the regular distribution of IEP monthly reports and, if possible, to expand the respective list of addressees.

Action 8: AFSCO to assess the possibility to obtain a complete list of IEP users per country in order to share it with FPs.

9.4 EXPERT DATABASE (EDB)

The current stat-of-play of EFSA's database of external scientific experts was presented by Sérgio Potier Rodeia. A total of 3,662 applications have so far been submitted to the database, and 3,062 experts have been included. Candidate countries and potential candidate countries are becoming increasingly better represented in the EDB. Efforts should however continue to be made to promote the EDB in these countries. The results of a user-survey carried out by end of 2011 amongst external users of the EDB were also shared with FPs. The survey revealed that the number of experts included in the EDB should continue to grow. FPs were invited to continue promoting the EDB so to increase the overall number of experts, especially on those areas where sought expertise is currently not always found. Despite the fact that all respondent users considered the EDB tool to be user-friendly, there is still space for improvement, in particular with regards to the speed by which the tool delivers query results. The survey showed that not all MS make use of the EDB. FPs were therefore invited to further promote its use.

Action 9: FPs to continue promoting the EDB in order to increase the number of included experts, especially on areas where sought expertise is currently not always found.

Action 10: FPs to continue promoting the use of the EDB search tool.

10 RELEVANT ISSUES FROM THE ADVISORY FORUM MEETING

Torben Nilsson presented the key points arising from the 42nd Advisory Forum meeting, occurred on 30th November - 1st December 2011. Discussions were held on the medium term planning process, the national perspectives for data collection in food safety, hazard databases, EFSA's emerging risks exchange network and cooperation in the BIOHAZ

area. Other topics discussed were the 10th anniversary of the General Food Law and of the establishment of EFSA, impact indicators, and an update on Bisphenol-A. Special reference was also made to the recent launch of the call for expression of interest for National Experts in Professional Training (NEPT) at EFSA⁵. This call aims to foster the exchange of professional experience in, and knowledge of, food safety risk assessment, contributing to the development of human capital at European level. More information on this AF meeting is available on EFSA's website⁶.

11 SUBJECT(S) RAISED BY FOCAL POINTS

TDS Exposure (FRANCE)

Philippe Prigent, from France, presented the EU Research project concerning Total Diet Studies (TDS) harmonization and methodological improvement. The project aims to identify typical diets of different population groups in Europe, assess dietary exposure to chemical contaminants amongst different population groups, harmonize data collection on TDS at European level, and set up a European database with TDS data to be shared with risk assessors and risk managers.

Philippe Prigent concluded his presentation announcing that this was his last Focal Point meeting, as he will be leaving the French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety, ANSES. The Chair thanked Philippe Prigent for his excellent contribution to the work of the Focal Point Network and wished him all the best for future personal and professional challenges ahead.

⁵ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/vacancies/vacancy/nept120216.htm>

⁶ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/events/event/111130-m.pdf>

12 AOB

Procedures of kick-off meetings for grants and procurement (FRANCE)

Philippe Prigent briefed participants on an issue found with the current procedures for counting the time allocated to a project, following the signature of an agreement/contract under the grants/procurement schemes. As explained, currently the counting of the time allocated to a project starts with the signature of the agreement/contract. However, following the signature of an agreement/contract, time is necessary to set up and prepare adequately the team that will implement the project, and therefore for the team to have the respective kick-off meeting. It was therefore proposed that the counting of the time for the implementation of a project could occur only after the kick-off meeting (and not when the agreement/contract is signed), and that at least one month (after the signature of the agreement/contract) is given for the kick-off meeting to take place. This concern was shared by other FPs. The Chair informed FPs that such a modification of the procedures requires previous consultation with EFSA's Finances Team.

Action 11: AFSCO to consult EFSA Finances Team in order to assess the feasibility of allowing the counting of the time for the implementation of a project to be the date of kick-off meeting; and that such meeting may occur at least one month after the signature of the agreement/contract made under the grants/procurement schemes.

Email requests for information (EFSA)

The Chair informed FPs that, in general, requests for information distributed through the Focal Point network should be related to risk assessment in food and feed safety and not related to risk management (e.g. questions related to inspections, controls and legislation should be avoided). In case of doubts when sending out requests, FPs can always contact AFSCO and raise the question on whether the subject is of relevance to be disseminated via the Focal Point network. The Chair reminded FPs to copy the Scientific Cooperation mailbox when sending out requests for information to the Focal Point Network.

Action 12: FPs to copy the Scientific Cooperation mailbox (Scientific.Cooperation.@efsa.europa.eu) when sending requests for information to the Focal Point Network.

Future FP Meetings

The proposed dates for the forthcoming 2012 Focal Point meetings are:

- 14th FP meeting: 5-6 June 2012, Bern, Switzerland;
- 15th FP meeting: 9-10 October 2012, Parma, Italy.

Torben Nilsson invited FPs to suggest topics for discussion on the joint meeting that will occur with the AFCWG members back-to-back with the 15th FP meeting in October 2012.

FPs were reminded not to make any travel arrangements until receiving the formal invitation from EFSA. FPs were also reminded that they should have an approved ADoI before registering for a meeting.

13 CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

The Chair closed the meeting. He thanked again Roland Grossgut and Johann Steinwider for hosting the meeting in Vienna and for the very good support provided in the organisation of this event. He also thanked the participants for their attendance and their active contributions in the various discussions. Finally he reiterated that it was a true pleasure for him to have chaired all Focal Point meetings held so far and wished a continued fruitful and consolidated collaboration between EFSA and the Focal Point network. Kerstin Gross-Helmert thanked Bernhard Berger for his important contribution in the establishment of the Focal Point network and for his commitment to the FPs throughout the years. Finally, Roland Grossgut expressed also his gratitude to Bernhard Berger for his work with the Focal Points.

SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS

Reference	Who	What
Action 1	FPs	Promote EFSA's 10th anniversary by (1) linking their national WebPages with EFSA's dedicated webpage on the subject; (2) using the dedicated promotion material (3) promoting the organisation of national or other FP events, with a focus on the 10 th anniversary of the General Food Law and of EFSA
Action 2	AFSCO	To bring back to EFSA management the comment on the size of EFSA's reports and assess what can be done to obtain shorter, condensed versions
Action 3	FPs	To liaise directly with the BTSF national contact points for the promotion of training sessions on food safety risk assessment, as well as to support their implementation at national level
Action 4	AFSCO	To share with Focal Points the BTSF information package on training sessions in food safety risk assessment as soon as it becomes available
Action 5	AFSCO	To invite a EU BTSF coordinator for the next FP meeting in order to clarify questions on the support that can be given by Focal Points to the national BTSF contact points
Action 6	FPs	To target, as far as possible, all risk assessment bodies, when collecting information on risk assessment activities at national level to be uploaded onto the IEP
Action 7	FPs	To continue the regular distribution of IEP monthly reports and, if possible, to expand the respective list of addressees
Action 8	AFSCO	To assess the possibility to obtain a complete list of IEP users per country in order to share it with FPs
Action 9	FPs	To continue promoting the EDB in order to increase the number of included experts, especially on areas where sought expertise is currently not always found

Reference	Who	What
Action 10	FPs	FPs to continue promoting the use of the EDB search tool amongst their network of organisations
Action 11	AFSCO	To consult EFSA Finances Team in order to assess the feasibility of allowing the counting of the time for the implementation of a project to be the date of the kick –off meeting; and that such meeting may occur at least one month after the signature of the agreement/contract made under the grants/procurement schemes
Action 12	FPs	To copy the Scientific Cooperation mailbox (Scientific.Cooperation.@efsa.europa.eu) when sending requests for information to the Focal Point Network