

---

**COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTORATE**

**18<sup>th</sup> PLENARY MEETING OF THE  
EFSA ADVISORY GROUP ON RISK COMMUNICATIONS (AGRC)**

**Meeting date:** 18 March 2013

**Venue:** EFSA (Via Carlo Magno, 1A – 43121 Parma, Italy)

**MINUTES**

**Members of the Advisory Group on Risk Communications**

**Chair:** Anne-Laure Gassin, Director of Communications (ALG)  
(in lieu of Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, Executive Director, who could attend meeting only in part).

**Present:** Prof. Claude Fischler, CNRS Paris (CF)  
Prof. George Gaskell, London School of Economics (GG)  
Prof. Ortwin Renn, University of Stuttgart (OR)

European Food Safety Authority:

Per Bergman, Director of Scientific Evaluation of Regulated Products (PB)  
Lucia de Luca, Stakeholder Relations (LdL)  
Laura Smillie, Senior Communications Adviser (LS)  
Dimitrios Spyropoulos, SCISTRAT Planning & Monitoring (DS)  
Bernhard Url, Director of Risk Assessment and Scientific Assistance (BU)  
Stijn Van de Vyver, CHAN Unit (SVV)  
Victoria Villamar, Assistant to the Executive Director (VV)

**Apologies:** Prof. Massimiano Bucchi, Università di Trento (MB)  
Prof. Ragnar Löfstedt, King's College London (RL)  
Hubert Deluyker, Director of Scientific Cooperation and Assistance (HD)  
Dirk Detken, Head of Unit LRA (DD)  
Kirsten Haupt, Head of EDIT Unit (LS)  
Arthur Healy, EXO Unit (AH)  
Alberto Spagnolli, Head of EXO Unit (AS)

---

**COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTORATE****1. Welcome and introduction**

In the absence of EFSA's Executive Director - Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle - who would join the group in the afternoon, EFSA's Director of Communications, Anne-Laure Gassin welcomed members to Parma. The group was informed that apologies had been received from Professors Massimiano Bucchi and Ragnar Löftstedt.

**2. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda was adopted without amendments or additions.

**3. Declarations of interest**

ALG confirmed that all Annual DOIs had been received. There were no SDIs relevant to the agenda of this meeting.

**4. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising**

ALG explained that the minutes of the last meeting had been sent to the members of the AGRC for their approval by written procedure by Tuesday 2 April ahead of being published on EFSA's website.

**5. Update on EFSA's activities (ALG)**

ALG provided an overview of recent and current EFSA activities; particular reference was made to initiatives proposed in the areas of stakeholder engagement, transparency and possible developments in the organisation of how EFSA carries out its scientific work (ie greater involvement of EFSA scientific staff).

It was explained that following on from the consultation with EFSA's stakeholders in relation to its Policy on Independence and Scientific Decision-Making Processes in 2011 and its subsequent Implementing Rules in 2012, in the course of 2013, EFSA will be seeking to increase stakeholder engagement. In order to continue its dialogue, ALG informed the group that EFSA had held a meeting in January with the NGOs that had submitted in late 2012 a document entitled [5 Demands for change at EFSA](#).

ALG explained that in follow-up to recommendations from EFSA's External Evaluation carried out in 2012, in January EFSA launched a transparency initiative aiming at facilitating access to data and enhance transparency of EFSA's work. The programme, to be developed in cooperation with the Authority's partners and stakeholders, will consider how best and to what extent technical data used in risk assessments can be made available to the broader scientific community and interested parties.

ALG provided an overview of discussions held at the recent Management Board meeting. She highlighted the presentation of EFSA's draft Multiannual Plan 2014-2016 which identified three key priority areas: ensuring EFSA is fit for purpose; optimising the use of

---

**COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTORATE**

resources; and building more transparency and trust. ALG noted that EFSA is proposing to redistribute some of its scientific work between external experts and internal staff from 2014 in the area of regulated products (GMOs, food ingredients and packaging, feed additives and health claims) by providing further support to Panels in relation to some routine preparatory work currently being carried out by Panel Working Groups.

ALG informed that recent scientific topics of interest included: conclusions on neonicotinoids; the opinion on the human health risks of endocrine disruptors; the public consultation and re-evaluation of aspartame; long-term feeding trials; and EFSA's joint mandate with the European Medicines Agency regarding phenylbutazone residues in horsemeat.

**6. Renewal of the Advisory Group on Risk Communication (ALG)**

ALG informed the group that the mandate of the current AGRC will expire in May 2013. ALG explained that requests for membership would be launched shortly. ALG noted that the Terms of Reference would be slightly revised to ensure that all areas of social science relevant to EFSA's work are covered, including the need to enhance expertise in the area of stakeholder relations. ALG explained that the new group would likely be in place by summer 2013. She invited current members to express their interest in contributing to the work of the AGRC.

**7. Review of EFSA's Communication Strategy (ALG)**

ALG shared a presentation highlighting timings for the finalisation of the Communications Strategy 2014-2016 explaining that the aim is to have final adoption by EFSA's Management Board by end 2013. ALG explained that key considerations for the new strategy would include outcomes of the External Evaluation as well as feedback from the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications (AFWGC and EFSA's Stakeholder Consultative Platform. As part of the strategy review the Terms of Reference of the AFWGC will also be examined, particularly focussing on: strengthened role in coordinating communications messages; continued update of Risk Communication Guidelines; development of a glossary of "consumer-friendly" definitions of commonly used risk assessment/scientific terms; development of best practices specifically in the area of social media; improved training programme for Member States; strengthening of internal communications.

In the context of the Risk Communication Guidelines, GG suggested that short vignettes/scenarios could be added to the "Learning from experience" section to put the science into context. GG suggested that adopting a story-telling approach would make EFSA's communications more accessible. OR noted that given the complexity of science a story-telling approach may not always be appropriate. He noted that the approach would work well when needing to explain EFSA's working processes.

With regards to social media, CF questioned why EFSA does not have a Facebook page. LS explained that as EFSA cannot provide complete answers to concerned consumers unlike

---

**COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTORATE**

risk managers and given the nature of this media, where the expectation is to constantly be engaging, given the resources required, EFSA has not prioritised this communications tool. LS pointed out that EFSA is active on Twitter and uses the application to drive traffic back to the EFSA website. SVV further noted that there is a lot of content on EFSA's website (e.g. Understanding Science videos) which is already easily shared. He noted that since the launch of the videos in January 2012 there have been over 60,000 views. ALG noted that there has also been positive feedback on the videos from MEPs and that EFSA would be seeking to enhance its level of Twitter activity and engagement (through "following" and retweeting messages for instance of other agencies, public bodies and stakeholders involved in EFSA's areas of work).

**8. Communicating on independence: building understanding and engaging with stakeholders (LS)**

LS shared a presentation providing an overview of some of the key independence issues which generated media coverage in 2012. LS noted that the main criticisms related to independence had been received from Pan-European, French and German media.

LS explained that EFSA is currently reviewing its approach to external relations taking into account external developments, results from our activities and external advice.

**9. Stakeholder involvement in framing of EFSA mandates (OR)**

OR shared a presentation on the SAFE FOODS framework providing details of the research project, focussing on recommendations regarding stakeholder involvement in the framing of risk assessment mandates. OR explained that the SAFE FOODS model builds on the three-component risk analysis model developed by the FAO and WHO. It evolves this classical model into a five-stage process involving framing, risk/benefit assessment, evaluation, risk management, and review. OR highlighted that the main objectives of the SAFE FOODS framework are to: take benefits into account whenever possible and explore ways of balancing risks and benefits; broaden the aspects of risk to consider ethical, economic, social and environmental impacts; and formalise stakeholder involvement.

OR explained that the model foresees the establishment of a screening board ("interface working group") at the assessment stage with three representatives each from EFSA and the European Commission and one representative from an environmental NGO, industry and a consumer group. OR noted the importance of increased stakeholder involvement for issues of high public concern. He added that defining and exploring the boundaries of a specific mandate at the assessment stage allows for public concerns to be predicted and identified. It also allows for non-food safety issues to be acknowledged by EFSA and addressed by the parties concerned. GG questioned whether it would be problematic for mandates to be framed with non-food safety issues. OR explained that it is legitimate so long as they do not dominate the science. BU suggested that it would be better to anticipate the evaluation to the pre-framing phase before the mandate is formulated. OR explained that the assessment phase brings to light issues which might not be immediately

---

**COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTORATE**

evident. CGL thanked OR for sharing this approach and suggested EFSA test the concept of framing mandates with the involvement of stakeholders.

**Closure of the meeting**

ALG explained that following the renewal of the AGRC mandate the next meeting is scheduled for Monday 14 October. The group was thanked for their valuable contribution and the meeting was closed.