

ADVISORY FORUM AND SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION UNIT

Parma, 29 November, 2013
EFSA/AF/M/2013/487/PUB/FINAL

Minutes

**FORTY NINTH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY FORUM
VILNIUS, LITHUANIA, 25-26 SEPTEMBER 2013**

MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

Chair: *Bernhard Url*, Deputising Executive Director, EFSA

Austria	<i>Klemens Fuchs</i>	Latvia	<i>Aija Melngaile</i>
Belgium	<i>Benoît Horion</i>	Lithuania	<i>Zenonas Stanevicius</i>
Bulgaria	<i>Boiko Likov</i>	Luxembourg	<i>Patrick Hau</i>
Croatia	<i>Andrea Gross-Boskovic</i>	Malta	<i>Ingrid Busuttil</i>
Cyprus	<i>Popi Kanari</i>	Netherlands	<i>Antoon Opperhuizen</i>
Czech Republic	<i>Jitka Götzová</i>	Norway	<i>Lars E. Hanssen</i>
Denmark	<i>Jørgen Schlundt</i>	Poland	<i>Jacek Postupolski</i>
Estonia	<i>Piret Priisalu</i>	Romania	<i>Liviu Rusu</i>
Finland	<i>Kirsti Savela</i>	Slovak Republic	<i>Petra Gerekova</i>
France	<i>Rozenn Saunier</i>	Slovenia	<i>Ada Hočevar Grom</i>
Germany	<i>Andreas Hensel</i>	Spain	<i>Ana Canals Caballero</i>
Greece	<i>Eirini Tsigarida</i>	Sweden	<i>Leif Busk</i>
Hungary	<i>Maria Szeitzné Szabó</i>	United Kingdom	<i>Alisdair Wotherspoon</i>
Iceland	<i>Jón Gíslason</i>		
Ireland	<i>Raymond Ellard</i>		
Italy	<i>Giancarlo Belluzzi</i>		

OBSERVERS

FYR of Macedonia	<i>Svetlana Tomeska Mickova</i>	Switzerland	<i>Michael Beer</i>
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Montenegro	<i>Nedeljko Latinovic</i>	European Commission	<i>Jeannie Vergnettes</i>
Serbia	<i>Vera Katić</i>		

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

Advisory Forum secretariat: *Jeffrey Moon, Saadia Noorani, Elena Zeraschi and Elda Franchi*

<i>Per Bergman</i>	<i>Dirk Detken*</i>
<i>Stef Bronzwaer</i>	<i>Djien Liem*</i>
<i>Hubert Deluyker</i>	<i>Pia Makela*</i>
<i>Anne-Laure Gassin</i>	<i>Luisa Ramos Bordajandi*</i>
<i>Marta Hugas</i>	<i>Tobin Robinson*</i>
<i>Juliane Kleiner</i>	<i>Alessia Vecchio*</i>
<i>Gritta Schrader (Vice Chair of the Plant Health Panel)</i>	<i>Christine Vleminckx (Vice Chair of the acrylamide working group)</i>
<i>Giuseppe Stancanelli</i>	

(*=*by telephone*)

1 WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

Bernhard Url opened the meeting and passed the floor to Dr Millius, the Director of State Food and Veterinary Service, Lithuania.

Dr Millius welcomed members to Vilnius and made a short introduction on the value placed on the work of EFSA and its outputs by Lithuania and the main priority work areas for the country.

Bernhard Url welcomed the new AF member for Croatia, Andrea Gross-Boskovic, and noted apologies from Turkey and Portugal. Welcome was also given to Gritta Schrader, Vice Chair of the Plant Health Panel who was in attendance.

Bernhard Url informed the members that following the recent resignation of Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, EFSA's Executive Director, he would be acting as chair for the meeting.

2 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The Agenda was adopted with additional items from France, Sweden, Bulgaria and Germany to be included under Any Other Business (Item 7).

3 MATTERS ARISING

Members received a list of action points arising from the last meeting of the Advisory Forum with the current status.

No additional matters were raised for discussion.

4 PRESENTATION BY CROATIA ON FOOD SAFETY AND ACCESSION TO THE EU

Andrea Gross-Boskovic, the newly appointed Advisory Forum member for Croatia, presented an overview of the main activities of the Croatian Food Agency (HAH).

5 STRATEGIC DISCUSSION ON EFSA'S WORK WITH MEMBER STATES

5.1 Focal Point Review

Stef Bronzwaer presented information on the review being carried out on the Focal Point Network, focusing on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis that was completed by an EFSA Task Force.

Spain noted that the work carried out by the focal points is in excess of the financial support they are provided with. Italy, France Cyprus and Sweden supported Spain in this view.

Italy commented that the focal point network was a vital tool in cooperation between EFSA and the Member States. Sweden proposed that the focal points could have a greater role in coordination and support of the national scientific network members. France noted that the focal point network was a very efficient network system in Europe. Cyprus highlighted that focal points needed further support and commented that more drive from the AF members was needed in linking Article 36 organisations together. Germany highlighted the role of the focal points in avoiding duplication of work and exchanging information as the main objectives and Finland outlined the good practice of the focal point working with the AF member, the Advisory Forum Communication Working Group member and the scientific network members.

Lithuania supported the view of the importance of the focal point network and the need for it to be strengthened and continued. Denmark supported the continuation of the network.

Denmark and France noted some of the difficulties in using cooperation tools such as the Information Exchange Platform (IEP) and Germany suggested that a 'blog' type of communication tool may be more useful for sharing information between members on upcoming works, noting that such a tool could be useful in helping to avoid duplication of work. Anne-Laure Gassin informed members that the Communication Unit was currently looking into new tools to facilitate communication

Stef Bronzwaer noted the comments made and confirmed that the financial contribution by EFSA aims to support the Member States in their tasks, and that it never was intended to cover fully the costs of the FP. He further stated that a 'focal point' was not necessarily a single person, but could be a team or organisation, and that their role could be extended to improve national networking further. He indicated that the current framework for financial provision needed to be considered further to ensure a continuing legal basis for the agreements and explained that the financial allocation was proportionate to country/population size.

Bernhard Url concluded that there was a very positive history of work with the focal points and there was a need to continue, with possibility of extending the activities of the focal points to provide additional coordination at national level with more needing to be done in the areas of avoiding duplication of work and improving the technical support tools.

(Action1: Review tasks and framework of the FP network in on-going Scientific Cooperation Review.)

5.2 Scientific Cooperation Review and Work Programme 2014

Juliane Kleiner outlined the discussions so far from the AF Discussion Group on Scientific Cooperation on the continuing development of Scientific Cooperation between EFSA and the MS, with the focus being on sharing of information and data and developing risk assessment capacity and the outline of proposals for leading scientific centres ('networks of excellence') to provide scientific support to EFSA through outsourcing. Bernhard Url highlighted the importance of considering new ways to build risk assessment capacity.

Spain, a member of the Discussion Group, noted that the idea of 'centres of excellence' were not well defined and further detail was needed for the AF members to discuss. Spain also noted that training could be targeted more specifically on practical issues, like the need for better understanding of the FoodEx 2 data system.

Italy raised the question of whether 'centres of excellence' would be limited to Article 36 organisations and supported the exchange of staff as a capacity building measure.

The European Commission suggested the Discussion Group elaborate on what the experience of other Agencies has been in the area of cooperation with the Member States.

Germany welcomed the development of 'centres' for outsourcing and noted the importance of sharing information and access to data and possibility for publication of data. The Netherlands, Finland and Italy also supported outsourcing in this way with Sweden, Belgium and Bulgaria noting the need for further development of the concept.

Hubert Deluyker suggested that a framework contract would be the way to achieve such outsourcing and highlighted the need to think of training possibilities outside of formal programmes.

Juliane Kleiner reiterated that outsourcing via centres or networks of excellence would rely on best science as a key requisite and it would be seen as a long term partnership with high quality providers. The criteria would need to be developed further for full discussion.

Bernhard Url concluded that real needs must be considered along with the legal framework that EFSA works within but with a view to make best use of EU resources and noted the Discussion Group would prepare a paper for further discussion at the December meeting.

5.3 International Scientific Cooperation

Djien Liem presented an overview of EFSA's developing role in cooperation with EU Agencies, international organisations and third countries. Germany, Denmark and France followed with presentations from a national perspective.

Italy welcomed the presentations and noted the need for discussions on cooperation at a scientific and political level. The Netherlands welcomed the discussion which showed the complexity of the issue and the different roles for Member States and EFSA, noting the role EFSA can play on exporting methodologies.

Sweden and Ireland noted the issue was complicated and clarity was needed on the philosophy of outreach to differentiate activities of diplomacy and science.

Bernhard Url agreed there was need to be clear on what EFSA's role is on the international arena and what mutual support can be achieved with the Member States in order to export European best practices.

(Action 2: Investigate further MS activities in International Cooperation and come back to members at a future meeting.)

5.4 Access to documents

Dirk Detken presented an overview of the requirements relating to access to documents requests received by EFSA and the implications for members who also share information with EFSA on relevant topics.

Germany raised the question of ownership of information and data and how this is managed when requests for information are made. Dirk replied that ownership is not the issue, but rather the rights of citizens to access information held, but with respect to commercial sensitivity and the right not to disclose information if it 'undermines the decision making process' as far as until the decision in question has been made.

Bernhard Url concluded with a proposal to establish a simple procedure to allow members documents and presentations to be shared in the event of requests for access to documents.

(Action 3: Develop text for agreement on sharing of AF documents and presentations to assist in 'access to documents' requests.)

5.5 Cooperation in the area of Plant Health (including reporting of EFSA's Scientific Network for Risk Assessment in Plant Health)

Giuseppe Stancanelli and Gritta Schrader presented the current activities of the plant Health Unit, Network and the Panel detailing current and forthcoming activities.

The Netherlands raised an issue relating to the likely increase in workload due to the new phytosanitary regulations, questioning whether this impact had been considered by the network and panel. Gritta Schrader informed members that there had been discussions on the new proposed control regime and that at national level there needed to be support from EPPO and EFSA. Giuseppe Stancanelli noted the move from pest risk assessment to commodity risk assessment required cooperation with other organisations not only at MS and EU level, but also internationally. Cyprus noted the work of the FAO in this area. Giuseppe Stancanelli clarified that the FAO produce standards, but do not conduct risk assessment.

Germany questioned how the risk assessment of EFSA interfaced with other plant health organisations.

Spain noted the difficulty in the country with getting feedback from the network due to plant health being a more agricultural matter.

Bernhard Url concluded that there was need to consider further EFSA's role in risk assessment methodology relating to the new plant health control regime.

(Action 4: EFSA to consider role in risk assessment methodology relating to new plant health import control regime.)

5.6 Feedback on the Scientific Committee Away Day

Juliane Kleiner outlined work programme prioritisation of the Scientific Committee, detailing the proposed guidance development.

Germany questioned who the target recipients were for the guidance and how EFSA will develop them with Member States and Internationally. Juliane Kleiner indicated that the development included consideration of the international context and public consultation, which also takes into account MS perspective and input. Denmark highlighted the need to involve third countries when developing standards which would help to gain their acceptance internationally.

Bernhard Url agreed the need to consider the intermediate step to developing global standards by developing within Europe and the European Agencies.

France questioned why combined exposure was given a low priority. Juliane Kleiner explained that the approach was to wait for the first work being done in the pesticide area to better inform development of guidance.

5.7 Update on Acrylamide

Luisa Ramos Bordajandi and Christine Vleminckx (Vice Chair of the working group) presented the ongoing work on acrylamide outlining the progress and timelines, indicating the public consultation on the draft opinion expected by July 2014 and the final Opinion to be published in 2015.

Sweden raised the issue of the revised European Commission indicative values of acrylamide in food and whether the work of the CONTAM Panel was to consider the impact of these.

Luisa Ramos Bordajandi stated that the question posed was to carry out a risk assessment and not to consider the indicative values, which are not legal limits and do not require enforcement action if exceeded. Sweden proposed that EFSA should include this consideration in the work. Bernhard Url indicated that this possibility will be considered.

Denmark reiterated the concern that the timeline for completing the request made by four members of the forum in writing to EFSA was too long. Norway supported Denmark in this view. Bernhard Url welcomed the approach taken by the members in writing to

EFSA, but explained that the request for a full risk assessment was from the Commission mandate. The European Commission noted the comments from members for future consideration.

The Netherlands advised that they have been requested by their government to provide a national risk assessment on acrylamide before June 2014, which would be before the timeframe for publishing the EFSA opinion.

Bernhard Url agreed the need for close liaison with The Netherlands and to keep the members of the Advisory Forum informed on progress.

(Action 5: EFSA to consider anticipating timeline for the first draft Opinion on acrylamide in Food and liaise with NL on their work planned regarding acrylamide.)

EFSA to also consider the possibility whether the evaluation of the impact of Commission's indicative values could be included in the opinion on acrylamide in food.

Action 6: EFSA to consider issues relating to 'framing of the question' and communications when receiving requests for risk assessments from MS.)

5.8 Experience on Risk Assessment of Energy Drinks in Lithuania

Lithuania informed members of the work being carried out on energy drink consumption in Lithuania detailing the measures being considered at national level.

France questioned how the stated effects of consumption were monitored. Lithuania replied indicating the role of GPs and public health colleagues in collecting information, but noted there was no agreed methodology for gathering the information.

Spain asked whether EFSA was conducting work on taurine/caffeine mix or combinations with alcohol. Tobin Robinson, by telephone, advised that the Opinion on caffeine is still progressing and no work on combined effects is being undertaken. Juliane Kleiner indicated that the panel may address the interaction of caffeine with other substances under the current mandate, which is very broad.

5.9 Networks Review Update

Jeffrey Moon provided an update on the implementations of the recommendations of the 'self review' carried out on EFSA's scientific networks outlining the programme of feedback from the networks to the Advisory Forum.

Members welcomed being kept informed of the activities of the networks and supported a proposal for developing guidance for representatives attending network meetings.

Per Bergman introduced a revised proposal for establishing a network in the area of Food Ingredients and Packaging (FIP). Per outlined the changes in the proposal since it was originally discussed with members and asked members to agree the revised terms of reference.

Bernhard Url noted the agreement of the terms of reference for a FIP network and concluded that guidance for representatives would be developed in conjunction with the members.

(Action 7: Mandate for establishing a FIP network to be finalised and AF members to provide nominations

Action 8: EFSA to consider developing guidance for new members of networks.)

6 OTHER MATTERS RAISED BY EFSA AND MEMBER STATES

6.1 Experience of ‘Nutrivigilance’ programme

France detailed the 2012 annual report on the national nutrivigilance programme.

Members of the forum welcomed the information. The Netherlands asked in relation to registered effect on blood pressure and hip fracture whether medications consumed were recorded since this could be a confounding factor. France indicated this was not assessed, but may have been noted.

Juliane Kleiner asked how the information was evaluated. France clarified that a dedicated committee evaluated the information. Germany questioned if France was planning to develop a database to record cases. France confirmed that they do have a database/website however the site is not open to the public. France offered to provide/extract data for Member States on request.

Hubert Deluyker questioned whether the pharmacovigilance database was used. France indicated that there was a portal on the Anses web site, but was not sure if it was linked to the pharmacovigilance database.

France proposed that a group of interested members could be established to further consider the use of such a system. The Netherlands, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Italy, Croatia, UK and Greece supported the proposal, with further members likely to support the activity after further thought.

Bernhard Url proposed that EFSA could support the group by assisting in developing terms of reference and organising a meeting.

(Action 9: France/EFSA to develop Terms of Reference for group on nutrivigilance and arrange meeting for interested members.)

6.2 Hepatitis A in several MS

Italy presented details of the current Hepatitis A outbreak affecting a number of countries in recent months from a national perspective.

Denmark informed members they were unable to identify the strain in Danish Cases and had asked Italy for information on the methodology they had used to detect the strain in Italian cases.

Poland, Denmark and Ireland supported the presentation with additional information indicating the difficulty of traceability of likely affected products in their own investigations.

6.3 Role of EFSA in foodborne disease outbreak investigation

Marta Hugas and Pia Makela provided information on how EFSA can support, primarily through data collection, such investigations.

Denmark commented that there should be more emphasis on sporadic cases, those who report low number of outbreaks. Marta highlighted that the current surveillance systems were built to detect outbreaks not sporadic cases.

Germany asked whether EFSA had an overview of all the available tools for data collection and traceability and what the long term proposals were from EFSA. Marta Hugas indicated that with a mandate there was a need to take stock of available tools and resources at EU and national level and establish methodology and improve crises preparedness, noting there was a need to continue discussions with members in the future.

Bernhard Url noted EFSA's involvement in training and internal preparedness for responding to incidents and the need for further planning in this area.

(Action 10: Consider further EFSA's role in international foodborne outbreak investigations and training opportunities and come back to the Advisory Forum on this subject.)

6.4 Communicating science - the BfR risk profile

Germany presented details of the developments on communicating risk assessments using 'risk profiling'.

The Netherlands and Finland indicated a willingness to collaborate on the approach being taken and suggested the issue to be discussed at the next AF meeting.

Anne-Laure Gassin noted the importance of this approach indicating how it could input into the risk communications guidelines being developed and proposed it would be useful to have further discussions both with the AF and also the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications, possible at a joint meeting.

Bernhard Url agreed this would be a good way to progress.

(Action 11: Organise a joint session of AF and AFCWG, December. Topics related to risk communication to be included on the agenda.)

6.5 Pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PA) in herbal teas and teas - Results of a BfR research project

Germany presented details of studies on the levels of PA in tea, outlining their findings.

France asked whether the levels were dependent on the quality/price of the tea, with Luxembourg asking about the origin of the tea. Germany advised that there seemed to be no correlation between price and origin and there was variation in levels between brands and between batches of the same brand. The Netherlands noted issues relating to harvest practices.

Spain asked whether the consumption data used was national data. Germany advised that it was and there would need to be separate exposure calculations done for each country.

Bernhard Url noted that there was a current project funded by EFSA for collection of occurrence data of prevalence of PA in food due for completion by the end of 2015.

6.6 Proposals for staff exchange between EFSA and Member State institutions

Alessia Vecchio presented proposals for short term staff exchange ('guest scientists') between EFSA and MS to support the existing arrangements for seconded national experts (SNE) and national experts in professional training (NEPT).

Spain asked for clarification on the expenses and compensation for experts involved. France questioned the availability of accommodation availability in Parma for such short term exchanges. Alessia clarified the financial framework and indicated the short term let possibilities were being explored.

Germany requested details on what kind of projects would be appropriate. Bernhard Url stated that projects linked to EFSA's tasks would be appropriate, citing risk assessment methodology and data collection methodology as examples and stating that prioritisation may be appropriate depending on what proposals were put forward.

Spain welcomed the flexibility offered and suggested that an exchange on developing FoodEx 2 would be advantageous. Sweden supported this proposal and welcomed the possibility of further exploration of financial support and or logistical support (e.g. housing) for such activities. Bulgaria noted welcomed the proposals and hoped the new arrangement would provide greater opportunities for experts.

Bernhard Url noted the comments and agreed the proposals should be developed further for commencement in 2014.

(Action 12 : Work out EFSA's proposal for short term staff exchanges between Member States and EFSA for December (consider pilot with Spain on the FoodEx 2).)

6.7 AF Strategic Topic Planning 2014

Jeffrey Moon presented the proposed dates for the AF meetings in 2014.

Bernhard Url requested members to provide further proposals for detailed discussions to be agreed at the December meeting and noted proposals from Germany and Denmark relating to endocrine disruptor, developing toxicology (Tox 21) and better use of information from the Rapid Alert system for epidemiological exchange and exposure assessment.

Italy confirmed the proposed date for the meeting during the Italian Presidency and indicated an additional day Scientific/Technical meeting would be planned following the meeting which would be open to members to attend.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

7.1 Sheep Pox in Bulgaria

Bulgaria informed members of the details of a current outbreak of sheep pox in the country identified through surveillance programmes.

7.2 Avian Influenza in Italy

Italy informed members of the details of 6 outbreaks of avian influenza in the country which had been resolved this week.

7.3 Organisational Changes within EFSA

Bernhard Url informed members of changes within the Risk Assessment and Scientific Assistance and the Science Strategy and Coordination Directorates.

7.4 Conference on Chemical Mixtures

France announced the International Conference on Chemical Mixtures organised in collaboration with the DTU and BfR to take place on 10-11 December, 2013

7.5 EFSA Colloquium

Juliane Kleiner provided a reminder on the Colloquium on Biodiversity as Protection Goal in Environmental Risk Assessment for EU agro-ecosystem to take place on 27th-28th November.

8. CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

Bernhard Url thanked the Lithuanian AF member for hosting and supporting the meeting and the AF members and observers for their active contributions. Bernhard also thanked the AF Secretariat and EFSA staff in attendance and those who contributed from Parma for their support.