European Food Safety Authority

IT Unit   Brussels, 04 June 2004

NOTE ON BUILDING IT LINKS BETWEEN EFSA AND MEMBER STATES NATIONAL AGENCIES

In September 2003, the Advisory Forum established the Information Technology Working Group to consider the practical aspects of building IT links between EFSA and Member States national agencies (see AF 10.09.03 -4- agreed in "AF Comm IT Terms of Ref.ppt"). Through its projects, the IT Working Group is expected to facilitate information exchange and communications between Advisory Forum members.

Following the creation of the Communications Working Group in November 2004, members discussed their information objectives, and in particular the nature of the information that they would like to share (scientific data, work programmes, communications materials,…), the subject areas (emerging risks,...), and the type of communications required (ability to dialogue in real time on emerging issues,…).

A summary of these discussions was provided as input to the first meeting of the IT Working Group on 19.04.04 (see attached "IT WG Comm needs 19 04 04.fmt.ppt") and further debated at the Communications working group on 22.04.04. At this meeting, members stressed the importance of clearly defining user requirements in order to ensure that the IT tools developed would be effectively utilised by members.

Following discussions in the IT and Communications Working Groups and subsequent internal discussions at EFSA, we recommend the creation of a specific IT tool, an Extranet, to facilitate information and data exchange. We propose to progress in the following manner:

- Develop a prototype Extranet in order to test the system and seek feedback from members

- Conduct interviews with potential Extranet users in order to further specify the key functional requirements and type of documents and information to be exchanged.

The prototype Extranet will demonstrate the following features:

- Security through login with user-name and passwords and communication encryption.

- Ability to define document topics and sub-topics

- Ability to upload and download documents

- Automated monitoring of web sites of interest

- Notification of new documents in specific topics

- Online collaboration tools: message board, chat, virtual meetings, shared event calendar

The timetable for this project is outlined as follows:

- May-July - Extranet users interviews. EFSA will interview Member States, EFSA and Commission representatives in order to understand use-cases and requirements for

the Extranet. In particular, we will gather views on using an Extranet in food crisis situation.

- June-September - Feedback on prototype Extranet. The prototype Extranet should be available mid-June. The prototype is only intended to solicit feedback on use-cases and functionalities.

- August - September - Validation of requirements. Requirements and use-cases unearthed in the interviews are validated once users have a chance to experience the prototype Extranet.

- September - Document categorization. As suggested by the UK representative at the Communication Working Group, a series of workshops will be conducted to iron out the types of documents that should be available on the Extranet.

- September-November – Implementation. If necessary, EFSA procures new or additional software. Functionalities and documents types are implemented.

- November – Official Extranet launch

The development of the Extranet will be funded by EFSA. It will require the involvement of members in defining the specifications for the extranet, testing the Extranet features, and of course through training.

The project proposal as outlined above is submitted to the Advisory Forum for comment and validation.

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