

3rd External Evaluation of EFSA – Recommendations from the Management Board

Analysis of the results of the External Evaluation

The Management Board acknowledges the usefulness of the third External Evaluation Report and commends on EFSA's steady performance increase since the last evaluation in 2011 as highlighted in the External Evaluation Report and summarised below.

EFSA's production system has continuously delivered high quality, fit-for-purpose scientific advice, following open and transparent processes. The high quality of EFSA scientific outputs is recognised by Member States partners and international scientific organisations.

Efficiency programmes have delivered significant savings in non-core activities over the years. The resources were re-invested to support EFSA's focus on general health matters and emerging risks, next to sourcing the continuously increasing demand of regulated products assessments.

The Management Board acknowledges the major progress made in enhancing the EU Risk assessment capacity, despite the limited financial resources which reflect the general financial situation with its subsequent pressure on public budgets. A joint European Risk Assessment Agenda has been established together with the EU Member States, thus enabling concerted actions on the food safety priorities and avoiding duplication of work.

Data sharing with Member States has been extended and the quality of submitted data has been improved through the implementation of a web-based Scientific Data Collection Framework.

An array of new collaboration instruments, like framework partnership agreements, thematic grants, multi-country joint projects and a fellowship programme contributed to further enhance the EU risk assessment capacity and cooperation between EFSA and Member States. The capacity building was supported by multiannual training programmes on the risk assessment methodologies and crisis simulation exercises, open for EFSA and Member States experts.

The Management Board also welcomes the increasing number of collaborative activities with the most relevant EU sister agencies ECHA, EMA and ECDC. The interagency cooperation would further benefit from a broader collaboration framework and the setting of joint strategic objectives, to ensure the most impactful implementation of a One Health Approach.

EFSA's investment in global collaboration is limited, given the mandate, the size and the resources of the organisation. This notwithstanding, EFSA has continued its collaboration at the global level with international organisations and selected countries to foster the coherence of the risk assessment methodologies. The Management Board is as well pleased with EFSA's significant contributions to the EU's interaction with the Codex Alimentarius system and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

Significant improvements have been achieved in the area of EFSA's engagement with the civil society. The independence policy and its implementing rules have been regularly updated, following the recommendations of the European Parliament and the civil society organisations.

By means of the "transparency and engagement in risk assessment" project more than 30 measures have been implemented to make the entire risk assessment process more transparent, accessible and reproducible. A newly rolled out stakeholder engagement approach has allowed to sharply increase the number of included stakeholder organisations and has introduced a multiplicity of general and targeted interaction formats. All with the aim to enhance mutual understanding of EFSA's scientific work on the one hand and of the societal expectations surrounding EFSA's work on the other hand.

The Management Board acknowledges EFSA's continuous improvements of its communication tools, channels and materials. The redesign of its website, social media presence, use of interactive tools, harmonisation of language and provision of lay man summaries have increased clarity, accessibility and outreach of EFSA's messages.

Having analysed the situation as it is, the Management Board expresses its general gratitude for the work of EFSA and appraises the development within EFSA. As the work needs to continue the Management Board identifies the following priority areas, listed in the order of priority, which need to be addressed to ensure EFSA remains the trusted scientific voice for food and feed safety, animal health and welfare and plant health and the that EU risk assessment system continues to function effectively, based on reliable evidence and excellent expertise. The recommendations take into account the outcome of the Fitness Check of the General Food Law Regulation and the legislative proposal on the transparency and sustainability of the EU risk assessment in the food chain amending Regulation (EC) 178/2002.

Recommendations

1. Enhance capacity for fit-for purpose and responsive scientific advice

a) Improve planning and responsiveness

- Review EFSA processes and use efficiency gains to address the growing mismatch between customer demands and resources available, which is resulting in backlogs in the area of regulated products and lower than anticipated preparedness and innovation in the area of generic risk assessment.
- Enhance workload prioritisation with DG SANTE and align understanding on framing of questions as well as expectations on scientific depth of the advice.

b) Optimize the use of resources

- Leverage on and optimize EFSA's role as a coordinator of the EU Risk Assessment Agenda.
- Optimize the use of the combined resources of EFSA and Member States to complement risk assessment activities and to avoid duplication of work, emphasising the role of the Advisory Forum and the active contribution from the Focal Points.

c) Harmonize EU assessments

- Enhance further coherence of the risk assessment approaches and stimulate harmonisation of methodologies at the EU level by enhancing buy-in and implementation of EFSA's guidance documents.

d) Utilize technological development in IT and data management

- Improve data sharing and data quality for Member States and EU citizens' through state-of-the-art IT systems. Leverage on technology initiatives in the area of machine learning and other applied artificial intelligence mechanisms for automating parts of the risk assessment process.

2. Enhance communication activities to strengthen EFSA's reputation

a) Increase proactivity of communication

- Foster proactive communications and engagement; enhance open, effective and prompt communications on EFSA scientific work to help increase trust in EFSA and in the EU food safety system. Continue focusing on engagement with stakeholders during the risk assessment process.

b) Communicate collaboratively

- Develop joint communication strategies and alliances with the national food safety authorities to support the credibility of the food safety risk assessment landscape. Protect EFSA's reputation and counterbalance the influence of social-media driven science-denying "post-truth" efforts.
- Intensify strategic and operational cooperation with the EU sister agencies (EMA, ECHA, ECDC, EEA) on interactive web-based communication about science.

c) Contextualize communication to address societal concerns and use communication science to improve communication about risk assessment

- Strengthen EFSA's credibility by the use of social science research to enrich, contextualize and optimize dissemination of EFSA's scientific work.

3. Secure long-term efficiency and sustainability of EFSA's operations

a) Enhance efficiency of the advice production system

- Explore new ways of producing scientific advice in the most effective and efficient way (e.g. insourcing, outsourcing, cross panel working groups, crowdsourcing).
- Use to the broadest reasonable extent shared services at the EU level.

b) Find additional ways to utilize expertise

- Identify, maintain and nurture a wide pool of experts leveraging also on new ways to scout, source and retain talents. Redress employers of experts for the time their employees dedicate to EFSA.
- Experiment tapping into large groups of often non-formal experts (crowd sourcing). Use global innovation platforms to fuel and procure methodological innovations.

c) Increase EFSA's financial resources

- Advocate EU institutions for an increase of EFSA's annual budget to secure the sustainability of EFSA's risk assessment tasks.
- Identify and advocate for sources of funding to complement the EU budget to render EFSA more responsive to the growing and emerging stakeholders needs (introduction of fees, charge-back mechanisms for knowledge products or services, etc.).

4. Continue EFSA's transformation to an Open Science Organisation

a) Make evidence transparent and re-usable

- Collaborate with stakeholders to receive application related data in structured, machine-readable formats.
- Proactively publish non-confidential evidence and its appraisal used for scientific assessments in structured, searchable and downloadable formats.

b) Make the advice-development process accessible

- Publish applied methods, models, assumptions and uncertainties together with the scientific advice.
- Make the evolvement of scientific outputs traceable by linking it to scoping and planning documents, data collections and selection, methods selection, working group deliberations, intermediate results and refinements as well as panel discussions.

c) Enhance the dialogue with stakeholders

- Use targeted engagement mechanisms to solicit stakeholder input in developing pre-guidance scoping documents.

d) Safeguard and explain EFSA's scientific independence

- Continue to adapt EFSA's independence policy to societal demands, striking a reasonable balance between the excellence of expertise and the risk of perceived conflicts of interests.
- Increase communication efforts to explain the multiple systems EFSA has put in place to secure unbiased, independent scientific advice and use communication science to improve communication about independence.

5. Invest in preparedness to cope with complex futures

a) Scan emerging risks and co-develop adequate assessment methodologies

- Continue investing in harvesting data and information to stay abreast of evolving scientific methodologies and research revelations in toxicology, epidemiology, exposure sciences and data sciences.
- Strengthen EFSA's ability to anticipate and respond effectively to emerging food safety risks in cooperation with the EU and international partners.

- b) Co-develop European capacity for future risk governance
 - Redesign the capacity-building model in a close collaboration with the Member States and European and international stakeholders to ensure increased synergy, efficiency and impact.
- c) Co-influence EU research funding priorities
 - Team up with the sister agencies to shape and expand the EU regulatory research funding programs.

6. Collaborate, cooperate and co-design to meet integrated "One Health" protection targets

- a) Upgrade collaboration to a strategic level
 - Develop and implement a voluntary, ambitious collaboration strategy with the sister organisations for delivering cross-cutting one-health outcomes, driven by a shared vision.
 - Co-develop a cross-science and cross-organisation approach of risk governance to anticipate and respond to emerging threats.
- b) Utilize the opportunities of big data
 - Invest in developing common platforms for data, information and knowledge available to risk managers in support to policy making.
 - Cooperate with Member States, the sister agencies, the JRC and Member States to ensure data connection and semantic interoperability. Co-develop scientific-technological tools to tackle growing volumes of data and cognitive analytics to identify patterns/relationships.
- c) Share limitless to tackle complexity and resource constraints
 - Use collaborative approaches to tackle increasingly multi-disciplinary challenges (-omics, harmonisation of modelling and computation methods, probabilistic risk assessment approaches, etc.).

Adopted in Parma on 10 October 2018
For EFSA's Management Board

Signed

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Chair of the Management Board