

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT FOR BREAKOUT SESSION REVIEW OF FOCAL POINT AGREEMENTS

32nd Meeting of the Focal Point Network (Prague, 13-14.09.2017)

1. INTRODUCTION

The first set of Focal Point Agreements was signed between EFSA and Member States in 2008. These were renewed until 2014. During 2013-2014 the Focal Point network was subject to an in-depth review, which acknowledged its important role in support of the activities of the Advisory Forum and identified Article 36 of Reg. 178/2002 as the operational framework for the network. Focal Points currently provide a significant contribution to the implementation of EFSA's Strategic Objective 3 - "Build the EU's scientific assessment capacity and knowledge community" - through the promotion of scientific cooperation, networking, partnering and clear communication.

The current cycle of Focal Point Grant Agreements started in January 2015 and will expire by end of 2018. A total of 30 Focal Point Agreements are currently running with an overall budget of 1.020M Euros (based on a 70% co-funding of Focal Points activities). Focal Points carry out a series of activities that can be grouped under 6 main areas:

- A. Information exchange;**
- B. Ensuring a fit-for-purpose Article 36 list and promoting the pooling of expertise;**
- C. Networking and raising EFSA's scientific visibility;**
- D. Facilitating the information flow on the activities of EFSA's Scientific Networks;**
- E. Promoting training initiatives on risk assessment;**
- F. Information sharing and promotion of international scientific cooperation activities.**

These activities are reported on a yearly basis on individual Focal Point Technical Reports per country. Information is then collated, analysed and the respective outcome feeds into Annual Scientific Cooperation Reports. In order to assess the quality of the reporting process and ensure the execution of mandatory tasks, an EFSA Focal Point Evaluation Committee is auditing a sample of submitted Focal Point Technical Reports on a yearly basis.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE BREAKOUT SESSION

Given the need to start well in advance the preparation of new Focal Point Agreements for 2019, and as a first step for preparing a **draft review plan** for setting new Focal Point Agreements, a breakout session for reflecting on past, present and possible future Focal Point activities will be carried during the 32nd meeting of the network.

The **key objectives** of the breakout session are to **assess the current strengths and weaknesses of the network as well its evolution overtime, considering opportunities and threats identified in the recent past. In addition, and more forward looking, focus will also be placed on new opportunities and threats** (resulting e.g. from the current review of Article 36 procedures and from the pilot on data quality pilot).

3. PLAN FOR THE BREAKOUT SESSION

The breakout session will start with a short introduction on its objectives and *modus operandi*.

Focal Points will then split into 4 Groups and granted 40 minutes for discussing 4 different questions (1 question per Group) and a common general question for all 4 Groups, as below:

- **Question for Group 1** - *looking back to the last Focal Point review and current tasks, are the identified key strengths of the network still relevant?*
- **Question for Group 2** - *looking back to the last Focal Point review and current tasks, have the identified weaknesses of the network been addressed? Were there missed opportunities? If yes, which ones?*

- **Question for Group 3** - looking forward, are there new needs / opportunities for the Focal Point network e.g. considering resource effort, need for review of current description of tasks, anticipated new tasks?
- **Question for Group 4** - looking forward, are there new threats to the Focal Point network?
- **Common Question for all Groups** - what new ideas would you have for the Focal Point network to enable an increased and more efficient cooperation and networking between EFSA and its Partners at European and International level?

Each Group has been appointed a **Facilitator** (from EFSA end) and will be appointed a **Rapporteur** (chosen among attending Focal Points). The Rapporteur will collect input during breakout discussions and report back in plenary. Each Group feedback should not last more than 10 minutes to allow plenary discussion. The total amount of time estimated for plenary discussion is 50 minutes. More details on the Group composition, Facilitators and Rapporteurs chosen for each Group are available in the table below.

Group 1 Q1 + Generic Q	Group 2 Q2 + Generic Q	Group 3 Q3 + Generic Q	Group 4 Q4 + Generic Q
Facilitator: Barbara Rapporteur: Austria	Facilitator: Jeff Rapporteur: Belgium	Facilitator: Sérgio Rapporteur: United Kingdom	Facilitator: Julia Rapporteur: Ireland
Corner 1 MTG room	Corner 2 MTG room	Corner 3 MTG room	Corner 4 MTG room
Austria	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Cyprus
Czech Republic	Belgium	Bulgaria	Hungary
Germany	Estonia	Croatia	FYR of Macedonia
Iceland	Greece	Finland	Ireland
Lithuania	Luxembourg	France	Latvia
Montenegro	Portugal	Italy	Slovenia
Norway	Serbia	Malta	Spain
Poland	Slovak Republic	Sweden	Switzerland
Romania	Turkey	United Kingdom	The Netherlands

4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

In order to best prepare in advance and facilitate Group discussions, background information is provided as Annexes to this background document, as detailed below:

Annex I – Outcome of the 2014 SWOT analysis on the 5 year review of the Focal Point network.

Annex II – List of Focal Point tasks as laid down in current Focal Point Agreements.

Annex III – Template for collection of input during Group & Plenary discussions.

5. NEXT STEPS

After the Focal Point meeting, Group Rapporteurs shall prepare a summary with the key elements of the Group discussion, along with input received during plenary discussion, and making use of the template provided in Annex III. For preparing such summary, Rapporteurs shall consult with members of their Groups ahead of sending the final summary to EFSA by **Friday 29.09.2017**. Group summaries will then be merged by EFSA into one single main summary of the breakout session and shared with Focal Points for final comments.

The following **key milestones** are anticipated after the Focal Point meeting:

- A. 10-11.2017** – preparation of draft review plan for establishing new Focal Point Agreements. The review plan shall include an analysis of the results of the breakout session; and an analysis of EFSA key strategic and operational documents referring to activities of the network.
- B. 27.11.2017** – presentation of the draft review plan to EFSA’s Management Team for approval.
- C. 01.2018** - setting up a cross-Unit EFSA Task Force to implement the approved review plan.
- D. 1st Semester of 2018** – preparation of new draft Focal Point Agreements.
- E. 3rd Quarter of 2018** – discussion of the new draft Agreements with the Focal Point network.
- F. 4th Quarter of 2018** – approval of new Focal Point Agreements by EFSA management.
- G. 01.2019** – implementation of new Focal Point Agreements.

Document history

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ANNEX I - Outcome of the 2014 SWOT analysis on the 5 year review of the Focal Point network

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Renewable FP Agreements have allowed for a formal and more permanent character of the FP network (e.g. all Member States, as well as Norway and Iceland, have renewed their Focal Point Agreements in 2012). 2. The FP work is carried out in an active networking environment, allowing for the strengthening of scientific cooperation between EFSA and MS. 3. The FP network facilitates the exchange of scientific information between EFSA and MS, enabling good access to information and facilitating the work carried out at national level by RA organisations (e.g. the overall number of requests for assistance increased in the past 5 years, reaching 155 requests in 2012). 4. Working in a networking environment allows for a better coordination of work between EFSA and MS, including on work planning, thus contributing to a better planning of risk assessment activities, helping to avoid duplication of work. 5. FPs meet three times a year. These meetings allow for a direct contact amongst its members and free discussion of subjects and exchange of experiences. 6. FPs play an important role in consolidating and expanding national networks (national target audiences), to which they disseminate EFSA's and own information and communication materials. 7. The FP network has contributed to avoid diverging scientific opinions between EFSA and MS. 8. FPs support the Information Exchange Platform, a tool for sharing data on studies and risk assessment work (outputs and mandates) of national organisations carrying out work in EFSA's remit (e.g. at the end of December 2012, the IEP contained over 1296 documents uploaded by Member States, EEA/EFTA countries and Pre-Accession countries). 9. FPs contribute to the growing and maintenance of the List of Article 36 Organisations, allowing for cooperation between EFSA and organisations in MS (in 2012, 5 new organisations joined the list with the support of FPs). 10. FPs play an important role in the roster of national scientific expertise, helping to populate EFSA's Expert Database and thus contributing to the work of the Scientific Committee and Panels, the Working Groups and EFSA's scientific networks (e.g. by end of 2012, more than 4000 experts had applied to the EDB). 11. The FP network increases the national knowledge and visibility of EFSA's outputs, working practices and outreach (e.g. via national Webpages and events). 12. FPs contribute to the dissemination of information at national level on training courses in risk assessment and collaborate with national BTSF contact points in the identification and selection of the right candidates. 13. FPs support the preparation and promote the BfR EU Food Safety Almanac, which provides a comprehensive overview of the national competent authorities operating in EFSA's remit. 	<p>Of the Focal Point Network:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is a high variability amongst different countries in the networking structure and capacity of FPs. This variability is perceived as a constraint to the networking capacity amongst FPs as there are differences in the roles and responsibilities. 2. The turnover and changes of FP's organisations/members leads to different levels of knowledge and experiences amongst the network members. 3. The FP network lacks a formal legal framework. The financial contribution provided with the FP Agreements does not have an explicit legal basis. 4. The current lifecycle of FP Agreements and annual reporting is not optimal considering the current cycle for the execution of the payments of FP Agreements. 5. The reporting table on planned activities requires a revision and harmonisation in order to meet its objective of helping to avoid duplication of work. 6. The Information Exchange Platform as a tool for sharing of RA information presents certain limitations, such as restricted access; not being used by all relevant national RA bodies; and types of documents that can be uploaded. 7. A high number of organisations in the List of Article 36 Organisations have never applied to calls for grants. 8. The use at national level of EFSA's Expert Database as a source of scientific expertise is limited. 9. With regards to training on risk assessment, the use made of the training material generated for the specialised BTSF courses in risk assessment is limited. The system in place to identify participants for the specialised BTSF courses in risk assessment is not optimal. <p>Indirectly linked to the Focal Point Network:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. The nature and type of requests sent out through the network is not always limited to data collection and risk assessment, but sometimes includes elements of risk management. 11. There is regular duplication/overlapping of information in the communication channels between FPs and other networks, and sometimes as well within EFSA and between EFSA and other EU Agencies and the EC.

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The 5 year review of the FP network is an opportunity for consolidation of its formal and financial framework. 2. Operating in a networking environment generates opportunities for further cooperation amongst FPs e.g. bilateral cooperation in between FPs located geographically for organising joint events or tutoring by "older" FPs. 3. A clearer definition of the tasks of FPs can be achieved via e.g. joint meetings with other networks with complementary roles (AF and AFCWG). 4. In order to further improve work planning, the tools available to collect information on this matter (IEP and table on planned activities) should be further boosted and improved. 5. A better communication between FPs and the national representatives of other networks can benefit the efficiency of the FP network and of the networks in general, contributing to avoid duplication of work. 6. The national target audiences under the FP network can be further expanded and consolidated in order to cover all national organisations and other possible stakeholders carrying activities falling within EFSA's remit. 7. The Information Exchange Platform, as a tool for sharing non confidential information on risk assessment outputs and mandates can be further enlarged to additional users, so to allow its use by representatives from other organisations at national level. Such process is foreseen to occur on the occasion of its integration by the "Virtual Library" initiative. 8. The review of the List of Article 36 Organisations currently in course with the support of FPs should optimise the information flow to these organisations and allow for an increase in the number of organisations/consortia applying to calls for proposals and participation in networking activities. 9. The use of EFSA's Expert Database by MS as a source of expertise should be increased. The FP network can also be more frequently used for identifying expertise sought for specific projects/assignments. 10. FPs can further raise the knowledge and visibility of EFSA by continuing to disseminate the views of EFSA (e.g. presenting initiatives and the work of EFSA in regional, national, EU and international events), thus acting as "EFSA ambassadors". 11. FPs can further promote training on risk assessment at MS level by making the best use of the programmes and material generated by the BTSF RA training programme 12. The FP network could be better used in the case of crisis situations. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The lack of a formal and financial framework could undermine the authority of FPs and cause a threat for the continuity of the FP network. 2. The high turnover on the FP organisations and members contributes to a lack of clarity of the tasks of FPs and shifts in responsibilities. The lack of clarity of FP tasks may generate knowledge gaps and an under spending of the financial contributions. 3. The location of AF, AFCWG and FPs in different organisational structures in MS risks generating blocks and overlaps on the information exchange flow. 4. If not prevented, the nature of the information exchange flow may, overtime, extend to areas not falling in EFSA's remit (e.g. risk management issues). 5. The workload of FPs has been increasing overtime, but the available resources have been stable, thus the capacity of FPs to cope with increased workload may be exceeded overtime. 6. Parallel networks e.g. AF, AFCWG and FPs, are not always aware of each other's work, which can lead to duplication of work. 7. There is the risk that not all scientific information of relevance is exchanged within the network if not all the national target audiences are covered by national FP networks. 8. The use of the Information Exchange Platform as a source of scientific information may stabilise overtime if it is not made more user-friendly and if access rights are not revised. 9. The List of Article 36 Organisations risks becoming obsolete should the review process not allow for its full refreshment and should its scope remain limited to grants. 10. It will become questionable to consider EFSA's Expert Database as a cooperation tool should its use in MS as a source of expertise not be expanded. 11. Concerning the sharing of relevant information with EFSA, additional work should be done with FPs to address problems of confidentiality and transparency.

ANNEX II - List of Focal Point tasks as laid down in current Focal Point Agreements

A. FP ensures the exchange of information on relevant scientific outputs, data collection activities and/or other relevant scientific information concerning risk assessment:

- FP disseminated through their national networks, by email or other means (to be specified), other information (e.g. information emails on scientific events, calls for data, job offers, etc.) submitted to the FP network by EFSA and/or other FPs – **mandatory**;
- FP shared with the FP network requests for specific information and/or disseminated in-house or through their national networks those requests (using the appropriate EFSA template, when applicable) - **mandatory when relevant**;
- FP shared with EFSA and FPs information on national risk assessment activities (including planned activities and mandates) through the Excel table on Risk Assessment Activities (in advance of AF meetings) - **if relevant**;
- FP shared through the FP network, via email or other collaborative tools (excluding the Excel table abovementioned) information on (or links to) ongoing or concluded national risk assessment activities (e.g. scientific outputs, research activities, etc.) - **if relevant**;

B. Cooperation through Art. 36 and databases or networks of scientific experts:

- FP contributes to ensure that the relevant competent MS organisations are included on the Article 36 List, in line with the objectives of Article 36 of EFSA's Founding Regulation, and that the List is reviewed regularly, at least every three years – **mandatory**;
- FP sets up and maintains (or uses) national databases or networks of scientific experts to disseminate relevant information received through the FP network – **mandatory**;
- FP assists its country in the process of designating new competent organisations by: supporting organisations with the preparation and submission of their information in the Art36-DB, arranging the MS assessment of organisations' compliance with the formal criteria, and supporting the designation procedure by the Permanent Representations / Missions – **mandatory when relevant**;
- FP ensures that changes to organisations, especially where organisations no longer meet the formal criteria, are immediately notified to EFSA and designation is withdrawn - **mandatory when relevant**;
- FP organised meetings, events and/or established contact with Article 36 organisations and/or with potential Article 36 organisations, providing updated information about EFSA's grant and procurement schemes, stimulating the growth/update of the list and also the national networking of organisations – **if relevant**;
- FP informs, stimulates and/or supports Article 36 organisations in applying to calls for proposals/tenders once launched – **if relevant**;
- FP promoted the use of national databases/networks of scientific experts for identifying expertise for EFSA and / or for national scientific activities/events – **if relevant**;

C. Networking and raising the visibility of EFSA and of its role in the EU and internationally:

- FP maintains national and/or FP Webpages to inform about EFSA activities, e.g. calls for proposals and tenders, calls for membership of EFSA's Scientific Committee and Panels, other EFSA job offers, EFSA public announcements (e.g. press releases), EFSA email alerts or EFSA's scientific outputs – **mandatory**;
- FP maintains lists of contacts of relevant stakeholders (other than the Article 36 List or databases/networks of experts mentioned above) to which information and communication materials about EFSA are disseminated – **mandatory when relevant**;
- FP liaises with the Communications Exchange Network (CEN, formerly AFCWG) member and implements joint information or communication initiatives, e.g. brochures, leaflets, articles, newsletters, etc. on the role and activities of EFSA, as well on cooperation initiatives with EFSA – **if relevant**;
- FP organises national FP events (conferences/seminars/workshops) – **if relevant**;
- FP delivers presentations/presents posters on EFSA or events organised at national/international level (e.g. FP events, other conferences/seminars/workshops) – **if relevant**;
- FP facilitated EFSA's contribution to national events (e.g. EFSA participation in national conferences/seminars/workshops) in order to present EFSA's role or work – **if relevant**;
- FP provides/receives mentoring to/from EFSA, other FPs and/or to candidate/neighbouring/third countries in areas of relevance to EFSA (e.g. regional events for sharing of information of common scientific relevance or on experiences in collaborating with EFSA) – **if relevant**;

D. Training opportunities in risk assessment:

- FP disseminates information provided by EFSA and/or other FPs, regarding training opportunities in risk assessment, to relevant national organisations (e.g. BTSF trainings, other EFSA RA courses, training workshops/activities on RA shared by other FPs) – **mandatory**;
- FP supports the implementation of publicly funded RA courses (e.g. BTSF, other EFSA RA courses, other RA courses occurring at national level or in other MS), through e.g. the use of existing training material, the identification of candidates for the courses, recommending tutors for the courses, etc. – **if relevant**;

E. Coordination of EFSA's Scientific Networks at national level:

- FP provides relevant information to the AF member regarding scientific network meetings e.g. agendas and minutes of meetings, work programmes, planned risk assessment activities and/or activity reports of EFSA's scientific networks, as provided by EFSA or the national network representatives – **mandatory when relevant**;
- FP provides relevant information received from the AF member to national network representatives e.g. relevant feedback from AF meetings, relevant topics to be discussed at network meetings, etc. – **if relevant**;
- FP shares relevant issues discussed in a specific scientific network with national representatives from other scientific networks e.g. through reports circulated to distribution lists made up by network representatives; and/or through the promotion of annual meetings attended by network representatives and the AF representative – **if relevant**;
- FP supports the AF member in the identification of national representatives for meetings of EFSA's scientific networks – **if relevant**;

F. FP shares relevant information on international scientific cooperation activities related to risk assessment carried out by national organisations (note that "international" in this context means activities outside the EU and EEA/EFTA countries, i.e. with third countries, including Pre-Accession and ENP countries, as well as with international organisations e.g. OIE, WHO, etc.):

- FP disseminates to relevant national networks/contacts, information about international scientific cooperation activities on risk assessment (e.g. projects, meetings, workshops, events, trainings, etc.) provided by other FPs or EFSA – **mandatory**;
- FP shares with EFSA and/or other FPs relevant information related to international scientific cooperation activities on risk assessment planned to be carried out (or carried out) in his country (e.g. planned activities, programmes of workshops or conferences, brochures, press releases, scientific outputs, etc.) – **if relevant**;
- FP promoted international scientific cooperation activities on topics within the remit of EFSA (e.g. via international cooperation meetings, mentorship sessions, etc.) – **if relevant**.

ANNEX III - Template for collection of input during Group & Plenary discussions

Group No.: _____ Rapporteur Name: _____

GROUP DISCUSSION	PLENARY DISCUSSION