

**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE AND ADVISORY FORUM UNIT**

Parma, 19 January 2009  
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**Minutes**

**FIRST MEETING OF THE ADVISORY FORUM  
REPRESENTATIVES ON ANIMAL HEALTH  
PARMA (ITALY), 27-28 MAY 2008**

**ADVISORY FORUM REPRESENTATIVES ON ANIMAL HEALTH**

**Chair:** *Riitta Maijala*, Director of Risk Assessment, EFSA

Austria	<i>Petra Winter</i>	Ireland	<i>Niall Ó Nualláin</i>
Belgium	<i>Luc Vanholme</i>	Italy	<i>Paolo Calistri</i>
Bulgaria	<i>Boiko Likov</i>	Lithuania	<i>Marius Masiulis</i>
Cyprus	<i>Pavlos Toumazos</i>	Luxembourg	<i>Carlo Dahm</i>
Czech Republic	<i>Eva Renčová</i>	Portugal	<i>Fernando Almeida Bernardo</i>
Denmark	<i>Kristian Møller</i>	Slovak Republic	<i>Dalibor Polák</i>
Finland	<i>Tuula Honkanen-Buzalski</i>	Slovenia	<i>Tina Aric</i>
France	<i>Gilles Salvat</i>	Sweden	<i>Susanna Sternberg Lewerin</i>
Germany	<i>Franz J. Conraths</i>	United Kingdom	<i>Kulin Patel</i>

**OBSERVERS**

Norway	<i>Ingfrid Slaatto Næss</i>	European Commission	<i>Eric Marin</i>
Switzerland	<i>Jürg Danuser</i>	European Commission	<i>Sabine Osaer</i>

## MEMBERS OF EFSA'S ANIMAL HEALTH AND ANIMAL WELFARE PANEL

<i>Christine Müller-Graf</i>	<i>Moez Sanaa</i>
<i>Mo Salman</i>	<i>Philippe Vannier</i>

## STAFF OF THE EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

<i>Viviane Abratzky</i>	<i>Milen Georgiev</i>
<i>Ana Afonso</i>	<i>Per Have</i>
<i>Gian Luca Bonduri</i>	<i>Djién Liem</i>
<i>Denise Candiani</i>	<i>Christine Majewski</i>
<i>Sandra Correia Rodeia</i>	<i>Elena Marani</i>
<i>Fabrizio De Massis</i>	<i>Torben Nilsson</i>
<i>Sofie Dhollander</i>	<i>Oriol Ribó</i>
<i>Elda Franchi</i>	<i>Jordi Serratosa</i>

### 1 WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

Riitta Maijala, Director of Risk Assessment, opened the meeting, welcomed the Advisory Forum (AF) representatives on animal health and apologised that Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, Executive Director of EFSA, had been prevented from attending the meeting. She then kindly reminded those AF representatives who had not yet submitted their declaration of interests to do so.

### 2 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted without changes.

### 3 ADVISORY FORUM WORK ON HARMONISATION

Djién Liem provided an overview of EFSA's work, including the AF work on harmonisation. Riitta Maijala emphasised that EFSA needs good networking to undertake its tasks.

### 4 ROLE OF EFSA IN CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROTECTION OF ANIMAL HEALTH

Riitta Maijala presented EFSA's draft document on its role in contributing to the improvement of animal health in Europe. She emphasised that EFSA has been working in animal health since the beginning, so the purpose of the document is to clarify EFSA's role. EFSA's goals will comprise integrated and efficient approaches for delivering scientific advice, scientific support for EU surveillance programs and crisis preparedness, avoidance of unnecessary divergence in scientific opinions, and coordination of scientific resources within the remit of EFSA.

The European Commission supported the role of EFSA, while mentioning a need to avoid duplication of efforts within data collection and a wish for consideration of animal nutrition in addition to animal diseases. The United Kingdom suggested that harmonising the principles for fast replies in crisis situations would be useful and should involve non-EU countries like New Zealand, Australia and others. Denmark mentioned that differences exist between Member States in terms of declaring a crisis. France asked if EFSA's focal points could support crisis coordination. Sweden said that differences can be fine; transparency is important for the discussions. Germany agreed with Sweden.

Riitta Maijala said that EFSA's role within data collection would be to coordinate and assist as needed. She explained the close relation between the work of EFSA's Panels on animal health and animal welfare (AHAW) and additives and products or substances used in animal feed (FEEDAP). She further said that EFSA cooperates with the ECDC on emerging risks monitoring and that memoranda of understanding on data exchange and reasoning in risk assessments within EFSA's remit have been or are being prepared with the United States, New Zealand, Australia and Japan. Finally, she agreed with Sweden that differences can sometimes occur due to different data being used or due to the different roles between EFSA and MS organisations; hence the expression "avoidance of unnecessary divergence in scientific opinions". Philippe Vannier, Chair of the AHAW Panel, added that differences of scientific opinions can confuse risk managers and the public, so it is important to discuss and understand their causes. Djien Liem explained that EFSA's focal points are new and could possibly play a coordinating role, but this needs to be discussed further.

## **5 COMMUNITY ANIMAL HEALTH POLICY**

The European Commission presented the EU animal health strategy for 2007-2013 and the related action plan. The strategic goals are 1) to ensure a high level of public health and food safety by minimising the incidence of biological and chemical risks to humans, 2) to promote animal health by preventing/reducing the incidence of animal diseases, and in this way to support farming and the rural economy, 3) to improve economic growth/cohesion/competitiveness assuring free circulation of goods and proportionate animal movements, and 4) to promote farming practises and animal welfare which prevent animal health related threats and minimise environmental impacts in support of the EU sustainable development strategy. To deliver these strategic goals, the action plan focuses on the following main pillars: 1) Prioritisation of EU intervention, 2) The EU animal health framework, 3) Prevention, surveillance and preparedness, and 4) Science, innovation and research. The importance of EFSA taking the lead or being involved in the science related activities was emphasised.

Cyprus expressed support to the EU animal health strategy, in particular for addressing animal transport and measures against illegal trade. France complimented the ambition level of the strategy and suggested a need for EU

guidelines or reference to guidelines of the United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). The United Kingdom asked which diseases besides BSE/TSE would be considered for the data collection and warned against allowing non-vaccinated animals into the EU. Sweden asked for clarification of the role of the European Commission vis-à-vis the Member States in the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).

The European Commission thanked for the positive comments and mentioned that the European Parliament had supported the strategy almost unanimously. The European Commission said that the existing guidelines are often not used and that they would need to be adapted to address the priorities of the strategy. The decision on which diseases to take into account for the data collection would be based on a careful analysis of the priorities. The import policy would consider also economic aspects and Russia is a special case, since they are not in the World Trade Organisation. The same system is used for the representation in the OIE and Codex Alimentarius, *i.e.* both the European Commission and the Member States are represented.

## **6 AHAW PANEL 2003-2008: PAST AND FUTURE CHALLENGES**

Philippe Vannier and Jordi Serratosa presented the past and future work of the AHAW Panel.

Germany asked about the relation between the Panel and stakeholders. Cyprus asked if the Member States can request an EFSA opinion and expressed a specific need regarding non-indigenous animals. Bulgaria asked about the prioritisation of diseases. Sweden asked if animal welfare is considered in opinions on animal diseases or vice versa.

Philippe Vannier explained that the Panel is independent and bases its opinions exclusively on science, *i.e.* not on social, ethical or economic considerations. The purpose of stakeholder consultations is just to consider their experience. Jordi Serratosa said that EFSA opinions are official replies to official questions. Riitta Maijala added that the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Member States can request an EFSA opinion. The discussion of priorities is an issue for the risk managers and is thus taking place in working groups under the European Commission. Philippe Vannier informed that the AHAW Panel has received already several requests about migrating birds. He also confirmed that EFSA's opinions consider both animal welfare and animal diseases.

## **7 FEEDBACK FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRES' ASSESSMENT**

Jordi Serratosa provided the AF with an overview of their replies to the questionnaire on possible procedures for collaboration between the Member States and EFSA related to risk assessment in Europe on animal health. Nineteen replies were received prior to the meeting and Jordi Serratosa said that it is important for EFSA to receive information on Member State activities. The AF

agreed to share their replies with the other AF representatives on animal health. Riitta Maijala thanked for the replies and invited those Member States that had not yet replied to do so by 13 June 2008.

## **8 INTRODUCTION TO GENERAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS**

### **8.1 Exchange of views and discussion on risk assessment on animal diseases approaches and possible procedures for scientific collaboration with the Member States**

Per Have introduced the exchange of views on risk assessments and scientific collaboration on animal diseases. He outlined the different steps of EFSA's AHAW risk assessments and highlighted the collaboration with many different experts as well as the need for collaboration with the Member States on data exchange and on risk assessment approaches.

The Chair referred the discussion to agenda item 8.2.

### **8.2 Exchange of views and discussion on risk assessment on animal welfare approaches and possible procedures for scientific collaboration with the Member States**

Oriol Ribó introduced the exchange of views on risk assessments and scientific collaboration on animal welfare. He informed that EFSA had developed risk assessment guidelines for animal welfare as a self-tasking activity and highlighted the lack of data as the main constraint in performing risk assessments on animal welfare. The following ideas on how to further strengthen the collaboration with the Member States were shared: Institutional collaboration in the context of article 36 of EFSA's Founding Regulation (178/2002), experts' involvement, data exchange, and harmonisation of risk assessment guidelines and approaches.

Germany said that there would have to be an added value in order for the Member States to collaborate, that the national experts may not be considered independent, that Germany would be reluctant to share data, since it could be interpreted differently by EFSA's Panel than at national level, and that the rapid risk assessments, which are often exceeded by risk managers, cannot be performed according to the same methodology as ordinary risk assessments. France said that the sharing of expert databases could be useful, but would require agreement by the experts. France shared the German reluctance to share data due to the risk of a different opinion. Italy said that the interpretation of data may depend on specific conditions and that establishing a network would be an added value in itself, since it would allow the sharing of risk assessment models. Italy suggested examining how the Member States presently provide data to the European Commission and other agencies, *e.g.* Eurostat, to identify possible gaps and overlaps. Sweden said that national experts could bring national knowledge into EFSA's opinions. Denmark requested EFSA to share its reflections on the benefit to the Member States of sending experts to contribute to EFSA's work. Switzerland said that the

usefulness of data would depend on the way they were collected; hence the data collection should be done for specific purposes. Finland suggested that EFSA should take the lead in establishing guidelines for data collection in order to obtain better data in the future. Germany supported this proposal. The United Kingdom suggested spending resources to obtain good data on animal welfare. Belgium suggested establishing an EU database on animal health and animal welfare with direct access for EFSA. The European Commission informed that their current initiatives on data collection should address all these questions and welcomed the involvement of EFSA.

Riitta Maijala said that the added value is the aim of the cooperation and thanked the AF for the many good proposals. She explained that EFSA's experts are independent. This means that they do not represent a national viewpoint, but will have to argue in scientific terms and on the basis of the scientific evidence. She agreed that EFSA should play a role in promoting and harmonising data collection and sharing. It would be important to anticipate the data needs well in advance, since the data collection is very time consuming. Djien Liem explained that EFSA's Panel would consider views on how data should be interpreted and explain possible differences of views. He welcomed the sharing regarding expert databases. Moez Sanaa said that the best way to address urgent risk assessment requests would be to anticipate them, since a proper risk assessment takes time. Philippe Vannier added that in a crisis situation there would possibly be different requests to the same experts, so a close coordination or cooperation would be required. Christine Müller-Graf agreed that it would be ideal if data were collected specifically for risk assessments, however in reality the risk assessments often have to be based on incomplete data. Moez Sanaa added that the resulting uncertainties would then be explained in the opinion. Philippe Vannier said that non-harmonised data lead to less accurate opinions, so the issue of harmonised data collection is very important. Riitta Maijala concluded that, while data collection is often done for regulatory purposes, EFSA can provide scientific support to the European Commission to make the data useful also for risk assessments. She also suggested sharing EFSA's opinions and national risk assessments. Torben Nilsson informed that EFSA together with its focal points is establishing an information exchange platform to encourage and facilitate the sharing of opinions and other scientific documents.

### **8.3 Exchange of views and discussion on future possible procedures for improving networking and collaboration in animal health and welfare risk assessment**

Based on the discussions under agenda item 8.2, Jordi Serratosa summarised a number of ideas for further cooperation and networking between the Member States and EFSA in animal health and animal welfare risk assessment: It was suggested that an increased networking and communication between EFSA and the Member States would be of mutual benefit, *e.g.* by avoiding duplication of efforts and by reducing discrepancies of opinions. The national focal points could

provide practical support, *e.g.* through the sharing of national opinions, models and scientific documents on the information exchange platform. The use of the best experts for risk assessments is crucial both for EFSA and at national level both under normal circumstances and in crisis situations. To enhance the process for the selection of experts, EFSA will launch an expert database in June 2008, which would also be available to the Member States. Procedures for the collection and sharing of data should be established to facilitate the efficient preparation of reliable risk assessments. EFSA could propose guidelines and indicators for the data collection on animal welfare. EFSA could also provide scientific support for the animal disease information systems that would be established by the European Commission in the context of the EU animal health strategy. Finally, cooperation on risk assessment models was suggested.

Italy mentioned the zoonoses task force as a good model for cooperation on data collection and sharing. France said that the quality assurance of risk assessments is important for the final validity of opinions. Cyprus suggested that risk assessment guidelines developed by EFSA would be useful for the preparation of national opinions. Italy suggested that an annual seminar with experts on the appropriate use of risk assessment models should be organised by EFSA.

Riitta Maijala explained EFSA's quality assurance procedures and agreed on the suggestion to organise a seminar on the appropriate use of models. Christine Müller-Graf and Moez Sanaa said that quality assurance systems are important for the trust in national opinions. Jordi Serratosa suggested that EFSA could share a paper on the models used by EFSA and further said that an explanation would be needed when the Member States share models.

## **9 CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FOLLOW-UP**

Riitta Maijala informed that EFSA would prepare minutes of the meeting. She invited the Member States to complete the submission of replies to the questionnaire by 13 June 2008 in order for a report on the Member State situation within animal health to be drafted and published on EFSA's website. Finally, she informed that EFSA will organise annual meetings of the AF representatives on animal health in the future.