

SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION UNIT

Parma, 7th April 2008
EFSA/FP/M/2008/004/PUB

Minutes

**FIRST MEETING BETWEEN FOCAL POINTS AND EFSA
PARMA (ITALY), 5-6 MARCH 2008**

Participants

Chair: Bernhard Berger

Austria	<i>Roland Grossgut</i>	Latvia	<i>Aija Kažociņa</i>
Belgium	<i>Leen Meulenberghs</i>	Lithuania	<i>Almantas Kranauskas</i>
Bulgaria	<i>Teri Vrabcheva</i>	Luxembourg	<i>Nathalie Welschbillig</i>
Cyprus	<i>Eleni Kakouri</i>	Netherlands	<i>Hubert Noteborn</i>
Czech Republic	<i>Miroslav Elckner</i>	Poland	<i>Barbara Jaworska</i>
Denmark	<i>Arne Büchert</i>	Portugal	<i>Manuel Barreto Dias</i>
Finland	<i>Kirsti Savela</i>	Romania	<i>Simona Sirbu</i>
France	<i>Lilian Puech</i>	Romania	<i>Alecsandra Cozachievi</i>
Germany	<i>Karin Schlesier</i>	Slovakia	<i>Zuzana Birosova</i>
Germany	<i>Susanne Kaus</i>	Slovenia	<i>Ada Hocevar</i>
Hungary	<i>Judit Sali</i>	Spain	<i>Cristina Alonso-Andicoberry</i>
Ireland	<i>Anne-Marie Boland</i>	Sweden	<i>Rickard Bjerelius</i>
Italy	<i>Agostino Macrì</i>	United Kingdom	<i>Alisdair Wotherspoon</i>

Observers and Invitees of the Executive Director

Norway	<i>Danica Grahek-Ogden</i>	European Commission	<i>Jeannie Vergnettes</i>
Switzerland	<i>Judith Beck</i>		

Staff of the European Food Safety Authority

<i>Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle</i>	<i>Riitta Maijala</i>
<i>Bernhard Berger</i>	<i>Alexandrine Maviel-Sonet</i>
<i>Stef Bronzwear</i>	<i>Torben Nilsson</i>
<i>Christoph Buller</i>	<i>Ilias Papatryfon</i>
<i>Hubert Deluyker</i>	<i>Sérgio Potier Rodeia</i>
<i>Anne-Laure Gassin</i>	<i>Carola Sondermann</i>
<i>Kerstin Gross-Helmert</i>	<i>Victoria Villamar</i>

1 WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, Executive Director of EFSA, welcomed the participants and opened the first meeting of Focal Points which was considered a milestone for the cooperation between EFSA and EU Member States.

In her opening speech Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle highlighted the following aspects:

- The Strategy for Cooperation and Networking as basis for the scientific cooperation between EFSA and Member States aims at giving mutual benefit to all.
- A stronger and better risk assessment methodology is not only important for EFSA, but also for the European Commission, the Council, the EU Member States, and last but not least the national authorities of the Member States. Therefore, it is the common goal of EFSA and Member States to building more coherence in risk assessment and risk communications.
- Sharing and exchanging information is crucial for day-to-day work. A number of initiatives had already started to increase cooperation between EFSA and MS, including ESCO Working Groups, the work under Article 36 and the creation of national Focal Points.
- The role of Focal Points is to support the Advisory Forum, which deals with strategic aspects of cooperation between EFSA and Member States, and to build a network at national level including stakeholders. The Focal Points also play a key role in actively disseminating information between EFSA and Member States.
- To the date of the meeting, 21 agreements had been signed, with others following in due course. The Executive Director expressed her confidence that all agreements would be signed by summer.
- Finally, she thanked all Focal Points for their support to EFSA, developing a cooperation of mutual benefit, and wished participants a fruitful meeting.

2 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

The Chair welcomed the participants from 24 Member States as well as from Norway, Switzerland and the European Commission.

The agenda was adopted without comments from participants.

The Chair informed participants that the meeting would be held in English and asked anyone who had a need for translation to give feedback for future meetings.

Participants were asked if they had any items under Any Other Business (AOB). Two items were raised by EFSA, namely: 1. the request to Member States to submit their Strategic Plans to EFSA for information (time frame: 2008-2013) and 2. the request for identification of expert assessors in scientific substantiation of health claims.

Participants were reminded to submit their Declarations of Interest as soon as possible, if not already done.

3 FPs AND THEIR ROLE

Bernhard Berger, Head of the Scientific Cooperation Unit (SCO), stressed the need for scientific cooperation and stated the milestones achieved so far. He continued with a description of Focal Points and their role. He stressed the importance of having one contact person per country, who if unavailable could nominate a second person, either on a permanent or a case-by-case basis. The presentation ended with an introduction to the SCO Unit and the expectations for the 1st Focal Point Meeting.

4 WORK OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

Torben Nilsson, Team Leader Advisory Forum of the Scientific Committee & Advisory Forum Unit, gave a presentation on the work of the Advisory Forum in relation to Focal Points. The composition and role of the Advisory Forum was introduced, as well as its work programme.

He explained that the work of the Focal Points is to support the Advisory Forum members and to facilitate the cooperation and networking at national level, with EFSA and other Member States. He reiterated that the role of the Advisory Forum, which deals with strategic decisions, differs from the Focal Points' tasks, which focus on operational issues.

5 INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPANTS (TOUR DE TABLE)

A tour de table was held during which each participant briefly introduced him-/herself. The participants stated their names and professional background. They further introduced the institutions/agencies they worked at and where the Focal Point was located. In addition, they explained how risk assessment, risk management and risk communication were being carried out in their countries. Finally, they gave an overview of their plans for the Focal

Point work. Participants appreciated the opportunity to share their experiences gained from the first organised activities and ideas on planned activities.

6 EFSA'S SCIENTIFIC DIRECTORATES

The two Science Directorates of EFSA were briefly introduced by the respective Directors. Hubert Deluyker presented the work of the Scientific Cooperation and Assistance Directorate (SCA), how it supported scientific cooperation with the Member States, and gave examples on data collection activities and risk assessment support. Riitta Maijala briefly introduced the work of the Risk Assessment Directorate (RA) and the nine Panels. She stated the goals of risk assessment and showed a schematic work flow, from a question for an EFSA opinion, received from the European Commission, the European Parliament or Member States, to its adoption and publication.

7 EXPECTATIONS OF FOCAL POINTS FROM THE SCIENTIFIC DIRECTORATES

A discussion was held on what Focal Points expected from EFSA's Scientific Directorates and *vice versa*. Issues raised included:

- Information on EFSA's work and activities: Advice to visit the EFSA website for further information.
- Membership of EFSA's Scientific Panels and Working Groups: EFSA has nine Scientific Panels and the Scientific Committee. Currently there was an open call for scientific experts following the decision to replace the current Food additives, flavourings, processing aids and materials in contact with food (AFC) Panel with 2 new Panels (one dealing with food additives and nutrient sources and the other with food contact materials, enzymes, flavourings and processing aids). One expert can only be a member of one Scientific Panel; but participation in several Working Groups is possible. EFSA Scientific Panels have a maximum of 21 members; the Scientific Committee is composed of the Panel's Chairpersons plus six independent scientists.
- Role of Focal Points: Focal Point tasks, as agreed by the Advisory Forum, were of a facilitating nature, i.e. to assist the Advisory Forum member. Regarding the selection of experts for ESCO Working Groups, Focal Points should actively disseminate formalised calls in their countries which they receive from EFSA. Focal Points stated that they would like to receive feedback on expert nominations.
- Expert database: such an expert database was being developed by EFSA to support both EFSA and MS in identifying experts with a defined expertise.
- Parallel networks: Focal Points would not interfere with existing scientific networks. A list of existing expert networks was made available to participants as a tabled document.

8 EFSA'S RISK COMMUNICATION

Anne-Laure Gassin, EFSA's Director of Communications, introduced the work and remit of the Communications Directorate. She presented EFSA's role in risk communication, emphasising aspects to be taken into account, such as risk perception and consumer understanding. She explained who EFSA communicates with, as well as EFSA's key communication tools and outputs. She also touched upon cooperation with Member States through the Advisory Forum Communications Working Group.

In the following discussion, it was suggested that EFSA could set up links to national Focal Point websites and/or web pages once these have been established and *vice versa* and to work with Focal Points in developing guidance or guidelines as to how best to communicate online the purpose, role and activities of Focal Points at national level, as well as their relation both with EFSA and with Advisory Forum members.

9 DATABASE OF SCIENTIFIC EXPERTS

Sérgio Potier Rodeia gave an introduction to the database of scientific experts, which is currently being developed. The first part included the objectives, what had been done to date and future steps. The second part presented the current prototype of the database, showing the application form, main and sub-fields of competence, and search tools.

The following discussion raised questions on eligibility criteria for experts to be included in the database, the role of the Focal Points with regard to the database, and who the users of the database would be.

The advice of the ESCO Working Group in December 2007 was to have a flexible approach for the inclusion of experts in the database, allowing it to be populated as well and as fast as possible. Nevertheless criteria for inclusion/exclusion of experts had been defined through incorporation of mandatory fields for input. Feedback from national experience in the development and use of expert databases was encouraged.

With regard to the expert database, Focal Points would have an active role in testing the database during the pilot phase and enrolling participants from their Member States once formally launched. When EFSA sends a link to the database to the Focal Points, these would forward it to relevant experts at national level, encouraging them to input their data.

In addition to EFSA, Focal Points and Advisory Forum members were the foreseen end users of the database.

10 SESSION ON TASKS OF THE FOCAL POINTS

10.1 INFORMATION SESSIONS

The Chair briefly introduced the information sessions on the agenda as a means of giving further background information for the planned break-out group discussions.

10.1.1 PRESENTATION FROM IRELAND

The Irish representative gave a short presentation on their activities as national Focal Point, sharing their first experiences. To enhance efficient information exchange, the Irish Focal Point was developing and maintaining parts of the FSAI¹ extranet (the “*Safety Net*”). Sections accessible to the Focal Point group included news items, shared files, working documents and a photo gallery. In the context of EFSA’s 5 Year Anniversary, the FSAI included a supplement to the November/December edition of the FSAI newsletter explaining EFSA’s role and key achievements to date. To facilitate contact with the Irish Focal Point, an e-mail address was created, which had also been advertised in the FSAI newsletter.

The Netherlands made a document available to the participants on the establishment of their national Focal Point. It describes the position and role of the Focal Point in The Netherlands.

10.1.2 WORK UNDER ARTICLE 36

Ilias Papatryfon introduced the implementation of the Article 36 cooperation and networking, including the establishment and revision of the Article 36 list and the Article 36 grants. An overview of calls for proposals (2007 and 2008) was presented.

It was emphasised that the Focal Points would be the link between organisations on this list and EFSA. In this context they should overlook and coordinate the updating of the list for the organisations in their respective Member States.

Focal Points would be informed, as early as possible, once the procedure was launched to allow new nominations for the Article 36 list. They would then have an important role to stimulate application of appropriate organisations.

10.1.3 EXCHANGE OF SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION

Carola Sondermann gave a presentation on the exchange of scientific information. As first step an Exchange Information Platform on the Extranet was proposed. At a later stage this might lead to a scientific bulletin, reaching the scientific community in Europe and beyond. To help develop this process it was proposed to set up a Task Force with Focal Points.

10.2 INTRODUCTION TO GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The Chair pointed out that the presentations were intended to give background information and ideas for the break-out groups and beyond.

¹ Food Safety Authority of Ireland

Kerstin Gross-Helmert explained the procedure of creating the break-out groups. Emphasis was placed on getting a ‘balanced’ distribution of participants within the groups, *i.e.* representatives from countries of different sizes, ‘older’ and ‘newer’ Member States, and countries from eastern, northern, western and southern Europe.

10.3 BREAK-OUT GROUPS

In the break-out groups, participants discussed the tasks of FPs as set out in the agreements and possible ways and tools to fulfil these tasks:

Group 1: Exchange of information

Group 2: Cooperation through Article 36 and Experts Database

Group 3: Networking and raising visibility

10.4 SUMMARY OF BREAK-OUT GROUPS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

A rapporteur (Focal Point participant) of each group presented a summary and the conclusions of the group discussions.

Group 1: Exchange of information

The group agreed that a Task Force would be useful to give recommendations of how best to organise the exchange of scientific information through the Focal Points. An “Exchange Information Platform” on the Extranet was seen as a good tool to exchange scientific information. It was pointed out that notifications of newly uploaded documents should be possible.

The group further discussed the tasks listed in the signed contracts and compiled comments and suggestions.

Group 2: Cooperation through Article 36 and Experts Database

Focal Points were seen as an interface between EFSA and the “Article 36 organisations” at national level, especially regarding motivation of organisations to apply (once the respective procedure had been launched), maintenance and updating of the list, and providing ideas of scientific activities to be undertaken under the Article 36 work-programme. Further, Focal Points could provide feedback on the expert database during the testing phase and after its launching, as well as assist EFSA in populating the database.

A table was presented, giving ideas and recommendations on how to carry out the tasks listed in the signed contracts.

Group 3: Networking and raising visibility

Different ways of disseminating materials within EFSA's remit were discussed, including the internet, the Extranet, seminars and colloquia. Concerns were raised regarding translation of information and a general information overload. It was recognised that underlining the importance of food safety risk assessment and raising the visibility of national authorities goes hand-in-hand with raising the visibility of EFSA and *vice versa*. Focal Points could play an important role in supporting Advisory Forum members in national outreach. The Information Exchange Platform was seen as a good tool to help organise and coordinate the exchange of scientific information. It was further discussed that Focal Points provide an interface between EFSA and national level stakeholders and should therefore inform stakeholders of public consultations. The group's remarks and recommendations were summarised in a table.

The Chair suggested, and agreement was reached in plenary, that the SCO Unit would work on the summary of the break-out groups and disseminate it to the Focal Points for comments.

11 REPORTING ON FOCAL POINT ACTIVITIES AND FINANCIAL ISSUES

Alexandrine Maviel-Sonet, EFSA's Director of Administration, gave a presentation on reporting and financial issues of the Focal Point agreements. A standard template for reporting would be provided to the Focal Points. The importance of the reporting itself and the timing was emphasised.

Regarding the reporting of financial resources, only relevant points in the template would need to be filled in. It was emphasised that while the total cost of work of the Focal Points could be higher than the lump sum received, EFSA could only pay as a maximum the amount specified in the agreement.

EFSA was intending to report on the Focal Point activities to the Advisory Forum in November. To be able to prepare and distribute this report to Advisory Forum members in time, Focal Points were asked to send their reports to EFSA's SCO Unit by 1st of October at the latest.

12 EXTERNAL/INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

Victoria Villamar, Acting Head of External and International Relations, gave an overview of EFSA's relationships and activities with external bodies/institutions, including:

- EU institutions, *i.e.* the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of Ministers;
- EU/International partners, e.g. EU Agencies, International Organizations with a similar remit as EFSA (e.g. FAO, WHO, OECD) and third countries; and last but not least
- Stakeholders, e.g. consumer organisations, industry and Non-Governmental Organizations.

13 FUTURE MEETINGS

Further Focal Point meetings in 2008 were planned for 4-5 June and 10-11 September. The dates were still provisional and Kerstin Gross-Helmert reminded the participants never to book tickets before they receive the formal invitation to a meeting.

14 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Participants were notified that the Advisory Forum had agreed to exchange strategic Work Plans (time frame 2008-2013), which was most appreciated by EFSA. The SCO Unit would send out an e-mail message with information. The Advisory Forum had already agreed to place these strategic Work Plans on the Extranet to be shared between Member States and EFSA.

Participants were also informed that a request for expert assessors for health claims was sent out. Focal Points were asked for advice on names of experts in their countries.

CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

The Chair closed the meeting and thanked all participants for their active contributions. He stressed that the SCO Unit was committed to cooperate with the Focal Points and was available to support them in their work.