

SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION UNIT

Parma, 25 August 2008
EFSA/FP/M/2008/018/PUB

Minutes
SECOND MEETING BETWEEN FOCAL POINTS AND EFSA
PARMA (ITALY), 4-5 JUNE 2008

Participants

Chair: Bernhard Berger

Austria	<i>Johann Steinwider</i>	Lithuania	<i>Vaiva Briedyte</i>
Belgium	<i>Maxime Didat</i>	Luxembourg	<i>Nathalie Welschbillig</i>
Bulgaria	<i>Teri Vrabcheva</i>	Malta	<i>Ingrid Busuttil</i>
Cyprus	<i>Eleni Kakouri</i>	Netherlands	<i>Hubert Noteborn</i>
Czech Republic	<i>Miroslav Elckner</i>	Poland	<i>Barbara Jaworska</i>
Estonia	<i>Piret Priisalu</i>	Poland	<i>Piotr Holownia</i>
Finland	<i>Kirsti Savela</i>	Portugal	<i>Manuel Barreto Dias</i>
France	<i>Philippe Prigent</i>	Romania	<i>Simona Sirbu</i>
Germany	<i>Karin Schlesier</i>	Slovakia	<i>Marica Theiszová</i>
Greece	<i>Stamatina Louka</i>	Slovenia	<i>Ada Hocevar</i>
Hungary	<i>Judit Sali</i>	Slovenia	<i>Blaza Nahtigal</i>
Ireland	<i>Anne-Marie Boland</i>	Spain	<i>Cristina Alonso-Andicoberry</i>
Italy	<i>Agostino Macrì</i>	Sweden	<i>Anita Strömberg</i>
Latvia	<i>Aija Kažociņa</i>	United Kingdom	<i>Alisdair Wotherspoon</i>

Observers and Invitees of the Executive Director

Norway	<i>Danica Grahek-Ogden</i>	Switzerland	<i>Judith Beck</i>
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Staff of the European Food Safety Authority

<i>Davide Arcella</i>	<i>Alun Jones</i>
<i>Bernhard Berger</i>	<i>Torben Nilsson</i>
<i>Stef Bronzwear</i>	<i>Saadia Noorani</i>
<i>Christoph Buller</i>	<i>Ilias Papatryfon</i>
<i>Hubert Deluyker</i>	<i>Finn Sheye</i>
<i>Ernesto Guisado Ferrer</i>	<i>Carola Sondermann</i>
<i>Yenny Gamming</i>	<i>Andras Szoradi</i>
<i>Kerstin Gross-Helmert</i>	<i>Karen Talbot</i>

1 WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

Hubert Deluyker, Director of the Scientific Cooperation and Assistance Directorate, welcomed the participants from 26 MS as well as from Norway and Switzerland and opened the second meeting between Focal Points (FPs) and EFSA. In his opening speech Hubert Deluyker highlighted the importance of good collaboration between Member States (MS) and EFSA to further strengthen risk assessment (RA) and risk communications. He stressed that EFSA was well aware of the high work load of FPs, which included work under Article 36, the Expert Database, the exchange of scientific information and raising EFSA's visibility in MS. Given the significance of these issues and the involvement of FPs, he encouraged them to continue their efforts and to establish and maintain well-functioning national networks. He committed EFSA to undertake all efforts and provide full support to successfully bring this idea forward. He thanked the participants for their attendance and wished them a fruitful meeting.

2 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Following a warm welcome, the Chair introduced the draft agenda, indicating that two items had been added to the draft sent to participants in May. The agenda was adopted without comments from participants.

The Chair reported progress on matters arising from the 1st FP meeting:

- The draft minutes of the 1st FP Meeting were distributed after inclusion of comments from participants. The minutes were approved without comments from participants and would be placed on EFSA's webpages. To allow the minutes of the 2nd FP Meeting to be placed on the web before the 3rd Meeting, EFSA would need to receive approval of the draft minutes by at least two thirds of participants in writing.

- The table of FP tasks was circulated to participants. It was re-emphasised that the table was not an officially adopted list. Participants acknowledged that the list was an outcome of the 1st FP Meeting and gave helpful guidance on FP tasks.
- The FP Working Group (WG) on the Information Exchange Platform (IEP) was established, as recommended by participants of the 1st FP Meeting. The WG met for the first time on 23 May 2008.

Participants were asked if they had any items under Any Other Business (AOB). Two items were raised by EFSA, namely: 1. the question whether FPs agreed to share their contact details and 2. the request to Member States to submit their Strategic Plans to EFSA for information (time frame: 2008-2013).

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair introduced the session on Declarations of Interest (DoI) and reminded participants, who had not already done so, to submit their DoIs using the new IT tool as soon as possible. Participants were informed that once their Annual DoIs (ADoIs) were approved, they would receive a request to fill in a Specific DoI (SDoIs). The Chair invited participants to declare any conflicts of interest. None were raised.

Hubert Deluyker explained EFSA's policy on DoIs, emphasising its legal basis, objectives and scope. The principles of interests and conflicts were explained, as well as the processes for ADoIs and SDoIs. He then introduced the new IT tool, describing its implementation and benefits.

Ernesto Guisado Ferrer, IT project manager, then demonstrated the IT tool, giving step-by-step instructions how to use it.

In the following discussion, it was clarified that EFSA would pre-fill the electronic DoIs using the existing paper versions. Experts were being asked to check whether the data was correct and input any missing information.

4 RELEVANT ISSUES FROM THE ADVISORY FORUM MEETING

Torben Nilsson, Team Leader Advisory Forum of the Scientific Committee & Advisory Forum Unit, informed participants of relevant issues from the Advisory Forum (AF) Meeting held on 12-13 April in Rome:

- 1st FP Meeting and related issues: Feedback from the meeting was given to AF Members. The table of FP tasks was agreed upon by AF Members.
- Extranet structure: the AF endorsed the proposed structure, foreseeing one Workspace for the AF and one for Scientific Cooperation with FPs as a sub-community. ESCO WGs are part of the Scientific Cooperation Workspace and FPs can access them.
- AF WG IT: The WG is revising the Term of Reference (ToR) to actively support scientific cooperation work. A page has been created on the Extranet which lists the members of the AF, FPs, AFCWG, IT WG.

- Crisis exercise: the aim of the exercise was to determine how EFSA and MS work together on food safety in the EU.
- AF on Animal Health and AF on Plant Health: The Animal Health meeting took place on 27-28 May 2008 whilst the Plant Health meeting is planned for 8-9 October 2008. Members of both groups would meet on an annual basis, establishing platforms for MS to give guidance to EFSA and for MS to share views and experiences.

5 EXPERT DATABASE

Bernhard Berger, Head of the Scientific Cooperation Unit (SCO), gave a presentation on EFSA's database of scientific expert. As stated in the second part of EFSA's policy on the selection of experts, in future, all external scientific ad-hoc experts will need to be included in the Expert Database (EDB). The EDB was launched on 5 June 2008. A strategy was developed to populate the EDB together with the Communications Directorate. The assistance of FPs is an important part of this strategy, which will contribute to the success of the database.

5.1 PRESENTATION OF IT TOOL

Ernesto Guisado Ferrer demonstrated the IT tools of the EDB. The system is made up of three components, namely:

1. the Expert Application Form on the Internet, which asks for general expert information, institutional information, fields of competence, additional expert information and includes a disclaimer;
2. the External Search Tool on EFSA's Extranet, which can be used by EFSA and the AF Members to search for scientific experts according to their fields of competences, country, language knowledge, etc; and
3. the data storage system on the ESA Intranet.

In the following discussion it was clarified that scientists could choose whether they would like to share their data with MS. It was explained that AF Members could search the data of those experts who would like to provide their expertise at national level.

5.2 POPULATION STRATEGY

Alun Jones, Senior Press Officer, presented the population strategy for the EDB, including its objective and target audiences. While EFSA would send out information at EU-level, the assistance of FPs in promoting the EDB at national level was considered highly important. The strategy to populate the EDB would include the promotion of the EDB in newsletters and on websites of FPs and national authorities, the distribution of letters/e-mail messages to national experts, and the placing of news announcements to specialised national journals and websites, in cooperation with the AFCWG. In accordance, as the EDB was launched, an e-mail message was sent to FPs, containing four attachments (a press announcement, a PowerPoint presentation, Frequently Asked Questions and a banner to be placed on the webpages to provide a direct link to the EDB)

for immediate use in promoting the EDB. FPs were also asked to identify specialised magazines and websites, which were read by potential expert applicants. EFSA media could then contact these sites in cooperation with the MS. It was agreed that FPs would receive an update message with any further promotion materials available, e.g. leaflets or letters for distribution. Alun Jones further informed participants that they would receive a feedback questionnaire before the next FP Meeting regarding promotion activities.

5.3 DISCUSSION

It was explained that two steps had been developed to ensure a high quality of the experts on the EDB:

1. Validation of the input data; and
2. Eligibility criteria, which would determine whether an applicant would be included in the EDB or not.

Applicants would receive feedback.

The search function could then filter out the most appropriate candidates related to the search criteria.

6 UPDATES OF ARTICLE 36

Ilias Papatryfon, Scientific Officer in the SCO Unit, provided an update on:

- the Article 36 list of competent organisations, giving an overview of the Article 36 list and the FP work already underway; and
- the Article 36 Work Programme, showing the number of grants already given, the participating competent organisations from MS, and an update on the status of Article 36 calls for 2008.

It was explained that Article 36 calls are published on the web and an e-mail message is sent to FPs for information. FPs could then encourage organisations to apply and facilitate the process of application. When EFSA receives proposals, they are evaluated and the organisations are notified of the outcome. The process from launch of a call until signature could take several months.

In the following discussion, the issue was raised that the time between the launch of a call and the deadline for application was too short.

7 FOCAL POINT INFORMATION EXCHANGE PLATFORM WORKING GROUP – REPORTING BACK AND DISCUSSION

Kerstin Gross-Helmert, Scientific Officer in the SCO Unit, reported back from the 1st Working Group (WG) Meeting on the Information Exchange Platform (IEP).

A document describing the ToR, the subject and types of documents to be uploaded, and the structure of the platform had been distributed to FP before and was discussed at the

meeting. The ToR of the WG were adopted at the meeting. FPs were asked to send any comments until 20 June 2008.

It was decided at the meeting that all mandatory fields, which together would make up a short introduction for each uploaded document, should be given in English. Inserting keywords would also be made mandatory. Abstract or summaries in English should be included if possible, especially for documents in other languages, but would not be mandatory. It was also suggested to explore the option of a multi-language search engine.

FPs agreed with the proposed nomenclature of documents. The participants further supported the proposed structure of the IEP, set according to the EFSA Panel and Unit structure, which had been recommended by the WG. The IEP would be set up by the SCO Unit until the end of June. This would allow FPs to start uploading documents from July. A message would be sent to FPs informing them accordingly.

The quality of documents uploaded would be ensured through restricting access rights to FPs, AF Members and EFSA. It was further stressed that duplication of work should be avoided, an issue that would need to be taken up when reviewing the use and procedures of the IEP in 6 months. Close cooperation with other groups, such as AF Members and the AFCWG was seen as essential.

The participants also agreed that, at this stage, the IEP should not host confidential documents, including pre-notifications and diverging opinions. The issue of confidentiality would be taken up at the AF.

The WG had agreed to review the IEP and uploading procedures within 6 months.

8 COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES

Karen Talbot, Communication Advisor of the Communications Directorate, reported back to FPs on the AFCWG Meeting in Dublin in April. She informed participants that the AFCWG had created “Communities of Interest”, a network of people interested in certain communications subjects (e.g. websites) such as health claims or cloning.

Yenny Gamming, Web Manager of the Communications Directorate, informed FPs of activities concerning FP webpages. She presented the web tool kit, which had been distributed to FPs. The aim of the tool kit was to give an EU-wide coherent message on FPs, the correct use of the EFSA logo, and correct linking to EFSA and national websites. FPs were asked to inform the Communications Directorate of FP webpages, to allow linking to them from the EFSA website. An example of existing national FP webpages was presented.

Christoph Buller, Head of Public Information and Events Unit of the Communications Directorate, introduced the guidelines for the use of the EFSA logo and photos on the EFSA website. He stressed that the logo could only be used with written consent from EFSA and explained the criteria for assessment. A guideline document on the use of the logo was available and an updated version would be circulated to FPs shortly.

9 FOCAL POINT EVENTS AT NATIONAL LEVEL

The FPs of Finland, Malta, Germany and Cyprus gave presentations on events and activities they organised at national level. These included the organisation of kick-off meetings and presentations about FP's and EFSA's work, the launching of FP webpages as well as the publication of newspaper articles, booklets and leaflets. Examples of newspaper articles, a newsletter and a leaflet were shared with the FPs.

In the following discussion FPs expressed their interest in organising a session to exchange experiences on successes and difficulties of practical FP work. It was suggested to schedule such a session at the next FP Meeting in September.

The Chair pointed out that EFSA would be happy to join national events on invitation whenever SCO colleagues or EFSA staff were available.

10 BREAK-OUT SESSION

Stef Bronzwaer, Deputy Head of the SCO Unit, introduced the topic of break-out group 1: Workshops in MS on Food Safety Evaluation at EU level. The aim of the workshops would be to stimulate scientists in MS to participate in EFSA's Panels to reach a balance of involved MS. Thus, EFSA would offer support to MS to increase EFSA's visibility in and explain EFSA's work and procedures to the scientific community.

Carola Sondermann, Senior Scientific Officer of the SCO Unit, presented the topic of break-out group 2: Scientific subjects of interest to MS. The objective of the group was to brainstorm on scientific subjects of interest to MS for short-term planning of upcoming scientific projects and events regarding:

- Article 36
- Information Exchange Platform
- Scientific Colloquia

Break-out group 1

As EFSA has relevant experience on similar workshops in non-EU countries through the PHARE Programme, the break-out group welcomed the participation by Finn Sheye of the Legal and Policy Affairs Unit who shared his experiences. The key outcome from the discussion was as follows:

- The focus of the workshops should be on newer MS from which fewer experts were currently Members in EFSA Panels;
- The following hindrances to participate in EFSA's work were recognised: time pressure and work load of experts, difficulty for experts to be released from their home institutions and reimbursement issues for home institutions; language was considered a minor hindrance;
- The workshops should target scientists directly as well as and their home institutions;
- Three approaches were suggested of holding the workshops: 1) To give general information on EFSA, describing its work and the application procedures; 2) To

choose a specific topic/issue; and 3) to combine the two approaches. The preferred approach would depend on the countries and their needs;

- Panel expert(s) and/or their home institutions could be invited to the workshops to share their experiences and report on the benefits received from taking part in Panel activities;
- Representatives from institutions could share their experiences on how they stimulate their scientists to apply to EFSA Panels and which solutions they have found for arising problems;
- It would be possible to cluster MS, i.e. for experts from several MS to attend workshops together, supporting regional cooperation between MS
- Resource limitations of EFSA were indicated with regard to the organisation of the workshops.
- The most critical issue could be to ensure that the actual target audience would participate in the workshop. It would be the pivotal role of the concerned Focal Points to attract and select appropriate scientists and/or their home institutions.

The SCO Unit would work with relevant FPs to develop the programme and identify key experts for the workshops.

Break-out group 2

First, a brainstorming session took place to gather ideas of scientific subjects of interest to MS. The collected subjects were then grouped into broader areas of interest. The participants discussed how the listed subjects would best be dealt with, i.e. whether they should be addressed under Article 36, as a Colloquium or on the IEP. While subjects were allocated either to Article 36 or Colloquia, it was agreed that all mentioned subjects should be included in the IEP.

The participants shared the view that this exercise should not be a one-off activity, but should present the start of a transparent process for collecting such information.

It was noted that EFSA was already working in the mentioned areas. It was agreed that the SCO Unit would prepare a synthesis/list of the subjects proposed in the break-out group. This list should also include publications and events related to the mentioned subjects in order to inform the FPs about upcoming and performed activities by EFSA. The list would be circulated to the FPs by the 20 June 2008.

11 QUESTIONNAIRE FOR HARMONISED RISK ASSESSMENT ESCO WG

Stef Bronzwaer informed participants on the progress of the ESCO WG on Harmonisation of Risk Assessment (RA) Approaches. The WG's aim is to remove discrepancies between RA approaches used in different MS to increase transparency and trust amongst MS in the various risk assessment procedures. The WG developed a questionnaire focusing on process-related aspects of RA, asking FPs: 1) to answer part 1 of the questionnaire (organisation of RA within the country) and 2) to answer part 2

(procedural aspects of RA for each organisation) for their own organisation/institution and to forward part 2 to the main organisations/institutions dealing with RA at national level. FPs were asked to consolidate the answers for each area. Deadline for part 1 was set for 20 June 2008, to enable the ESCO WG to discuss results at its next meeting. Part 2 should be sent back as soon as possible and not later than 31 August 2008, since the WG would need to report back to the AF by the end of the year.

12 LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE STRUCTURE & ORGANISATION OF FPs IN MS

Alisdair Wotherspoon, FP of the UK, proposed to compile a table of FP contact details, the authority worked for, the structure and organisation of this authority, and the FP work. Participants agreed to input the information by the next FP Meeting in September. The document would be available on the Extranet.

13 INFORMATION ON ORGANISATIONS WITH EXISTING NATIONAL FOOD CONSUMPTION DATA

Davide Arcella, Scientific Officer of the Data Collection and Exposure Unit, explained the need for reliable and detailed food consumption data for EFSA's RA work. EFSA would financially support the work needed to make available disaggregated data from national food consumption surveys at the level of the individual consumer. It was clarified that the data would remain the property of the successful applicant and would only be used for RA conducted by EFSA, not by other MS. Participants were also informed that this project would be presented at the next AF meeting.

14 QUESTIONNAIRE ON BEES

The Chair gave feedback to participants on the current stage of the questionnaire on bee mortality and bee surveillance in Europe. The French Agency for Food Safety (AFSSA) had requested data and the developed questionnaire was sent to FPs in April 2008. The Chair thanked FPs for their involvement and informed the participants that EFSA acknowledged and thanked all MS that submitted their questionnaires and additional information on this subject. To that date, 20 MS had provided answers. All other MS would still have the opportunity to send answers by the end of June 2008, when the final report was expected to be published on EFSA's website.

15 FUTURE MEETINGS

The 3rd FP Meeting was tentatively planned for 10-11 September 2008. Assuming that the FP agreements would be extended, provisional dates for meetings in 2009, were proposed for 3-4 February, 13-14 May and 9-10 September. It was suggested that the meeting in May could be held at another venue than Parma. Offers from FPs to host the

meeting were welcomed. Participants were reminded never to book tickets before receipt of the formal invitation to a meeting.

16 AOB

FPs were reminded to submit their Strategic Plans to EFSA for information. It was agreed to make a space available on the IEP for FPs to upload the plans directly.

FPs agreed to circulate their contact details amongst themselves and to share their e-mail addresses (corporate, if available) with EFSA and third parties.

FPs were reminded that they could still nominate alternates.

Interest was expressed to learn more about the timing of opinions in MS. The SCO Unit offered to forward the request to all FPs.

17 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 FPs and was available to support them in their work.