



## European Food Safety Authority

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### EFSA OSTEND COLLOQUE: OUTCOME AND PROPOSED FOLLOW-UP ACTION

#### Introduction

1. As agreed by the Management Board, EFSA held a “colloque” with its stakeholders at Ostend on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> October. Stakeholders were invited from the Scientific Committee and Panels, from the European consumer organisations and the food industry. Invitations were extended to stakeholders from the new Member States as well as to established EU countries and related sectors. A full list of those attending is at Annex I and the programme for the event at Annex II.

2. A fuller account of the proceedings is currently being drafted and will be circulated to the Management Board, the Advisory Forum and the participants as well as made publicly available on the EFSA website. The following indicate the main outcomes and recommendation from the Colloque:

#### Openness and Transparency : Board Meetings.

3. EFSA currently meets its regulatory requirement to meet in public by webstreaming its proceedings. This has the advantage of allowing the proceedings to be followed irrespective of the geographic location of the viewer and is also the only way this requirement can be met at the Borschette Centre which does not have the facilities to admit the public.

4. In his initial speech, Mr. Jim Murray, Director of BEUC, expressed the hope that EFSA would allow interested parties to physically attend its meetings. EFSA is also aware that Brussels based followers of the webstream have indicated that they too would find it easier to follow the proceedings in this way. It is therefore suggested that starting in January (and including the Dublin meeting in June 2004) the Board should agree to arrangements to allow interested parties, who have notified EFSA in advance of a desire to attend Management Board meetings, to do so. It is proposed that webstreaming should continue at present to allow for viewers to follow the Board even if not based in Brussels. This will entail many Board meetings moving to a commercial venue in Brussels (the rue de Genève 10 facilities cannot accommodate the Board given the need for translation facilities) and will entail an additional cost for meetings of approximately €17,000 per meeting. It is suggested that this arrangement should be reviewed by the Board after a year's experience of its operation.

Openness and Transparency: Risk Assessment

5. It is the essential characteristic of EFSA's Scientific Opinions that they are independent (including of the Member States) and that the internal discussion which leads to their formulation remain private whereas of course the final view reached, including any minority view of the members of the Committee or Panel must be made public.

6. Within this framework it is desirable to give all interested parties (including Member States) the opportunity to bring relevant matters to the attention of the Scientific Committee or Panels. EFSA already provides the mechanism for this as the Work Programmes are available on the EFSA website and the role of the Scientific Coordinator of each group is to bring such material to the attention of Scientific Committee/Panel members. There was however support at the Colloque for also holding public hearings to enable views to be put to the Scientific Committee/Panel before a decision was taken on a given question. There are clearly significant resource commitments involved and it would not be necessary or practical to make this a prerequisite of all opinions. However, there are clear advantages in such a procedure when there are substantial scientific differences of view on controversial issues and time allows for them to be publicly presented in this way. It is therefore recommended that the Scientific Committee/Panels should be invited to make use of this approach where they consider these criteria are met and the public interest would seem to justify such action.

7. A further option for additional openness in the risk assessment process is for opinions to be circulated in draft so as to allow all interested parties to submit comments on the tentative conclusions. This can be a very useful way of stimulating constructive comment and allowing the strength of argument to be tested. It is in general not suitable in cases where an opinion essentially has a significant impact on a product already being sold within the EU where a definitive opinion is likely to be needed by the risk manager. Again it is suggested that the Scientific Committee/Panels should be encouraged by the EFSA Management Board, in circumstances where they believe it will improve the quality of decision taking, to consider such stakeholder involvement. It is suggested that the value of these two proposals, if accepted, be reviewed by the EFSA Management Board after one year.

Scope of EFSA Risk Assessments

8. There was very strong support at the Colloque from all three groups of stakeholders for EFSA's risk assessments to tackle broad themes as well as important but more narrowly focused issues. Consumer organisations are understandably concerned that risk should be looked at in aggregate (e.g. multiple sources of chemical exposure) rather than in isolation and all stakeholders wanted to help the public situate any individual risk in a broader context.

9. This outcome is in line with the existing Management Board decision to reserve part of its capacity to "auto-saisine" this kind of topic and the ongoing identification of

such issues by the Scientific Committee and Panels. The EFSA Management Board is invited to continue this approach in determining the 2004 Work Programme and any subsequent in-year revision of priorities that reflect changed circumstances.

Stakeholder involvements in risk communication

10. The risk communication exercise undertaken at the Ostend Colloque reinforced the benefit of stakeholder involvement in the preparation of EFSA risk communications. Such participation needs however to reflect certain realities:

- (i) The object is not to influence the opinions of the Scientific Committee/Panels which must remain independent;
- (ii) The preparation of risk communications inherently requires confidentiality to be observed until the communication is issued. Otherwise there is a considerable danger of causing unjustified or disproportionate media reporting;
- (iii) Outside stakeholder involvement must not be at the expense of national authorities. EFSA has already accepted, in the context of the Advisory Forum discussion of semicarbazide, the need, as resources become available, to have more capacity for information exchanges with Member States.

11. Subject to the constraints outlined above, which it should not be difficult to meet in practice, EFSA would very much welcome the contribution that both consumer and scientific colleagues could make to improving communication on sensitive issues to better meet consumer needs and reflect reality in the food chain. Subject to EFSA Management Board agreement, we therefore propose to form such ad hoc groups where there seems a need and the outcome will no doubt be considered by the Management Board when it reflects on EFSA's performance in relation to particular issues.

Keeping in touch with Stakeholders

12. It was strongly felt by all attending the Ostend Colloque, including not least EFSA staff, that the momentum achieved for mutual support and co-operation required some form of further regular interaction. The proposal is to set up a non-regulatory advisory committee meeting a few times a year to obtain both feedback on EFSA's performance and positive suggestions for the future as well as opportunities for mutually beneficial co-operation between EFSA and its stakeholders. If the Board is content with this, we will bring forward more detailed proposals.

13. Finally there was a strong feeling that stakeholders wished to be more proactively advised of EFSA's activities. A regular "e-zine" (in e-mail communication) was suggested by EFSA staff as it will also be a useful mechanism for keeping in touch other groups with a strong interest in EFSA (eg interested MEPs). If this proposal is agreed, EFSA would propose to issue a monthly e-zine commencing in March 2004. In the context of future development of its web site, EFSA will also introduce an email notification of "What's New at the Authority" which will allow stakeholders and other recipients to be updated on new initiatives in a timely manner.

Recommendations

14. The Management Board is invited to decide that:
- (i) in addition to webstreaming, interested observers should, given advance notice, be allowed to attend Board meetings;
  - (ii) the chairman of the Scientific Committee and Panels should be asked to employ, as appropriate, additional procedures (eg public hearings, evaluations of reports in draft);
  - (iii) EFSA staff should involve stakeholders, where appropriate, in the risk communication process on the basis set out above;
  - (iv) progress on (i), (ii) and (iii) should be reviewed by the Management Board after one year;
  - (v) it should continue its policy of providing adequate space in the Work Programmes to allow for the consideration of wider scientific issues;
  - (vi) the Executive Director should bring forward proposals, after discussion with interested parties, for an EFSA stakeholders consultative forum; and
  - (vii) an EFSA e-zine be issued from March 2004 to proactively publicize our activities.

**EFSA COLLOQUE**  
**ANDROMEDA HOTEL IN OSTEND**  
***“Involving our Stakeholders”***  
***23 October to 25 October 2003***

**PROGRAMME\***

**DAY 1                      23 October 2003**

14.00	<b><i>Registration</i></b>
15.00	Opening plenary <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Welcoming address</b> - Stuart Slorach, Chair of the EFSA Management Board.</li><li>• <b>“What consumers expect from EFSA”</b> – Jim Murray, Director, BEUC</li></ul> Questions and answers
16.15	<b><i>Break for coffee/tea</i></b>
16.30 – 18.30	Briefing for breakout session  <b>Workshop 1:</b> Identify ways of opening up the risk assessment process  <b>Workshop 2:</b> How can stakeholders alert EFSA to issues of particular concern to the public?  Plenary presentation and discussion of breakout findings. 15 minutes per group (including discussion).
19.30	<b><i>Dinner</i></b>

*\* simultaneous interpretation in French and English is foreseen for all sessions*

**DAY 2**            **24 October 2003**

08.00	<b><i>Breakfast buffet</i></b>
09.00	Welcome from the Chair  <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Deirdre Hutton</b>, Chair of the National Consumer Council UK and Vice Chair of the EFSA Management Board</li><li>• <b>Roland Vaxelaire</b>, President and CEO of Carrefour Belgium and Member of the EFSA Management Board</li></ul> Questions and answers in panel discussion
10.15	<b><i>Break for coffee/tea</i></b>
10.30	Briefing for breakout session <b>Workshop 3:</b> How can ongoing interaction and communication be managed between EFSA and its stakeholders? <b>Workshop 4:</b> How can stakeholders be involved in risk communication?  Plenary presentation and discussion of breakout findings. 15 minutes per group (including discussion).
12.30	<b><i>Lunch</i></b>
13.30 – 14.45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Introduction to the simulation and organisation of the groupings</b></li><li>• <b>Launch of the simulation.</b></li></ul>
14.45	<b><i>Break for coffee/tea</i></b>
15.00 – 17.30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Continuation of the simulation</b></li></ul>
17.30 - 18.30	Plenary presentation and discussion of breakout findings.
19.30	<b><i>Dinner</i></b>

**DAY 3**            **25 October 2003**

08.00	<b><i>Breakfast buffet</i></b>
09.00	Opening plenary

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Report back from working groups with conclusions</b></li><li>• <b>Agree recommendations to go to the EFSA Management Board</b></li></ul> <p><b>CLOSING: Geoffrey Podger, Executive Director EFSA</b></p>
11.30	<i>Break for coffee/tea</i>

Annex II

**EFSA COLLOQUE**  
**ANDROMEDA HOTEL IN OSTEND**  
***“Involving our Stakeholders”***  
***23 October to 25 October 2003***

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