

SCIENTIFIC PANEL ON BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS

MINUTES OF THE 147th PLENARY MEETING

**Held on 7 and 8 July 2021, web-conference
(Agreed on 23 July 2021)**

Participants

■ **Panel Members:**

Ana Allende, Avelino Alvarez-Ordóñez, Declan Bolton, Sara Bover-Cid, Marianne Chemaly, Robert Davies, Alessandra De Cesare, Lieve Herman, Friederike Hilbert, Konstantinos Koutsoumanis, Roland Lindqvist, Maarten Nauta, Giuseppe Ru, Luisa Peixe, Marion Simmons, Panagiotis Skandamis, Elisabetta Suffredini

■ **Hearing Experts¹:**

Not applicable

■ **European Commission (EC) and/or Member States representatives:**

Luis Vivas-Alegre (EC, DG Health and Food Safety, Unit D1)

Jean-Baptiste Perrin (EC, DG Health and Food Safety, Unit G4; for items 8.5 and 8.6)

■ **EFSA:**

▪ **BIOCONTAM Unit:**

Pierre-Alexandre Beloeil, Lorena Corredor, Maria Teresa Da Silva Felicio, Nikolaos Giannoulis, Beatriz Guerra, Michaela Hempen, Maria Francesca Iulietto, Ernesto Liébana, Winy Messens, Stefania Musella, Denise Pezzutto, Angel Ortiz-Peláez, Valentina Rizzi, Eleonora Sarno, Pietro Stella

▪ **ED Office:**

Pilar Garcia Vello (for item 8.3)

■ **Observers:**

Not applicable

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

No apologies were received.

2. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

¹ As defined in Article 17 of the Decision of the Executive Director concerning the selection of members of the Scientific Committee, the Scientific Panels, and the selection of external experts to assist EFSA with its scientific work:
<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/keydocs/docs/expertselection.pdf>.

3. Declarations of Interest

In accordance with EFSA's Policy on Independence² and the Decision of the Executive Director on Competing Interest Management³, EFSA screened the Annual Declarations of Interest filled out by the Panel members invited to the present meeting. No Conflicts of Interest related to the issues discussed in this meeting have been identified during the screening process, and no interests were declared orally by the members at the beginning of the meeting.

4. Agreement of the minutes of the 146th Plenary meeting held on 3 and 4 June 2021, web-conference

The minutes of the 146th Plenary meeting were agreed by written procedure on 18 June 2021.

5. Election of Chair and Vice-chairs of the BIOHAZ Panel for 2021-2024

Election of the BIOHAZ Panel Chair and two Vice-chairs were carried out according to the Decision of the EFSA Management Board concerning the establishment and operations of the Scientific Committee, Scientific Panels and of their Working Groups⁴.

Kostas Koutsoumanis was elected as BIOHAZ Panel Chair. Ana Allende and Lieve Herman were elected as BIOHAZ Panel Vice-chairs.

6. Review of all Panel Working Groups

The Panel confirmed the need for the following existing Working Groups⁵ (<https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/science/scientific-committee-and-panels/biohaz#working-groups>) in order to assist the Panel in undertaking all necessary preparatory tasks in relation to draft scientific outputs falling under its remit:

- Working Group on AMR and GP feed residues, with no update of its composition, including chairmanship;
- Working Group on applications for alternative methods of use or disposal of animal by-products or derived products, with no update of its composition, including chairmanship;
- Working Group on microbiological safety of aged meat, with no update of its composition, including chairmanship;
- Working Group on organic fertilisers endpoint, with no update of its composition, including chairmanship;
- Working Group on high pressure processing of food, with no update of its composition, including chairmanship;
- Working Group on the update of the list of QPS recommended biological agents intentionally added to food or feed as notified to EFSA (2020-22), with no update of its composition, including chairmanship.

² https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/policy_independence.pdf

³ https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/competing_interest_management_17.pdf

⁴ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-02/expertselection.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/science/scientific-committee-and-panels/biohaz#working-groups>

7. Scientific outputs submitted for possible adoption or endorsement

No scientific outputs were submitted for possible adoption or endorsement.

8. Scientific outputs submitted for discussion⁶

8.1. Statement on the update of the list of QPS-recommended biological agents intentionally added to food or feed as notified to EFSA. 15: Suitability of taxonomic units notified to EFSA until September 2021

The WG chair informed the Panel that a new notification will be assessed for QPS: *Haematococcus pluvialis*. The extensive literature search for reviewing the QPS list was discussed and new search terms added reflecting recent taxonomic changes. The changes will also be implemented in the next update of the QPS list. The draft statement will be presented to the BIOHAZ Panel for possible adoption in December 2021.

8.2. Scientific opinion on the update of the list of QPS-recommended biological agents intentionally added to food or feed as notified to EFSA

The WG Chair informed the Panel about the progress on the draft opinion. The chapter on opportunistic infections requires further contributions from the WG. It was also agreed that the data on notifications will be analysed by risk assessment area to report any trends over the last years. It was suggested to publish the QPS list on EFSA's Knowledge Junction as xls and csv file only instead of pdf and text. The draft opinion will be presented to the BIOHAZ Panel for possible adoption in December 2022.

8.3. Scientific opinion on specific maximum levels of cross-contamination for 24 antimicrobial active substances in non-target feed

The WG Chair informed the Panel about the updates on the draft opinion documents (Part 1 Methodology, data gaps and general uncertainties; Part 2-13, the different assessments grouping the substances included in the mandate by classes), which were presented to the BIOHAZ Panel for thorough reading. In the Part 1, those updates involved mainly the section on the interpretation of Terms of reference, some new text included to address comments received from the European Medicines Agency (EMA) Committee for Medicinal Products for Veterinary Use (CVMP), conclusions and recommendations. Regarding the developments of the ToR1-AMR assessments (to assess the specific concentrations of antimicrobials, resulting from cross-contamination in non-target feed for food-producing animals, below which there would not be an effect on the emergence of and/or selection for resistance to microbial agents relevant for human and animal health), those for quinolones (flumequine and oxolinic acid), sulphonamides, as well as updated tetracyclines (tetracycline, oxytetracycline, chlortetracycline and doxycycline) and trimethoprim, were presented. The conclusions and recommendations of the assessments were discussed. Those parts of the draft opinion(s) under the remit of the AHAZ Panel were endorsed by the AHAZ Panel's plenary meeting of 23 June. The assessments of ToR2 (growth promotion/increase of yield) for six remaining substances (apramycin and neomycin, chlortetracycline and oxytetracycline, colistin and tylosin), as well as uncertainties, conclusions and recommendations, will be discussed at the FEEDAP Panel's plenary meeting of 7 September for possible endorsement. The EMA CVMP was updated on the current developments of the draft opinion at their meeting on 14 June, following the BIOHAZ Plenary. The 13 scientific opinions will be published in a virtual issue of the EFSA Journal. The deadline for adoption delivery of the scientific opinion(s) is 30 September 2021.

⁶ Please be aware that EFSA's Register of Questions is unavailable from 21 January until March. The temporary suspension of the tool is necessary to allow us to implement the launch of our new OpenEFSA portal. We apologise for the inconvenience. Further information is available [here](#)

8.4. Scientific opinion on the capacity of certain specific processing transformation methods of animal by-products used in the production of organic fertilisers and soil improvers in view of determining the endpoints in the manufacturing chain of certain derived products

The WG Chair presented the draft opinion for first reading. The WG Chair thanked Panel members for the comments received. Most of them have been addressed in the version presented during the plenary, will be discussed with the WG in the next meeting or were discussed during the plenary. A selection of the comments made by the WG Chair were discussed, and suggestions by Panel members were made, like the presentation of the thermal inactivation data in tabular and graphical formats and the use of data points in which no reduction of the initial load of the indicator microorganisms is available. There were questions and concerns on how to disentangle the efficacy of the chemical treatment when appear combined with thermal treatment. The WG member, in charge of the expert knowledge elicitation (EKE) exercise to elucidate the final answer to the ToR and the uncertainty analysis, reported the training conducted in the last WG meeting and presented the calendar of activities, with the most important the 8th WG meeting on 20 August 2021 where the individual judgments will be presented and a facilitator (hearing expert Andy Hart) will lead the discussion to reach consensus for 52 data points. The individual subjective probabilities will be produced by the 9 participants (7 WG members and 2 EFSA staff members) between 14 July 2021 and 16 August 2021. The Chair of the Panel welcomed the approach and suggested to use the format of the training to WG members as a standard practice in BIOHAZ opinions. The 9th and last WG meeting will take place on 28 September 2021. The deadline for adoption of the scientific opinion is 31 October 2021.

8.5. Scientific opinion on the efficacy and safety of high pressure processing of food

The last WG meeting took place on 28-30 June 2021. The sections dealing with food contact materials have been endorsed by the CEP Panel at their 6-7 July plenary meeting (*dealing with assessment question AQ5 "What are the potential chemical food safety concerns through food contact materials (FCM) in HPP-treated food compared to untreated food or food submitted to treatments, routinely applied to these foods with the purpose to increase microbiological food safety?"*). The sections dealing with food processing contaminants are scheduled for endorsement at the CONTAM plenary meeting on 13-15 July 2021 (*dealing with AQ4 "What are the potential chemical food safety concerns through formation of process contaminants in HPP-treated food compared to untreated food or food submitted to treatments, routinely applied to these foods with the purpose to increase microbiological food safety?"*). Several sections dealing with ToR2 (to assess the efficacy of HPP when applied to raw milk and raw colostrum from ruminants) were presented for information to the BIOHAZ panel and discussed; more specifically the data and methodologies, assessment and conclusions related to sub-questions SQ12-17. The next WG meeting related to BIOHAZ issues will be held on 22-23 September 2021. The deadline for adoption is 31 January 2022.

8.6. Scientific opinion on the microbiological safety of aged meat

The WG chair updated the panel on the progress since the last WG meeting on 17 June 2021. During that meeting the ToRs were clarified with EC. With regard to animal species, beef is to be considered for dry ageing and beef, pork and lamb for wet-ageing. Meat ageing done at private homes is excluded from the assessment. The end point of the assessment is the end of shelf-life. The draft protocol was discussed, defining assessment questions and sub-questions, and the approach and methods to answer those. It was agreed to develop a questionnaire to gather information on meat aging practices. The next WG meeting is planned on 21 September 2021. The deadline for adoption of this opinion is 31 December 2022.

8.7. Scientific opinion on the evaluation of safety and efficacy of lactic acid to reduce microbiological contamination on carcasses from wild game and small stock

The Panel was informed that the additional information from the applicant was received on 1 July 2021. The initial deadline to deliver the Scientific Opinion (10 December 2021) has been extended to 17 April 2022. The next WG meeting to discuss the ToR2 (on the efficacy i.e. does the use of this substance significantly reduce the level of contamination of pathogens on carcasses from wild game and small stock aforementioned) and ToR3 (on the potential emergence of reduced susceptibility to biocides and/or resistance to therapeutic antimicrobials linked to the use of the substance) is scheduled for 15 July 2021.

9. New Mandates

9.1. Selftask on microbiological hazards associated with the use of water in post-harvest handling and processing operations of fresh and frozen fruits, vegetables and herbs

The charter for this mandate has been updated and approved by EFSA's project Coordination Office (PCO) and by EFSA's Science Council Taskforce (SCTF). The Panel agreed to establish an ad hoc WG will for this mandate and the Panel members were asked to provide any relevant suggestions for external experts for this WG. Ana Allende was nominated as Chair of the ad hoc WG which will be established for this mandate (conditional to screening and approval of her declaration of interests). A call for tender for outsourcing activities associated to this mandate will be launched and advertised by the appropriate channels in autumn. This tender aims to generate data and collect information that is relevant for the assessment questions of this mandate. The duration of these activities will be 24 months that should be integrated and concluded during the life of this mandate, i.e. 3 years. The deadline for adoption of this opinion is 30 September 2024.

9.2. European Parliament request for a scientific opinion on the transmission of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and zoonotic agents during animals transports

A new mandate was received from the European Parliament (EP) for a scientific opinion related to the spread of AMR during the transport of live animals. In particular, the EP asked EFSA to provide advice on the most significant risk factors contributing to the spread of foodborne zoonotic and indicator AMR bacteria during short (< 8 hours) and long (> 8 hours) journeys directed to other farms or slaughterhouses, to provide advice on preventive and control measures to reduce the probability of spread of such bacteria, and to identify the current data gaps and research needs to support the analysis of the correlation between risk factors and the spread of AMR bacteria during transport. Knowledge of those data gaps would be able to inform future more detailed risk assessments. EFSA Secretariat reported to the Panel the exchanges of view with the European Parliament prior to the reception of the mandate and informed the Panel of the ongoing negotiation with respect to the deadline for delivery of the scientific opinion.

10. Feedback from the Scientific Committee/Scientific Panels, EFSA, the European Commission

10.1. Scientific Committee

The 104th Plenary meeting of the Scientific Committee (SC) took place on 30 June and 1 July 2021⁷. The Panel Chair reported that no topics of specific interest for the BIOHAZ Panel were discussed at such meeting.

10.2. European Commission

Luis Vivas-Alegre (EC, DG SANTE) informed the Panel that the date for the EFSA training workshop 'Degree of certainty in scientific advice: implications for risk management and communication' was fixed for 22-23 November, and that EC is currently providing feedback to EFSA in relation to the EFSA outputs to be selected as case-studies for the training. He also indicated that the SANTE-EFSA mid-term planning exercise aiming at defining the future needs of SANTE in terms of scientific advice from EFSA is currently ongoing. The exercise should be finalised together with EFSA by September 2021.

11. Other scientific topics for information and/or discussion

11.1. Implementation of the guidance on uncertainty analysis in scientific assessments

Panel member Maarten Nauta provided feedback to the Panel in relation to the training on EKE he delivered to the WG on Organic fertilisers endpoint during its last WG meeting (see also agenda item 8.4).

11.2. Topics of scientific concern in the area of biological hazards and BIOHAZ self-tasks

The Panel and Secretariat presented and discussed a first set of ideas gathered since the previous plenary meeting on topics for possible future self-task mandates in the area of biological hazards. It was agreed to continue collecting ideas from the Panel and EFSA staff until mid-August 2021, after which the Secretariat will circulate a questionnaire aimed at gathering views of the Panel on the prioritisation of such topics in view of a new discussion at the next Plenary meeting. The Secretariat will also share those topics with SANTE colleagues to gather their preliminary input on the importance and urgency of the topics from the risk manager's point of view.

12. Any other business

EFSA Secretariat presented to the Panel the key findings reported in the Third joint inter-agency report on integrated analysis of consumption of antimicrobial agents and occurrence of antimicrobial resistance in bacteria from humans and food-producing animals in the EU/EEA, related to years 2016-2018. The report was jointly produced by ECDC, EMA and EFSA and published on 30 June 2021.

EFSA Secretariat informed the Panel on the "Pathogens in foods database and web application (PIF)". France presented it at the 80th Advisory Forum meeting on 9-10 June 2021 and it was considered by EFSA and the participants as an important project to be supported. The database was developed through a joint project by the Polytechnic Institute of Braganza (IPB, Portugal) and ANSES (France). It is a dynamic database, containing prevalence and enumeration data of

⁷ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/it/events/event/104th-plenary-meeting-scientific-committee-open-observers>

pathogens in food categories useful for (quantitative) microbiological RA, extracted from published peer reviewed articles.

EFSA Secretariat reminded the Panel that physical Plenary and Working Group meetings will not take place at least until the end of 2021. The Panel discussed what would be the most efficient proportion of physical vs. web meetings in the future for panel plenary meetings, agreeing that it would be important that about half of the meetings would be held physically, to allow a more open interaction and more effective discussions between participants, especially at the moment of adoption of scientific outputs by the Panel. The Panel indicated that retaining the possibility to organise physical meetings would be particularly important for WG meetings and when new expert groups would be formed.