



Communication, Engagement and Cooperation Department

Stakeholder Engagement

8th Meeting of the EFSA Stakeholder Bureau

Virtual Meeting, 16 March 2021

Introduction

The eight meeting of the Stakeholder Bureau, that took place on 16 March 2021 as a virtual meeting was an opportunity to get an update on the framing of the EFSA Strategy 2027, on the progress with the implementation of the Transparency Regulation and to exchange views on evolution and sustainability of EFSA's ecosystem including partnership and stakeholder engagement. In addition, the Bureau was informed on the progress with the blueprint of the stakeholder engagement stemming from the Transparency Regulation, and the preparations for the Stakeholder Forum 2021. Finally, the Bureau was updated on the upcoming communication and engagement highlights, EFSA's technical assistance to support to the General Plan on the Risk Communication and ongoing communication campaigns.

In his welcome address, the Chair of the Bureau, Bernhard Url, the Executive Director of EFSA stressed that the entry into application of the Transparency Regulation involves a substantial transformation of the way EFSA operates. The main principles and drivers behind this change are captured in the objectives of the EFSA Strategy 2027. Bernhard Url pointed out that the engagement with third parties plays a pivotal role in ensuring the achievement of the new strategic objectives and in meeting the requirements of the evolved policy framework. EFSA wants to provide the highest quality of science, be prepared for the future, stay relevant and ensure a resilient risk assessment model.

Raymond O'Rourke, Chair of the Management Board welcomed the Bureau and share the Management Board's views on shaping the EFSA Strategy 2027 and thanked the Bureau members for their valuable input provided during the horizon scanning workshops and invited them to contribute additionally via the public consultation.

Raymond O'Rourke said that the stakeholder engagement has always been close to his heart and that he was happy to be able to personally support EFSA in its commitment toward enhanced engagement with the public and its stakeholders. For what concerns the EFSA Strategy circle, he shared with the Bureau that EFSA and the Management Board continued to work on the Strategy definition process focusing on the assessment of how the changing context will impact the EU's policy, operational and financial environment and therefore EFSA's 2027 Strategy. EFSA performed a Changing Context Analysis that allowed to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the 2027 draft strategic and operational objectives but also to plan EFSA's possible contribution to the European Green Deal and other policy documents.

The Management Board held a workshop on January 28-29 to discuss "what" EFSA should achieve under the three 2027 Strategic Objectives, including defining the value to be delivered to the broader society, to EFSA's target audiences and at the level of its products and services. A public consultation of the draft strategy will be conducted in April after the endorsement of the new version while the final adoption of the 2027 Strategy is foreseen in June 2021.

The evolution of EFSA's ecosystem

Bernhard Url introduced the ecosystem concept and shared views on how the implementation of the Transparency Regulation would change the way EFSA works and bring more openness and engagement. Bernhard Url stressed that EFSA operates in a complex ecosystem of different actors whose common denominator is EU food/feed safety. Despite this commonality, roles, interests, and even the degree of involvement of the various ecosystem players differ significantly. Through informing, consulting, involving, collaborating with and empowering each other, we all stay connected and exchange the 'nutrients' (data, information, methods) that make our ecosystem flourish.

EFSA engages with stakeholders and partners to stay relevant. EFSA operates at the interface of policy, science, and society, and all these three dimensions are evolving. Staying relevant means being able to deliver value (today and in the future) by meeting the requirements of policymakers in a timely and effective manner, and by detecting the evolving societal concerns.

Staying relevant in an evolving world means being prepared for the challenges ahead and this is not something that EFSA can do in isolation. We need our stakeholders to be part of this dialogue not only to provide data or insights, but also to make sense of the signals we detect.

Involvement of stakeholders is also key to ensure the quality of EFSA scientific work and EFSA welcomes the opportunities brought by the Transparency Regulation, because by opening up the risk assessment process to public scrutiny and external input, the outcome of this process is owned collectively by all the parties involved.

Apart from relevance, preparedness and quality of science, another dimension that is of paramount importance to EFSA is sustainability. EFSA's scientific advice must be faster, more standardised, more comprehensive, reusable, inclusive and intelligible. We must find smart solutions to ensure the sustainability of the EU food/feed safety system, and these solutions are collective, not individual.

Jose Julio Ortega, the representative of Academia category in the Bureau recalled of the importance of continuous investment in the new generation of researchers and risk assessors to ensure the sustainability of the European food safety system.

Maud Perrudin, Member of the Bureau representing the Industry category stressed the importance of the impact that COVID pandemic has on stakeholder engagement. Despite a continuous effort to engage with stakeholders in a virtual way, Maud Perrudin expressed concerns in the efficiency of the on-line engagement.

For what concerns EFSA's vision on partnership, Bernhard Url mentioned that to stay relevant we need to leverage the potential of our ecosystem, gain access to the evidence and knowledge that will be needed to address scientific questions of increasing complexity and meet the corresponding societal expectations. In this evolutionary process, we see the development of Partnerships of increasing impact, primarily with EU Member State risk assessment bodies and organisations and EU Agencies, as essential. The full potential of the ecosystem will only be reached when we manage to have meaningful engagement with our stakeholders.

With regards to the implementation of the Transparency Regulation, Bernhard Url said that EFSA remains committed to ensuring that all stakeholders affected by the Transparency Regulation are well informed and prepared for the entry into application of the new processes. To achieve this objective, EFSA has been deploying significant resources to run a comprehensive training plan to ensure that the stakeholders mainly affected by these new processes are brought up to speed. The plan, which is currently being rolled out, features more than 10 video tutorials on the new tools and a number of webinars on the new processes. So far, EFSA hosted two webinars reaching out to over 1200 participants, and more events will follow.

Unprecedented amounts of data will be made publicly accessible, allowing for even greater public scrutiny of the risk assessment process. EFSA is developing innovative and user-friendly digital platforms, tools, and procedures to make EU risk assessment more transparent, accessible and efficient. The new rules are intended to help EFSA deliver more transparent, better informed science that supports public health and confidence in the food safety system.

Pekka Pesonen, representative of the Farmer category stressed the importance of transparency but noted that the innovativeness the competitiveness of the European SMEs sector should not be forgotten.

Bernhard Url recalled that following the conclusion of the main implementation phase, EFSA will continue its stakeholder engagement on the Transparency Regulation through the fora foreseen by the Stakeholder Engagement Approach (SEA), where stakeholders will continue to be kept closely informed about the continuation of the implementation of the Transparency Regulation pillars on sustainability and governance, as well as risk communication.

Els Bedert, the Bureau member representing Distributer category called for more coordination with the EU Member States to achieve a harmonized risk assessment approach across Europe.

The evolution of stakeholder engagement

Cinzia Percivaldi, Engagement & External Relations Officer, Engagement and Cooperation Unit and Tobin Robinson, Head of Scientific Committee and Emerging Risks Unit updated the Bureau on the progress with the blueprint of the stakeholder engagement stemming from the Transparency Regulation, and on the progress so far and implementation of solutions stemming from the preparedness workshop.

The recommendations from the stakeholder community (Stakeholder Forum 2019) and the new regulatory framework have informed EFSA's reflections on how to evolve the way of engagement with stakeholders to ensure relevance, the quality of scientific outputs, and EFSA's preparedness for the challenges ahead. Based on these drivers – stakeholder recommendations and the strategic directions stemming from the new regulatory framework – EFSA has redesigned the stakeholder engagement approach to ensure its relevance in the years to come.

The input collected from stakeholders at the three co-design workshops (January – April – June 2021) focusing on each of the three streams of the new framework (preparedness, stakeholder dialogue, quality of science), will be used to fine-tune EFSA's engagement blueprint and get back to stakeholders with a final product at the next Stakeholder Forum to close the feedback loop and validate collectively the future way of working together.

The preparedness stream aims at detecting and prioritising issues not yet covered by an existing mandate to get prepared for the challenges of the future and stay relevant for policymakers and society.

The solutions to stakeholder demands based on the input collected at the workshop in January can be summarized in the following recommendations;

- The setup of a digital community platform for registered stakeholders to collect input on new or emerging issues requiring EFSA's preparedness,;
- Provide timely info and regular feedback available one click away in the digital community platform to enhance dialogue and traceability of information;
- Enable a public channel to collect signals from beyond EFSA's stakeholder community;
- Establish regular workshops with stakeholders to analyse the input and signals collected through the above tools and prioritize issues together.

The series of workshops continues with the digital platform workshop in April 2021 and the workshop on the quality of science in June 2021. The results of workshops will be presented to the Bureau at the next meeting in October. Finally, the Stakeholder Forum, to take place in November 2021 will be an occasion to discuss the outcome of the co-design workshops and validate the evolved engagement framework stemming from them. EFSA would appreciate the support of the Bureau in fine-tuning of the programme and steering the event.

Upcoming engagement and communication activities

Barbara Gallani, Head of Communication, Engagement and Cooperation Department provided an overview of upcoming communication and engagement highlights, EFSA's technical assistance to support to the General Plan on the Risk Communication and ongoing communication campaigns.

EFSA's communication priority topics in 2021 covers the Transparency Regulation with main messages on the changes in the regulatory framework with focus on participatory processes, and proactive release of data - full openness of scientific information to the public and responding to citizens' needs. For what concerns the Bee health topic, EFSA will focus its communication on the review of the guidance on risk assessment of pesticides and bees, the authorisation of neonicotinoids and the systems-based approach to the environmental risk assessment of multiple stressors in honey bees. The priority topic on sustainable and healthy food covers topics such as edible insects, dietary guidelines (e.g. safety of sugar), new mandate on nutrient profiling, and the history of recycling processes.

When it comes to chemicals in food, EFSA's focus will be put on a coordinated communication with Member States on titanium dioxide (TiO₂), BPA and endocrine disruptors as well as the combined exposure to multiple chemicals. Finally, the fifth priority topic will be the animal health and welfare covering the African Swine Fever mini campaign and animal welfare.

Encouraging Europeans to make confident food choices by explaining the critical role played by science in food safety is at the core of EFSA's new EU Choose Safe Food campaign. The campaign aims to raise awareness about the science behind our food and tell the story of the scientists who work to make sure it's safe. Its overall goal is to encourage citizens to think critically about their everyday food choices. The campaign promotes awareness to the target audience (citizens aged 25-45, with an extra focus on women and young parents) across Europe and with a particular focus this year on nine EU countries (Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain).

Ayla Gulden Pekcan, the Bureau member representing the Practitioner category express interest in the EUSafeFoodChoice campaign and offered support in its promotion via the network of associations of dietitians.

The European Commission has asked EFSA to support the development of the General Plan for Risk Communication by providing insights from social research and mapping existing risk communication structures and best practice by food safety authorities across the EU. The Transparency Regulation introduced new provisions calling for an integrated framework for risk communication by EU food safety risk assessors and risk managers at Union and national level. The package of four reports is developed jointly by EFSA, academic experts and partner organisations in the Member States.

The Science Studies and Project Identification and Development Office - SPIDO has a role in supporting EFSA's preparedness for future risk assessment requirements (including communication science) and help to prevent possible divergences on sensitive matters in selected scientific themes while fostering connectivity and partnerships with European as well as international and third countries organisations. SPIDO has established a process for identifying and prioritising scientific themes and developing their related roadmaps for action. In the context of developing a multi annual plan for future themes (2022 and beyond) EFSA will be outsourcing an activity through a procurement to perform a horizon scanning exercise and solicit feedback from relevant audiences including the SH Bureau on a number of proposed themes that could be potentially developed in the future. The awarded contractor might approach some of the Bureau members (depending on the theme and its relevance within your line of work) around May-July and EFSA would greatly appreciate if the Bureau could support this activity.

General remarks and next steps

Bernhard Url recalled that EFSA will continue to exchange information with the Stakeholder Bureau members and looks forward to an active participation and interaction over the coming months, particularly in view of the implementation of Transparency Regulation, framing of the Strategy 2027 and the upcoming stakeholder events.

The Chair thanked the Stakeholder Bureau members for their contributions, in particular within the Sounding Board for the implementation of the Transparency Regulation, for the open discussion and their valuable feedback which has allowed EFSA to further improve the new tools and processes.

Bernhard Url recalled that EFSA will continue providing a dedicated Transparency Regulation training programme to help stakeholders better understand and prepare for the new arrangements.

He encouraged stakeholders to continue consulting the relevant EFSA webpage where a range of supporting materials such as animated tutorials and information about ongoing training sessions is regularly updated.

The next meeting of the Stakeholder Bureau will take place in October 2021.

Table 1. Follow up actions

	Follow up action	When
1.	Keep the Bureau informed on the development of the SPIDO project	Continuous
2.	Keep the Bureau informed on the progress with EFSA communication campaigns	Continuous

Annex 1. Draft Agenda

Time	No.	Topic	Scope	Presenter
09.30-09.35	1	Welcome by the Chair	Welcoming the participants and presenting the outline of the 8th meeting of the Stakeholder Bureau.	Bernhard Url Executive Director, EFSA
09.35-09.45	2	Welcome by the Chair of EFSA's Management Board	Welcoming the Bureau and sharing the Management Board views on ongoing EFSA initiatives; shaping the EFSA Strategy 2027	Raymond O'Rourke Chair of EFSA's Management Board
09.45-10.45	3	Exchange of views with the Bureau on the evolution of EFSA's ecosystem	Brief update on the implementation of the Transparency Regulation. Exchange of views on evolution and sustainability of EFSA' ecosystem including partnership and stakeholder engagement.	Bernhard Url Executive Director, EFSA
10.45-10.55		<i>Coffee break</i>		
10.55-11.30	5	The evolution of stakeholder engagement	Update on the progress with the blueprint of the stakeholder engagement stemming from the TR. Exchange of views with the Bureau on the progress so far and implementation of solutions stemming from the preparedness workshop. Getting ready for the Stakeholder Forum 2021.	Cinzia Percivaldi Engagement & External Relations Officer, Engagement and Cooperation Unit (ENCO) Tobin Robinson Head of Scientific Committee and Emerging Risks Unit (SCER)
11.30-11.50	3	Upcoming engagement and communication activities	Provide an overview of upcoming communication, scientific and engagement activities (events, public consultations, call for data, support to the Communication plan, progress with SPIDO project).	Barbara Gallani Head of Communication, Engagement and Cooperation Department, COMCO, EFSA
11.50-12.00	6	Closing remarks	Thanking the participants for the discussion and feedback and briefly outlining next steps	Bernhard Url Executive Director, EFSA
12.00		<i>End of the meeting</i>		

Annex 2. Participants list

Stakeholder Representatives

	Stakeholder Category	Stakeholder Organisation	Name and Surname
1.	Consumers	SAFE Food Advocacy	Floriana Cimmarusti
2.	NGOs and Advocacy Groups	Pan Europe	Martin Dermine
3.	Farmers and Primary Producers	COPA-COGECA	Pekka Pesonen (1st part) Bruno Menne (2nd part of the meeting)
4.	Business and Food Industry	Association of the European Self-Medication Industry	Maud Perrudin
5.	Distributors and HORECA	Euro Commerce	Els Bedert
6.	Practitioners	European Federation of Associations of Dietitians	Ayla Gulden Pekcan
7.	Academia	SETAC	Jose Julio Ortega

EFSA's Representatives

1.	Raymond O'Rourke	Chair of the Management Board
2.	Bernhard Url	Executive Director
3.	Marta Hugas	Chief Scientist
4.	Barbara Gallani	Head of Communication, Engagement and Cooperation Department, COMCO
5.	Tobin Robinson	Head of Scientific Committee and Emerging Risk Unit, SCER
6.	Victoria Villamar	Head of Unit, Engagement and Cooperation, ENCO
7.	Matthew Ramon	Team Leader, External Engagement, ENCO
8.	Cinzia Percivaldi	Engagement & External Relations Officer, ENCO
9.	Goran Kumric	Engagement & External Relations Officer, ENCO
10.	Max Blank	Engagement & External Relations Officer, ENCO

European Commission Representatives – Observers

1.	Anastasia Alvizou	Deputy Head of Unit, D1, DG SANTE, European Commission
2.	Alexandra Tuijtelaars	Policy Officer, D1, DG SANTE,
3.	Fatima Darago	Policy Assistant, D1, DG SANTE