

SCIENTIFIC PANEL ON BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS

MINUTES OF THE 149th PLENARY MEETING

**Held on 20 and 21 October 2021, web-conference
(Agreed on 9 November 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; for items 7.1, 8.1, 8.2, 11.2)

Matjaz Klemencic (EC, DG Health and Food Safety, Unit G2; for item 7.1)

■ EFSA:

■ BIOCONTAM Unit:

Bianca Bottoni, Lorena Corredor, Maria Teresa Da Silva Felicio, Nikolaos Giannoulis, Beatriz Guerra, Michaela Hempen, Maria Francesca Iulietto, Ernesto Liébana, Winy Messens, Angel Ortiz-Peláez, Denise Pezzutto, Valentina Rizzi, Pietro Stella

■ FIP Unit:

Carla Martino (for item 14.1)

■ SCER Unit:

Georgia Gkrintzali (20 October)

■ Observers:

Fabio Agnolon, Leonie Boller, Laura Carreras, Estelle Chaix, Jessica Fitch, Laetitia Fourie, Stefanie Geiser, Valérie Goldfain, Andreas Loi-Brügger, Chiara Manoli, Thomas Mannheim, Elena Marullo, Eva Munter, Irene Sobrado, Kristen Sukalac, Stéphanie Tiprez, Betul Vazgecer (attending part or whole plenary)

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>.

Open session

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

No apologies were received.

2. Brief introduction of Panel members to observers

The BIOHAZ Panel members and EFSA staff briefly introduced themselves to the observers.

3. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

4. 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. Certain interests were declared orally by the members before the beginning of the meeting. For further details on the outcome of the screening of the Oral Declaration(s) of Interest made at the beginning of the meeting, please refer to the Annex.

5. Presentation of the EFSA Guidelines for Observers

EFSA BIOHAZ Secretariat introduced the EFSA Guidelines for observers, including the rules for attending the meeting, and explained when in the agenda specific slots for answering questions from the observers have been placed.

6. Agreement of the minutes of the 148th Plenary meeting held on 15 and 16 September 2021, web-conference

The minutes of the 148th Plenary meeting were agreed by written procedure on 5 October 2021.

7. Scientific outputs submitted for possible adoption or endorsement

7.1. 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 last meeting of the WG took place on 28 September by web-conference. The WG Chair presented the draft opinion for possible adoption, focusing in particular on the changes implemented since the last Panel meeting. The WG chair thanked the Panel members for the comments received; most of them had been addressed in the version presented during the

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

plenary or were discussed during the meeting. Following discussions, some changes were implemented and abstract, summary, conclusions and recommendations were discussed and revised to reach an agreement on the final version. Finally, the Panel proceeded with the adoption of the scientific opinion.

8. Scientific outputs submitted for discussion

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, of the 72 microorganisms notified to EFSA between April and September 2021, seven notifications, corresponding to six Tus, were evaluated: *Paenibacillus lentus* was re-assessed because an update was requested for the current mandate. *Enterococcus lactis*, *Chlamydomonas reinhardtii*, *Haematococcus pluvialis*, *Schizochytrium mangrovei* and *Schizochytrium aggregatum* were assessed for the first time. In the period covered by this statement, no new information was found that would change the status of previously recommended QPS Tus. 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 agreed to include in the draft opinion a general description of the taxonomy and naming convention on algae and protists and to include a summary table on notifications received over the last three opinion by risk assessment area. The draft opinion will be presented to the BIOHAZ Panel for possible adoption in December 2022.

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

The last WG meeting was held on 4 October 2021. The WG Chair presented the draft Scientific Opinion for first reading and the most important comments raised by the Panel members were discussed. The Panel agreed that there is no need to express the overall uncertainty for term of reference 1a (ToR1a) and ToR1b based on the formulation of the ToRs. For the other ToRs they informed that both concluding remarks and conclusions can have uncertainty included, but keeping in the conclusions only the essential parts. The next WG meeting related to BIOHAZ issues will be held on 16-17 November 2021. The deadline for adoption is 31 January 2022.

8.4. Scientific opinion on the microbiological safety of aged meat

The WG chair updated the Panel on the progress. A questionnaire on meat aging practices was distributed the EU associations representing FBOs engaged in meat aging. The draft modelling approach for ToRs 3 and 4 was discussed. The Panel agreed that the starting point for the assessment is at the stage of primal and sub-primal cuts and the end point is the end of aging process. The impact of trimming in the case of dry aging will be described but is excluded from the model as the uncertainty about its effect is too large. The inclusion of inactivation and competition with spoilage bacteria still needs further discussion. A more detailed approach for the modelling will be presented at the December panel meeting. The deadline for adoption of this opinion is 31 December 2022.

8.5. Self-task 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 last WG meeting took place on 12 October 2021. The WG Chair updated the Panel about the interpretation of the ToRs of the self-task mandate that has been discussed with the WG. She presented to the Panel also the preliminary work that has been done on the protocol development, namely the translation of the ToRs into assessment questions (AQs) and sub-

questions (ASQs). The WG has also reviewed the tender specifications for the tender that will be launched as a work package of this mandate. These tender specifications will be finalised internally and are expected to be published by the end of October 2021. The aim is to have submitted offers evaluated by January 2022 so that the outsourcing activities can start in February-March 2022. The next WG meeting is on 26 October 2021. The deadline for adoption of this opinion is 30 September 2024.

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

Luisa Peixe (Chair of the WG, conditional to the approval of her declaration of interests) and EFSA Secretariat presented the mandate and updated the Panel on the progress of setting up the *ad hoc* WG (BIOHAZ and AHAW Panel members and external experts). The first meeting of the WG is foreseen in November. The Panel was informed that an update on the progress of the current EFSA mandates related to animal transport (the present mandate on AMR, as well as additional mandates related to animal welfare assigned to the AHAW Panel) would be given by the Heads of BIOCONTAM and ALPHA Units, respectively, to the ANIT Committee of the European Parliament on 25 October 2021. The deadline for adoption of this opinion is 30 September 2022.

9. New Mandates

No new mandates have been received.

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

10.1. Scientific Committee

The 105th Plenary meeting of the Scientific Committee (SC) took place on 22 and 23 September 2021⁴. The Panel Chair reported that no topics of specific interest for the BIOHAZ Panel were discussed at such meeting.

10.2. European Commission

No discussions took place under this agenda item.

10.3. Update on Rapid Outbreak Assessments and related activities

The latest EFSA-ECDC Rapid Outbreak Assessment on a "Multi-country outbreak of multiple *Salmonella enterica* serotypes linked to imported sesame-based products" was presented. The report was published on 14 October 2021. The epidemiological and microbiological investigations from both the human and food sectors, and the traceability of the presumptive vehicle of infections were illustrated together with the joint European WGS clustering analysis and assessment on the outbreak.

11. Other scientific topics for information and/or discussion

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

The BIOHAZ Panel chair briefly indicated to the observers EFSA's and BIOHAZ' approach to uncertainty analysis in scientific assessments. Panel member Maarten Nauta reported about his recent presentation to the SCER cross-cutting WG on Uncertainty about the EKE performed

⁴ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/it/events/event/105th-plenary-meeting-scientific-committee>

in the framework of the opinion on organic fertilisers and soil improvers (see agenda item 7.1). More detailed discussions on uncertainty analysis in the specific draft opinions took place under agenda items 7 and 8.

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

Following the results of the ranking exercise on ideas for possible future self-tasks, discussed at the previous plenary meeting, EFSA Secretariat and the European Commission presented the feedback gathered from European Commission colleagues (DG SANTE and DG AGRI). Based on the views expressed by all parties, the Panel decided to select the topic related to the persistence of hazards in food processing environments as the most relevant and important topic on which a self-task should be initiated. Other topics could be explored in the future. EFSA Secretariat, in collaboration with Panel members, will develop further the draft background and terms of reference for the self-task mandate, which will be presented in the next plenaries and will then be submitted to the internal EFSA procedure for its possible approval.

12. Answers to questions from observers

During the plenary meeting, observers posed questions in relation to the mandates discussed. BIOHAZ Panel members and EFSA staff provided answers in relation to topics in the remit of EFSA and European Commission representatives provided answers in relation to risk managements topics. EFSA Secretariat invited all observers to provide further possible questions after the meeting through the AsKEFSA Service on the EFSA website.

13. Any other business

No AOB were discussed during the Open session of the Plenary meeting.

Closed session

14. Scientific outputs submitted for discussion

14.1. 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 last WG meeting was held on 6 October 2021. The WG chair presented the sections of the draft Scientific Opinion dealing with the conditions of use and mode of application as provided by the applicant, and the sections dealing with the assessment of ToR2 (on the efficacy i.e. on whether 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). The next WG meeting, mainly to further discuss the answers to ToR 3, is scheduled for 18 November 2021.

15. Any other business

EFSA Secretariat updated the Panel on the finalisation of a scientific paper based on the past BIOHAZ scientific opinion on the update and review of control options for *Campylobacter* in broilers at primary production, adopted in 2020.

EFSA Secretariat asked the Panel whether they would be in favour of resuming a certain proportion of physical plenaries in 2022, depending on the evolution of the situation and on EFSA decisions in terms of physical meetings with experts at EFSA. The Panel was overall in favour.

Annex

Interests and actions resulting from the Oral Declaration of Interest done at the beginning of the meeting

With regard to this meeting, Dr. Avelino Alvarez-Ordóñez, since the assessment of his last submitted Declaration of Interests could not be finalised before the meeting, declared the following interest: involvement, since September 2021, in a research project titled "Assessment of neglected sources and routes of transmission of antimicrobial resistance along the meat production chain and the environment beyond", funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of Spain. In accordance with EFSA's Policy on Independence⁵ and the Decision of the Executive Director on Competing Interest Management⁶, and taking into account the specific matters discussed at the meeting in question, the interest above was not deemed to represent a Conflict of Interest for the expert concerned.

⁵ http://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/policy_independence.pdf

⁶ http://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/competing_interest_management_17.pdf