

SCIENTIFIC PANEL ON BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS

MINUTES OF THE 150th PLENARY MEETING

**Held on 8 and 9 December 2021, web-conference
(Agreed on 22 December 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:

Olga Goulaki (EC, DG Health and Food Safety, Unit E1; for item 8.2)

Jean-Baptiste Perrin (EC, DG Health and Food Safety, Unit G4; for items 6.2, 6.6, 9.1)

Eric Thévenard (EC, DG Health and Food Safety, Unit G4; for item 8.2)

Wolfgang Trunk (EC, DG Health and Food Safety, Unit E5; for item 8.2)

Luis Vivas-Alegre (EC, DG Health and Food Safety, Unit D1; 8 December)

■ EFSA:

■ BIOCONTAM Unit:

Bianca Bottoni, Frank Boelaert, Sandra Correia, Maria Teresa Da Silva Felicio, Beatriz Guerra, Michaela Hempen, Maria Francesca Iulietto, Ernesto Liébana, Winy Messens, Angel Ortiz-Peláez, Valentina Rizzi, Pietro Stella

■ FIP Unit:

Carla Martino (for item 6.6)

■ SCER Unit:

Georgia Gkrintzali

■ Observers:

Not applicable

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>.

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

No apologies were received.

2. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

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 this meeting.

4. Agreement of the minutes of the 149th Plenary meeting held on 20 and 21 October 2021, web-conference

The minutes of the 149th Plenary meeting were agreed by written procedure on 9 November 2021.

5. Scientific outputs submitted for possible adoption or endorsement

5.1. 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 QPS list was updated in relation to the revised taxonomy of the genus *Bacillus*, to synonyms of yeast species and for the qualifications 'absence of resistance to antimycotics' and 'only for production purposes'. In the period covered by this statement, no new information was found that would change the status of previously recommended QPS taxonomic units (TU)s. Of the 72 microorganisms notified to EFSA, 65 were not evaluated: 11 filamentous fungi, 1 oomycete, 1 *Clostridium butyricum*, 1 *Enterococcus faecium*, 5 *Escherichia coli*, 1 *Streptomyces* sp., 1 *Bacillus nakamurai* and 44 TUs that already had a QPS status. Seven notifications, corresponding to 6 TUs were evaluated: *Paenibacillus lentus* was re-assessed because an update was requested for the current mandate. *Enterococcus lactis* synonym *Enterococcus xinjiangensis*, *Aurantiochytrium mangrovei* synonym *Schizochytrium mangrovei*, *Schizochytrium aggregatum*, *Chlamydomonas reinhardtii* synonym *Chlamydomonas smithii*, and *Haematococcus lacustris* synonym *Haematococcus pluvialis* were assessed for the first time. The Panel Statement 15 was adopted.

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

6. Scientific outputs submitted for discussion

6.1. 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.

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

The last WG meeting was held on 16-17 November 2021. The WG Chair presented the draft Scientific Opinion for thorough reading and many comments raised by the Panel members were discussed during the meeting and addressed. A major comment was to reconsider the assessment related to the recommendation of the minimum requirements of the HPP for the control of relevant pathogens to achieve an equivalent efficacy to that of thermal pasteurisation. Currently, the conclusions on equivalent conditions are restricted to the most resistant pathogen identified (*Staphylococcus aureus*) and it was suggested to broaden the scope by including also the other pathogens. The Panel further stressed the need to shorten the scientific opinion overall, in particular the conclusions. The next WG meeting related to BIOHAZ issues will be held on 11 January 2022. The deadline for adoption is 31 January 2022.

6.3. 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 food business operators engaged in meat aging but only few replies were received. The draft modelling approach for ToRs 3 and 4 was presented in detail and the approach was agreed after discussion. It is foreseen to use a stepwise approach. In a first step, a growth/no growth interphase model could be used to identify relevant pathogens for different scenarios. In another step, the growth of relevant pathogens during the aging process would be estimated. The outcome is described as log increase. The deadline for adoption of this opinion is 31 December 2022.

6.4. 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 25 November 2021. The WG Chair updated the Panel about the progress of work made with the WG on the protocol development. The panel provided comments on the current draft protocol. These will be discussed with the WG during the next WG meetings and the protocol is expected to be finalised/approved by the BIOHAZ Panel, at the latest by March 2022. The call for the tender associated as a work package of this mandate has been launched and the deadline for submission of offers is on 13 December. Evaluation of the submitted offers will take place during January 2022 so that the activities of a successful contractor can start in February/March 2022. The next WG meeting is on 14/15 December 2021. The deadline for adoption of this opinion is 30 September 2024.

6.5. 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) and EFSA Secretariat presented the composition of the *ad hoc* WG (BIOHAZ and AHAW Panel members and external experts) and updated the Panel on the discussions (mainly interpretation of terms of reference) that took place during the first meeting of the WG on 17 November. The mandate will be addressed in very close cooperation with the AHAW Panel which is working on a parallel EC Mandate on transport and welfare. Regular updates to the progress of the work will be done to the ENVI Committee of the European Parliament. The next meeting of the WG is scheduled for 20 December. The deadline for adoption of this opinion is 30 September 2022.

6.6. 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 18 November 2021. The WG chair reminded about the mandate and conditions of use and mode of application as provided by the applicant. The draft Scientific Opinion was presented, in particular 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 vice-chair has been invited to the next WG meeting on 20 December 2021 to present the outcome to all WG members. The abovementioned sections are aimed to be endorsed at the BIOHAZ plenary meeting in January 2022.

7. New Mandates

7.1. Application for an alternative processing method for category 3 rendered fats

A new application for an alternative method for production of biodiesel from rendered fats derived from category 3 animal by-products was presented to the Panel by EFSA secretariat. It has been submitted by BP Raffinaderij Rotterdam B.V. British Petroleum for implementation in two gasoil hydrofiners in a refinery in the port of Rotterdam. The application was received on 25 October 2021 and it is undergoing the completeness check. On 8 December a letter will be sent to the applicant requesting clarification or additional information. If finally accepted, the 6-month evaluation period will start the end of January. There is a standing working group chaired by Avelino Alvarez-Ordóñez who agreed to play such role. Based on the areas of expertise required, the composition of the working group may change by not inviting some of the members of the standing members to the meetings and by adding external expert/s.

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

8.1. Scientific Committee

The 106th Plenary meeting of the Scientific Committee (SC) took place on 17-19 November 2021⁴. The Panel Chair reported that no topics of specific interest for the BIOHAZ Panel were discussed at such meeting.

8.2. European Commission

EC representatives Eric Thévenard, Olga Goulaki and Wolfgang Trunk updated the Panel on the ongoing EC activities related to BIOHAZ topics, current mandates requested to EFSA in this area and legislative initiatives taken as a follow-up of past opinions of the BIOHAZ Panel and BIOCONTAM Unit. Some upcoming requests for scientific advice of the BIOHAZ Panel in this area concern the revision of the results of the recent three-year CWD monitoring carried out in some European countries. EC representatives thanked the BIOHAZ Panel for the quality of the scientific opinions delivered during the last year and indicated that the conclusions from BIOHAZ scientific opinions are clear and serve as a useful and appropriate support to EU risk management decisions.

⁴ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/it/events/event/106th-plenary-meeting-scientific-committee>

9. Other scientific topics for information and/or discussion

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

BIOHAZ Panel member Maarten Nauta provided the Panel and EC representatives with a summary of the discussions held during the recent EFSA training workshop on uncertainty with risk managers (22-23 November 2021). He reported the discussions with risk managers on the two BIOHAZ case-studies presented at the training (i.e. expression of uncertainty in conclusions of the scientific opinion on delayed meat inspection and of the scientific report on atypical scrapie intensified monitoring), as well as some of the overall conclusions from the training. A specific report on the training workshop will be prepared in due time within the EFSA cross-cutting WG on Uncertainty. The BIOHAZ Panel and EC representatives discussed ways to increase clarity on how uncertainty is expressed in conclusions of scientific opinions. They agreed that it would be crucial to further increase interaction between risk assessors and risk managers during the development of the scientific assessments, especially when finalising draft conclusions.

9.2. Topics of scientific concern in the area of biological hazards and BIOHAZ self-tasks (including draft self-task on the persistence of hazards in food-producing environments)

The proposal for a self-task mandate by the BIOHAZ Panel on the persistence of biological hazards in food processing environments was presented to the Panel. The background and terms of reference were discussed and will be reviewed by a subgroup of Panel members and by the Secretariat in order to produce a more consolidated version that will be discussed at the next plenary meeting.

9.3. Presentation on the EU Summary Report on surveillance for the presence of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies in 2020

EFSA Staff (BIOCONTAM Unit) presented the main findings that appeared in the EU Summary Report on TSE for year 2020, published on 30 November 2021⁵. The report presents the results of surveillance of TSE in animals from 27 Member States (MS, EU27), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (UK). Full data set was submitted by UK (non-EU country from 1 February 2020), therefore totals were presented as EU27 plus UK to allow comparison with previous years. In total, 1,222,671 cattle were tested by EU27 plus UK, showing a 2.4% decrease from 2019. Four atypical BSE cases were reported in 2020 in the EU: 3 H-type reported by France, Ireland and Spain and 1 L-type reported by France. Switzerland reported also 1 L-BSE case. Over the year, a total of 332,579 sheep and 120,615 goats were tested in the EU27 plus UK, a decrease of 1.7% and 16% respectively, compared with 2019. In sheep, 688 cases of scrapie were reported by 16 MS plus UK: 589 classical (CS), 98 atypical (AS), 1 CH1641-like. Twelve additional inconclusive cases were reported by Italy. In addition, Iceland reported 53 CS cases and Norway 12 AS cases. Random genotyping was reported by nine MS and, after excluding Cyprus, showed that 8.8% of the genotyped sheep carried genotypes of the susceptible groups. In goats, 328 cases of scrapie were reported by 9 MS plus UK: 319 CS and 9 AS. 12 MS plus UK reported 9,171 tested cervids, of which more than 75% reported by the six MS (Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden) implementing mandatory surveillance for CWD. The species most tested were roe deer and reindeer. Two cases of CWD in moose were reported in 2020 in EU: one by Finland and one by Sweden. In addition, Norway reported two CWD cases: in moose and in reindeer. Finally, 101 animals from three other species tested negative in Finland.

⁵ The European Union summary report on surveillance for the presence of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE) in 2020: <https://doi.org/10.2903/j.efsa.2021.6934>

9.4. Update on the EU One Health 2020 Zoonoses Report

EFSA Staff (BIOCONTAM Unit) presented an update on the EU One Health Zoonoses report, which was published on 9 December 2021⁶. Data analyses were particularly challenging due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU. A major finding was a drop in reported zoonotic diseases in humans and foodborne outbreaks in 2020. Campylobacteriosis was the most reported zoonosis in the EU in 2020, with 120,946 cases compared to more than 220,000 the previous year. It was followed by salmonellosis, which affected 52,702 people compared to 88,000 in 2019. The number of reported foodborne outbreaks also fell by 47%, to a total of 3,086 foodborne outbreaks for 2020. Salmonella remained the most frequently detected agent and caused about 23% outbreaks. In the report the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe was acknowledged in the remarkable drop in reported zoonotic diseases in humans, ranging from 7% to 53% depending on the reported disease in question, and foodborne outbreaks. EFSA also published two interactive communication tools on foodborne outbreaks – a story map and a dashboard. The story map provides general information on foodborne outbreaks, their causative agents and implicated food vehicles. The dashboard allows people to search and query the large amount of data on foodborne outbreaks collected by EFSA from EU Member States and other reporting countries since 2015.

9.5. Update on the EMA expert groups on the designation of antimicrobials or groups of antimicrobials reserved for treatment of certain infections in humans, and on the establishment of a list of antimicrobials which shall not be used or which may be used subject to certain conditions

BIOHAZ Panel member Luisa Peixe, who is representing EFSA in the abovementioned EMA expert groups, briefly reported the progress made in the EMA expert group meetings.

10. Any other business

EFSA Secretariat informed the Panel on the possibility that physical or hybrid (physical/online) BIOHAZ Plenary meetings could resume as of March 2021. This will depend however from the evolution of the current COVID-19 epidemiological situation and on the measures that will be in place in the different countries at the time. Further information will follow in due time. The Panel was also updated on the structure of the future new EFSA BIOHAW Unit as of January 2021.

⁶ The European Union One Health 2020 Zoonoses Report: <https://doi.org/10.2903/j.efsa.2021.6971>