

29-30 April 2024

09:00-17:30 / 09:00-15:45

MINUTES - Agreed on 16 May 2024

Location: Web-conference

Attendees:

o Panel Members:

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

o Hearing Experts¹:

Mabel Gil, Maribel Abadias, Gloria Sanchez, Miriam Garcia, Imca Sampers

o European Commission and/or Member States representatives:

EC: Matjaz Klemencic (items 6.10, 7.1), Gunilla Eklund (item 6.11)

o EFSA:

Angela Botteon, Sandra Correia, Maria Teresa Da Silva Felicio, Sofia Fusco, Martin Goudjihounde, Beatriz Guerra, Michaela Hempen, Ernesto Liebana, Winy Messens, Angel Ortiz-Peláez, Mirko Rossi, Pietro Stella, Frank Verdonck (BIOHAW Unit)

Laura Martino (MESE Unit) (item 6.5), Fulvio Barizzone (MESE Unit) (item 9.1)

o Others:

None

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Panagiotis Skandamis for participation to the second day of meeting (30 April).

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 Management,³ 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.

¹ As defined in Article 34 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>

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

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



4. Agreement of the minutes of the 168th Panel Plenary meeting held on 13-14 March 2024

The minutes of the 168th Panel plenary meeting were agreed by written procedure on 27 March 2024.

5. Scientific output(s) submitted for adoption/endorsement

No scientific outputs were submitted for adoption or endorsement.

6. Scientific Output submitted for discussion

6.1 Scientific opinion on the update of the list of QPS-recommended biological agents intentionally added to food or feeds as notified to EFSA ([EFSA-Q-2023-00054](#))

Last meeting was held on 22 March by web meeting. Next working group (WG) meeting is scheduled on 7 May in Parma. There were no substantial changes in the scientific opinion since the previous plenary meeting. The deadline for adoption of the Scientific Opinion is 31 December 2025.

6.2 Statement on the update of the list of QPS-recommended biological agents intentionally added to food or feed as notified to EFSA. 20: Suitability of taxonomic units notified to EFSA until March 2024 ([EFSA-Q-2021-00772](#))

Eight-four notifications were received between October and March 2023 (inclusive): 48 as feed additives, 25 as food enzymes, food additives and flavourings, 11 as novel foods and none as PPPs. From these 84, 27 were not evaluated because belong to taxonomic units excluded from the QPS evaluation (15 filamentous fungi, 1 *Enterococcus faecium*, 10 *E. coli* and 1 *Streptomyces aureofaciens*), and 49 belong to taxonomic units that already have a QPS status. From the remaining 8 notifications, 2 are non-QPS but were just evaluated for a possible QPS status: *Serratia marcescens* and *Weizmannia faecalis*. One was notified at genus level so cannot be assessed for the QPS status. The other 5 will be evaluated for a possible QPS status: *Akkermansia muciniphila*, *Microbacterium arborescens*, *Rhizobium radiobacter* (synonym *Agrobacterium radiobacter*), *Actinomadura roseirufa* and *Burkholderia stagnalis*. The screening at title/abstract level was done with the artificial intelligence classifiers tool in parallel with an expert. Conflicts were solved by the experts. The full-text phase was finalized and the summaries as well. The next and last WG meeting is scheduled on 7 May in Parma. The deadline for delivery of the Panel statement is 30 June 2024. The draft Panel statement will be presented for possible adoption at the next plenary meeting.

6.3 Scientific opinion on microbiological hazards associated with the use of water in postharvest handling and processing operations of fresh and frozen fruits, vegetables and herbs – parts 2-5 ([EFSA-Q-2023-00073](#), [EFSA-Q-2023-00074](#), [EFSA-Q-2023-00075](#) and [EFSA-Q-2023-00076](#)), including associated outsourcing activities (OC/EFSA/BIOCONTAM/2021/02)

The team leaders of the WASHTOP consortium were invited to this plenary meeting to give a brief presentation about the results of the work developed in the tender OC/EFSA/BIOCONTAM/2021/02. This presentation focused on the description of the: (i) most important findings from the industrial settings data collection and (ii) modelling results. This presentation was followed by a discussion on the challenges raised by the intense collaboration with both the WG and BIOHAZ Panel which was required for this tender, as these outsourcing activities corresponded to a work package of the mandate itself. Some relevant points raised:



- WASHTOP was expecting to deliver what corresponded to the offer they had presented to EFSA in response to the open call. EFSA staff, WG and Panel members scrutinised all their deliverables thoroughly and intensely. This forced WASHTOP to change numerous points aiming to address the received comments. This created high pressure and demotivation in the WASHTOP team, although they recognise the added value of the careful detection of inconsistencies, mistakes in data reporting and analysis as well as of suggestions to improve the interpretation of results.
- It took tremendous effort from both sides (EFSA and contractors) to reach a clear understanding of the difference between the drafting of the scientific opinion/WG members's role and the contractor's compliance with the fulfilment of the tender's objectives.
- The publication of the final external scientific report is synchronised with the publication of the scientific opinions that will be only adopted in December 2024 and are expected to be published in January 2025. This represents an inconvenience for WASHTOP, as they have to keep the sharing of the final outputs with their industry collaborators on hold.
- The EFSA template for external scientific reports had various problems resulting in constant loss of formatting as well as (sub)section numbering. This had a big impact, in particular on the work of the modelling team that had to work individually within the desktop application rather than collaboratively through a browser interface.

Some suggestions were made to facilitate and improve the co-work between contractors/EFSA staff/WG and Panel members. It was agreed that once this mandate ends a lessons-learned document will be prepared for possible future similar situations. The WG Chair underlined that the biggest advantage of this self-task mandate is the opportunity that the WASHTOP tender represents to collect a massive dataset aiming to fill data gaps previously identified.

The last WG meeting took place on 15-16 April 2024 in Parma. The WG Chair presented the updated draft of the "Fresh-whole FVHs sector-specific opinion" and WG member Panagiotis Skandamis presented the "Model opinion" addressing the most important comments received from the Panel on the current drafts. The WG Chair informed the Panel that the final deliverables from the WASHTOP tender were presented to EFSA during a meeting in Parma on 21-22 March. EFSA returned the final deliverables with comments to be addressed on 15 April and now we are waiting to receive the revised version of the final deliverable files in order to proceed with the 2nd round review of documents. The next WG meeting will be online on 21 and 22 May 2024 afternoon. The deadline for the adoption of the three sector-specific scientific opinions (Fresh-whole, Fresh-cut and Frozen FVHs) and the "Model" scientific opinion is 31 December 2024.

6.4 Scientific opinion on the public health aspects of *Vibrio* spp. related to the consumption of seafood in the EU ([EFSA-Q-2022-00826](#))

The last WG meeting was held on 11 April 2024 by web-conference, during which a brainstorming was held on the knowledge gaps and priorities for future research related to *Vibrio* spp. in seafood and aquatic environments. The concluding remarks were carefully reviewed. The revised draft scientific opinion was shared with the BIOHAZ Panel for thorough reading. The WG Chair informed that the scientific opinion was significantly shortened, and some parts were moved to annexes. She went through the various comments requiring a discussion with the BIOHAZ Panel. Most comments were related to the characteristics of the available analytical methods and their contribution to risk assessment (SQ1.4) and no major comments were received. The BIOHAZ Panel requested to move some of the priorities for future research to the recommendations and to further shorten the conclusions. The comments from the BIOHAZ Panel will be discussed at the last WG meeting on 16 May 2024 by web-conference and the scientific opinion finalised. The deadline for adoption of the Scientific Opinion is 30 June 2024.



6.5 Scientific report of EFSA on the impact of the proposed revised Australia’s microbiological monitoring programme for beef and sheep meat exported to the EU ([EFSA-Q-2023-00058](#))

The 10th WG meeting was held by web conference on 8 March 2024. The draft report was presented for thorough reading during this panel meeting. The revised draft report includes an appendix with a detailed description of the probabilistic modelling. Any additional information is moved to annexes and published separately. The Panel recommended to add a conclusion about impact of discontinuing *Salmonella* testing in the proposed programme and about differences between interventions following alerts from APC/*E. coli* or *Salmonella* monitoring. These suggestions will be discussed during the next WG meeting before presenting the draft report to the panel for possible endorsement. The deadline for this mandate is 30 June 2024.

6.6 Scientific opinion on the potential BSE risk posed by ruminant collagen and gelatine other than derived from hides and skins ([EFSA-Q-2023-00105](#))

The WG Chair presented the draft opinion for thorough reading. The WG Chair went through the comments submitted to the opinion before the plenary and addressed those made during the plenary. Some Panel members requested changes in the description of the model and calculation of the probability of infection. The answer to assessment question 5 on the exposure/risk of humans was deemed incomplete and it was requested to provide more specific conclusions that could answer the term of reference and be useful for risk managers. The files for the replication of the model results in the Montecarlo simulation tool of the EFSA’s R4U platform were shared with the Panel upon request by a member. The files of the rest of the parameters of the model will be available at the time of the publication of the scientific opinion. The draft opinion will be submitted for possible adoption to the next plenary on 13-14 June 2024.

6.7 Request for a scientific opinion on the evaluation of the safety and efficacy of peroxyacetic acid (PAA) to reduce microbiological surface contamination on beef carcasses, half carcasses and quarter carcasses ([EFSA-Q-2022-00626](#))

There is no update on this item since the previous plenary meeting.

6.8 Guidance on the submission of data for the evaluation of the safety and efficacy of substances for the removal of microbial surface contamination of foods of animal origin ([EFSA-Q-2024-00020](#))

The BIOHAZ Panel was informed that WG meetings were held on 11 and 24 April 2024 (both by web-conference) to discuss the work related to the self-tasking mandate for a revision of the Guidance document on the submission of data for the evaluation of the safety and efficacy of substances for the removal of microbial surface contamination of foods of animal origin intended for human consumption⁴. The WG vice-chair introduced the first draft of the sections dealing with the efficacy of the substance in removing microbial surface contamination of foods and the potential occurrence of acquired reduced susceptibility to biocides and/or resistance to therapeutic antimicrobials induced by the substance. Comments of relevance for the revision of the decontamination guidance document were provided to the WG dealing with the draft EFSA guidance document on the risk assessment of microorganisms used in the food chain to be applied across sectors. The next WG meetings will be held on 15 and 28 May 2024 by web-conference. The current deadline for adoption by the CEP Panel is end of March 2025.

⁴ <https://open.efsa.europa.eu/questions/EFSA-Q-2024-00020>



6.9 Scientific opinion on a re-evaluation of certain aspects of the EFSA Scientific Opinion of April 2010 on risk assessment of parasites in fishery products, based on new scientific data – addressing term of reference 4 ([EFSA-Q-2023-00172](#))

The WG met on 16th April 2024 and discussed the approaches to answer term of reference 4, the relevant fish species, parasites of public health importance and the fishing grounds (marine, brackish, and fresh water). The suggested approach consists of screening literature on all fishing grounds for zoonotic parasites and then link it to the most consumed fish species in the EU. Regarding the fishing grounds, the WG decided to use the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) division for the EU waters, and FAO division for the rest of the world. The WG members will work to gather more information about the relevant fish species and parasites for the next meeting. The next WG meeting will take place in Parma on 16 May 2024 to review the list of parasites and fish species to consider in the assessment. The deadline for the adoption of this second Part is 31 December 2024.

6.10 Request for a scientific opinion on the equivalence of an alternative heat treatment process of feathers and down ([EFSA-Q-2024-00169](#))

The EFSA BIOHAZ Unit updated the Panel on the progress with this mandate. The workplan has been prepared and the first WG meeting will be held by tele conference on 13 May. EFSA will deliver the output by 31 January 2025.

6.11 Self-task mandate of the BIOHAZ panel on the current status of the occurrence and spread of carbapenemase-producing Enterobacterales in the food chain in the EU/EFTA ([EFSA-Q-2024-00149](#))

The EFSA BIOHAZ Unit updated the Panel on the establishment of a WG dealing with this mandate. A first scientific opinion presenting the state of the art on the topic is expected by December 2024. A Monopole Framework Partnership Agreement with EU and National Reference Laboratories on antimicrobial resistance will be in place for the production of data related to the definition of testing protocols, for the performance of epidemiological investigations and for the performance of genetic analyses of relevant resistant isolates. One or more additional scientific opinions reviewing and analysing the results of the studies performed are expected by June 2027.

7. New mandates

7.1 Request for a scientific opinion on the presence of biological and chemical hazards in ash from Category 1 material after incineration, co-incineration, and combustion ([EFSA-Q-2024-00278](#))

EFSA received a mandate from the European Commission (EC) on 17 April 2024, requesting a scientific opinion on the presence of biological and chemical hazards in ash from Category 1 material after incineration, co-incineration, and combustion. The background and mandate were presented to the BIOHAZ Panel, and it was decided to assign it to the BIOHAZ WG on applications for alternative methods of use or disposal of animal by-products or derived products. It is a two-tier mandate. The BSE/TSE hazards will be addressed in opinion 1, to be delivered by 30 April 2025. The second opinion, to be delivered by 30 April 2026, dealing with the biological hazards other than the BSE/TSE and on the chemical hazards will not be needed if the outcome of opinion 1 is that there is residual TSE/BSE infectivity. After informing the Panel and in consultation with the BIOHAZ Panel Chair, it was decided that Avelino Alvarez-Ordóñez, chair of the above-mentioned WG, will be chairing the meetings related to this mandate.



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

8.1 Scientific Committee

The BIOHAZ Panel Chair indicated that no items of specific relevance for the BIOHAZ Panel were discussed at the last meeting of the Scientific Committee, which took place on 10-11 April 2024⁵.

8.2 European Commission

EFSA Staff from the BIOHAW Unit updated the Panel on preliminary information received from the European Commission (DG SANTE) about upcoming mandates in the area of biological hazards. Possible mandates are expected in the next months in the fields of food hygiene and animal-by products.

8.3 EFSA Guidance on the risk assessment of microorganisms used in the food chain ([EFSA-Q-2022-00249](#))

The Chair of the QPS WG Lieve Herman presented the main changes made in the guidance in response to the comments received from the QPS WG experts, after the last FEED Micro WG hold on 23-24 April 2024. Some new suggestions were received by the Panel which will be taken to the FEED Micro WG to be discussed during their next meeting on 13 May. The guidance will be endorsed by the different and relevant ASSESS Panels before the final endorsement by the SC before the public consultation foreseen in the last quarter of 2024.

8.4 Exchange of views with EFSA Executive Director

EFSA Executive Director Bernard Url thanked all BIOHAZ Panel members for their scientific contribution to EU food safety during the six years of their mandate 2018-2024. He highlighted the high value of expertise brought in by Panel members in all EFSA activities, as well as their commitment in ensuring preparedness to future food EU safety concerns also through the proposal of relevant topics for self-task mandates in the area of biological hazards. He stressed the importance of partnership among all actors involved at European and National level to deliver fit-for-purpose scientific advice and reminded the role of innovation in the evolution of the agrifood system.

9. Other topics for information and/or discussion

9.1 Implementation of the guidance on uncertainty analysis in scientific assessments

BIOHAZ Panel member Maarten Nauta presented to the Panel a draft BIOHAZ-specific practical guide to the implementation of uncertainty analysis in BIOHAZ assessments. The document provides some background and tools that aim to support the 2024-2029 BIOHAZ Panel in the implementation of EFSA's uncertainty guidance, based on the experience in the 2018-2024 BIOHAZ Panel and the typical terms of reference of mandates in the area of biological hazards. It should be regarded as a practical internal working guide to be used on voluntary basis and a BIOHAZ Panel-specific complement to the EFSA uncertainty guidances, not as a modification

⁵ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/it/events/118th-plenary-meeting-scientific-committee>



or replacement of these guidelines. The Panel provided comments to the document, which will be further discussed at the next Plenary meeting.

9.2 Topics of scientific concern in the area of biological hazards and preparedness

No specific topics were raised by BIOHAZ Panel members or EFSA staff.

9.3 Presentation on the EU One Health 2022 Zoonoses Report

EFSA Staff from the BIOHAW Unit presented the main findings of the EU One Health Zoonoses Report for year 2022⁶, published on 12 December 2023. It presents the results of the zoonoses monitoring and surveillance activities carried out in 2022 in 27 Member States (MSs), the United Kingdom (Northern Ireland) and 11 non-MSs. Key statistics on zoonoses and zoonotic agents in humans, food, animals and feed are provided and interpreted historically. Dashboards, allowing to explore monitoring data, and story maps, providing useful background information, were developed in relation to foodborne outbreaks, Salmonella, Listeria and Campylobacter. They are all available via links in the report and on EFSA website⁷.

10. Any other business

In December 2023 the experts of the EFSA Scientific Panels and of the Scientific committee were invited to fill an Expert Feedback Survey. The questions investigated the scientific and organisational support provided by EFSA and the experts' engagement in working with EFSA. The main findings of the survey, as well as the specific results for the BIOHAZ Panel were presented and discussed. The results of the survey will be used as input for lesson learnt and follow-up actions for the new Panel 2024-2029.

⁶ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/8442>

⁷ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/resources/data-collection-zoonoses>