

Fourth meeting of the Technical Group on the tools related to the application of the Transparency Regulation (TG TOOLS)

I. Introduction

The fourth meeting of the EFSA technical group on the tools related to the application of the transparency regulation (TG TOOLS) took place virtually on 15 April 2024, was attended by 16 members and was chaired by Karine Lheureux (Head of the Risk Assessment Logistics Unit of EFSA). Members of the TG TOOLS, DG SANTE and EFSA representatives participated in the meeting, with a list of participants available on the EFSA website.

II. Welcome, apologies for absence, and adoption of the agenda

The new representative of the European Pet Food Industry Federation (FEDIAF) was welcomed together with the additional representative of the German Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL). The member EU speciality food ingredients was exceptionally represented by a new representative.

Karine Lheureux introduced the new agenda point, the E-Submission Food Chain platform (ESFC hereinafter), highlighting that ESFC is not in scope of the Technical Group. However, since the need to provide stakeholders with a forum where ESFC-related matters can be discussed following the EU survey on ESFC was identified and upon suggestion of the European Commission, it was decided that ESFC would be included in the agenda of the 4th TG TOOLS meeting. Participants from the European Commission contributing to the agenda point on ESFC were welcomed.

No additional points were raised by the participants; the agenda was adopted.

III. Follow-up from previous meeting

The chair provided an overview on how queries of stakeholders are being handled internally with the involvement of the product managers of each tool. In addition, she pointed out that issues related to specific areas raised by members during the TG TOOLS meetings and in-between the meetings are addressed by the responsible product managers and their appropriate follow-up is always ensured. She further highlighted that the tools in scope are undergoing constant improvement based also on the feedback received from members.

An update was provided on the current state of **post-adoption notifications for post-TR applications on regulated products**. EFSA reiterated that following the update of the *Catalogue of support initiatives during the life cycle of applications for regulated products*, the complementary e-mail sent by EFSA is dismissed for all opinions adopted after the 1st of March 2024.

Enhancements on the **Submission Builder (Portalino)** which took place since the last meeting were presented by EFSA. The presented updates concern the simplification of submissions without confidentiality requests and the acceleration of the confidentiality assessment process in cases where all confidentiality requests are approved.

EFSA delivered a presentation introducing the new **initiative on the promotion of IT tools used in application procedures for regulated products**. The initiative aims at enhancing users' understanding of procedures and hence improving the quality of submitted applications by minimizing possible mistakes. Members were encouraged to join the LinkedIn group *EFSA Support to Applicants* where useful information such as updates on IT tools, guidance documents, training material or upcoming events is shared with stakeholders.



IV. Connect.EFSA

EFSA presented the pillars on which future enhancements aimed at improving user experience of Connect.EFSA are based. In addition, members were given a sneak peek into the new layout of the website and the timeline of upcoming enhancements. It was highlighted that communication guidelines for accessibility are being followed when implementing changes regarding navigation, content, and layout of the Connect.EFSA website. It was mentioned also that the new EFSA brand identity will be applied to the website for consistency with all EFSA's digital platforms. While new features can be expected, the functionalities will not change and users will be able to access the same services. Regarding the number of users allowed per each organisation, the EFSA product manager informed members that the current policy will be maintained.

CropLife Europe delivered a presentation centred around the notification of studies, with special focus on the bulk import functionality. The member's representative presented two use cases and came up with suggestions in order to improve efficiency and user experience based on their members' feedback. EFSA addressed the points raised by CropLife Europe and invited the members to conduct a wider survey, beyond CropLife Europe's association in order to evaluate whether other companies are also affected by the issues raised by CropLife Europe and adhere to the suggested improvements.

V. Open.EFSA

The product manager of Open.EFSA gave an update on the status of the migration of the old questions which were completed before January 2021 from the Register of Questions (RAW). The finalisation of the migration of the questions created between 2003 and 2021 is foreseen for summer 2024. In addition, he highlighted that further improvement on Open.EFSA will focus on the enhancement of the search functionality and better visibility.

FEFANA raised questions regarding the possibility of saving user-specific search history and filters; the tracking of topics and any dossiers of interest, not only the ones they are responsible for. The member further inquired whether an integration with ESFC would be possible in the future. The EFSA product manager pointed out that Open.EFSA serves the purpose of displaying information and activities to the public, it is not the tool where applicants are advised to track their applications. Regarding the saving of search preferences, the product manager indicated that the implementation of this function is planned.

The German Federal Office of Consumer Protection and Food Safety (BVL) raised a question on how to access information on questions which have not yet been migrated. Given the specificity of the case, the query will be followed up in the aftermath of the meeting.

VI. E-Submission Food Chain platform (ESFC)

As highlighted by the chair in the beginning of the meeting, ESFC was included in the discussion of the 4th TG TOOLS meeting following the identification of the arising need to provide stakeholders with a forum where ESFC-related matters can be discussed following the survey on ESFC conducted by the European Commission during Q1 2024. The European Commission, responsible for the tool, delivered a presentation regarding the result of the survey they conducted. The European Commission presented the key findings of the survey. Solution to various findings have been already found and will be implemented in the short and long term. In the short term, enhancements will take place addressing the difficulty in navigation; the issues when uploading files; the error message received when clicking on the "submit" button. The most recurrent survey findings included the saving of the search history; the improvement of the search functionality by adding additional filtering options; and the possibility to download the requests for information. The European Commission reassured members that they were aware of these issues regardless of the survey and all of them have been addressed, enhancements will follow shortly. The need from users to have a more direct contact with the unit/person in charge of their dossier when information



is requested from them was identified as a survey finding. To address this finding, in case of GMO applications, a communication channel is about to be created between the Member State and the responsible unit in the European Commission. This initiative might be extended to other areas in the future. The European Commission informed members that survey participants would appreciate an integration between ESFC and Connect.EFSA, however this would not take place in the short term.

Members thanked the opportunity to discuss ESFC on the forum. FEFANA, AMFEP and CropLife Europe presented the issues identified by them. Some of their questions had already been answered by the European Commission, therefore they restricted their presentations to topics which were not yet addressed. FEFANA presented the need to follow-up on public consultations; the downloading of metadata besides documents; the resolution of technical glitches and the lengthy and complicated uploading process. The member also expressed that additional functionalities would be welcomed in terms of tracking clarification requests and confidentiality claims. CropLife Europe suggested further improvements for a more efficient handling of parallel additional data requests during the risk assessment. In addition, the member pointed out at the difficulties faced when downloading zip files and when uploading big and multiple files. The European Commission answered the raised questions and took note of the suggested improvements which have not yet been considered by them.

During the Q&A session, various questions were raised regarding the confidentiality workflow of ESFC which have been answered by EFSA and the European Commission throughout the meeting. Questions that could not be addressed due to time-constraints will be replied to in writing.

VII. AOB and end of meeting

The chair thanked the members and European Commission and EFSA representatives for the fruitful discussion. She indicated that the mandate of the Technical Group is coming to an end and the last meeting under the current mandate is foreseen for October 2024. However, the continuation of the forum is possible upon revision of the terms of reference. The chair expressed her intention to rediscuss the terms of reference of the forum on the occasion of the next meeting. She anticipated a couple of elements on which members can reflect on in preparation for the next meeting, including extending the duration of the mandate, re-calling expression of interest to include more registered stakeholders and Member States and considering additional IT tools.
