

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

I. Introduction

The fifth meeting of the EFSA technical group on the tools related to the application of the transparency regulation (TG TOOLS) took place virtually on 21 November 2024. It was attended by 9 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 the list of participants available on the EFSA website.

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

Ruud Bremmers from EFFSACO and Alicia Juarez-Pallarés from FEFANA apologized. FEFANA was represented by Karine Schöndorfer. The member from EU speciality food ingredients was exceptionally represented by a new representative.

Karine Lheureux introduced the agenda and highlighted that given the need to continue the discussion on the E-Submission Food Chain platform (ESFC) at the last meeting, EFSA together with the European Commission decided to include ESFC in the agenda of the 5th meeting. Participants from the European Commission contributing to the agenda point on ESFC were welcomed.

The chair thanked stakeholders for their feedback regarding the future of the TG Tools and introduced the agenda point aimed at presenting to the members the future form of discussion on the tools.

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

III. Follow-up

EFSA delivered a presentation introducing the new **community on application matters**. The initiative aims at facilitating the end-to-end processing of applications by engaging stakeholders and bringing forward their proposals. The community will be based on thematic discussions around four main topics: procedural aspects, support initiatives, general aspects on guidance documents and **digital tools**. The new initiative incorporates the positive experience of the TG Tools and members of the Technical Group were encouraged to express their interest should they wish to join the community. The timeline of the community's establishment was presented with a provisional launch date in March 2025.

As a follow-up from the previous meeting, enhancements on the **Submission Builder (Portalino)** were presented by EFSA. The presented update concerns the mandatory indication of the submission type whenever a new submission is made.

IV. ConnectEFSA

EFSA provided an overview on the enhancements implemented on ConnectEFSA since December 2023. The EFSA product manager presented to stakeholders the changes in the layout of the interface of various modules by comparing the old layouts with the new ones released in December 2023 and June 2024. The EFSA product manager also reiterated the new features released in the past year including the opportunity to submit a complaint to EFSA by using a form and the various other services which were made accessible through shortcuts via the ConnectEFSA homepage: Emerging Risks Analysis Platform (ERAP) and Article 36 Competent Organisations.

Stakeholders were given the opportunity to fill-in a live feedback survey regarding the enhancements on ConnectEFSA.

As part of the upcoming release, planned for December 2024, new features within the remit of notification of studies (NOS) and consultations were presented by the respective product managers.



Enhancements on **NOS** will include the implementation of a dedicated email address for receiving information on pre-submission activities, and a re-designed share functionality which provides more flexibility for joint applications.

In terms of **consultations**, the "*respond online*" tab used for submitting a reply to a consultation will be modified for unauthenticated users. Unauthenticated users will be invited to log in or register so that they can take advantage of the benefits provided for logged-in users. The advantages of replying to consultations as an authenticated user include the trackability of past comments and the elimination of the risk of losing inserted comments upon leaving the page. This feature is also to enable EFSA to contact the commenter which proved to be an important aspect when evaluating the comments received through consultations. Another feature of the upcoming enhancement is that users trying to register with an already registered email address will be reminded by a pop-up window that there is already an existing account registered with their email address. Information on data protection and the legal notice will no longer be displayed as texts but will be accessible via hyperlinks when clicking on the confirmation boxes. Hyperlinks will be used to lead to part of the documents added to public consultations.

FEFANA brought two questions to the Q&A session on Connect.EFSA regarding the pre-submission of intended studies in renewal dossiers and recent automated emails received from EFSA. EFSA product managers replied to FEFANA's questions and requested the member to forward to EFSA the emails they received for further investigation.

V. 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 engaging discussion at the last meeting, EFSA and the European Commission decided to set ESFC on the agenda of the 5th meeting, as well. The European Commission, responsible for the tool provided an overview on the implementation of the enhancements planned as a result of users' proposals and the key findings of the survey on ESFC conducted by the Commission during Q1 2024. The vast majority of users' proposals and the survey's key findings have already been delivered, some of them are to be deployed in the short term.

In terms of future enhancements of ESFC, no major improvements can be expected in line with the requests of users. Currently, the European Commission is analysing the feasibility of the integration of ESFC with the EFSA tools and the possibility to display information regarding public consultations on ESFC. Further analysis will be conducted to verify the feasibility of an option where an application can be copied and used as a new draft application. What can be expected in the short term is the improvement of the upload/download performance, enabling the download of files' metadata and the migration of FSCAP to ESFC.

FEFANA presented to the Group various technical aspects they experience as users of ESFC. In his reply to the points raised by the member, the European Commission representative specified the timeline of the enhancements aimed at the improvement of the aspects brought to the meeting by FEFANA. In addition, the member's representative posed questions about the confidentiality workflow and she further asked for guidelines in terms of how to upload files in case of a request for information (intake phase) or additional data request (risk assessment phase). EFSA answered the questions of the stakeholder, highlighting that with regards instructions on uploading new files in case of an additional data request, EFSA will come back to the member.

VI. AOB and end of meeting

The chair thanked the members and European Commission and EFSA representatives for the fruitful discussion and very valuable feedback received from users over the last two years. Clear concrete feedback on the use of the IT tools helps EFSA improving their usability, accessibility and functionalities. She wrapped up the five meetings held during the mandate of the TG Tools and encouraged members to join the new community on application matters, where one of the thematic areas is digital tools.
