SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE
131st Plenary meeting

7-8 July 2026
9:00-18:00/9:00-13:00
MINUTES – Agreed on 31 July 2026

EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

Location: EFSA premises, Parma, Italy

Attendees:

- **Panel Members:**
  Susanne HOUGAARD BENNEKOU, Ana ALLENDE, Angela BEARTH, Jacqueline CASTENMILLER, Laurence CASTLE, Tamara COJA, Amélie CREPET, Pikka JOKELAINEN, Thor HALLDORSON, Ron HOOGENBOOM, Helle KNUTSEN, Claude LAMBRE, Søren SAXMOSE NIELSEN, Christoph TEBBE, Antonio VICENT CIVERA, Roberto VILLA, Holger ZORN.

Hearing Experts[1]:
Qasim Chaudhry (for item 4.2)

European Commission:
Athanasios RAIKOS - DG SANTE Unit E1

Francesca Moretti (Unit G5/ team feed additives) – Agenda item 6.1: Update on WG activities: Botanicals; Weight of evidence; Biomarkers of effect; Margin of Exposure

Athanasios Angelou (Unit E2/ team novel foods) - Agenda item 4.2: Draft revised guidance on risk assessment of nano substances

- **EFSA:**

Ad interim Head of Risk Assessment Services Department (ENABLE): Bénédicte Vagenende

Chief Scientist Office: Carlos das Neves, Yann Devos

Head of Risk Assessment Production Department (ASSESS): Manuela Tiramani, replacing Guilhem De Seze

Methodology and Scientific Support Unit (MESE): Claudia Roncancio Pena, Maria Chiara Astuto, Maria Bastaki, Lucian Farcal, Marios Georgiadis, Alessandra Giarola, Sara Levorato, Daniela Maurici, Alexis Nathanail, Alicia Paini.

Knowledge Innovation and Partnership (KNOW) Unit: Bernard Bottex

1. Welcome, apologies for absence Adoption of the agenda

The Chair welcomed the participants. Apologies were received from Josep Casacuberta, chair of the GMO and by Dominique Turck, chair of the NDA panel, replaced by Christoph Tebbe and Jacqueline Castenmiller, respectively. The agenda was adopted without changes.

2. Declarations of Interest of Panel members

In accordance with EFSA's Policy on Independence[1] and the Decision of the Executive Director on Competing Interest Management[2,] EFSA screened the Annual Declarations of Interest filled out by the Scientific Committee 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.

3. Update on new mandates

[1] https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/independence-policy-2024.pdf
[2] https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/decision-ed-on-competing-interest-management-2024.pdf

3.1 Draft self task mandate on the preparatory work for the development of a guidance on relative potency factors (RPF)

The draft self-task mandate on the preparatory work for the development of a cross-cutting guidance on relative potency factors (RPFs) was presented to the Scientific Committee. It was recalled that existing EFSA guidance on mixture risk assessment describes RPF and toxic equivalency factor (TEF) approaches at a conceptual level, while detailed methodological guidance for their derivation and application is currently lacking. The new guidance aims to provide the scientific basis, methodological considerations and a structured decision framework for the use of RPF approaches in the assessment of combined exposure to multiple chemicals, including circumstances where alternative approaches may be more appropriate.

The proposed terms of reference were discussed extensively, with particular attention to the relationship between RPFs and TEFs, the cross-cutting applicability of the guidance across EFSA domains, and the need for clear and consistent terminology.

The Scientific Committee provided comments on the scope of the new guidance, suggesting simplification of the text, clarification of the treatment of TEFs as a specific application of RPF approaches, and ensuring that the document remains focused on practical implementation. Following discussion, broad agreement was reached on the proposed mandate, subject to editorial refinements.

The draft mandate will be subject to public consultation to encourage early stakeholder engagement. Feedback received during the consultation will be considered in the preparation of a new self-task mandate for the development of the guidance itself.

In addition, the Scientific Committee took note of the appointment of Chantra Eskes (EFSA staff) as chair of the Working Group that will develop the guidance.

4. Scientific output(s) submitted for discussion/adoption

4.1 Draft guidance on evidence appraisal (EFSA-Q-2024-00584)

The draft guidance document on evidence appraisal was tabled for discussion.

The draft document was published for a public consultation from February to April 2026. Based on comments received from internal and public consultation, several major changes were made to the draft guidance document. Most important changes included: the extension of the scope of the document to appraisal of reliability and relevance, changes in the criteria/characteristics of Critical Appraisal Tools (CATs) and the decision to include in the EFSA catalogue of CATs only tools that have been used in EFSA assessments.

Changes were presented and discussed with the Scientific Committee (SC), and additional comments were provided. The WG will continue working on the document to address comments from the EFSA Scientific Committee, the Public and EFSA Panels consultation, to ensure full alignment on specific points with other cross-cutting EFSA guidance documents, to complete the catalogue of CATs and to finalise the public consultation report to be published annexed to the guidance.

The revised draft is intended to be tabled for final adoption at the September plenary meeting.

4.2 Draft revised guidance on risk assessment of nano substances (EFSA-Q-2024-00439)

The SC was invited to consider the draft updated EFSA Guidance on the risk assessment of submicro/nano particles in the food and feed chain for discussion and possible endorsement for targeted consultation. A step of public consultation is also foreseen by end of 2026-beginning of 2027.

The update consolidates the two 2021 EFSA Nano Guidance documents (Guidance on technical requirements for regulated food and feed product applications to establish the presence of small particles including nanoparticles and Guidance on risk assessment of nanomaterials to be applied in the food and feed chain: human and animal health) into one comprehensive Guidance, reflecting initial stakeholder input, the revised mandate and comments from the SC first reading.

Following comments from SC experts and EFSA Units at the previous SC Plenary, the WG revised the draft Guidance to support a realistic, particle-specific risk assessment approach while reducing unnecessary complexity. Background principles were moved to the annexes, and a refined decision strategy was introduced to clarify exclusions, exemptions based on screening criteria, cases requiring full particle-specific assessment, and the use of existing in vivo data and NAMs within a weight-of-evidence approach to avoid unnecessary further in vivo testing.

The SC was invited to provide comments on the clarity, proportionality and feasibility of the proposed approach, including any key issues to be addressed beforehand. Further clarifications were requested to improve the Guidance's consistency and applicability, including on terminology, evidence appraisal, the rationale for the toxicological focus on liver, spleen and kidney, and the practical use of NAMs within a weight-of-evidence approach. Subject to these clarifications, the SC endorsed the revised Guidance for targeted consultation that will include EFSA Panels, the NanoNetwork, EU Member States, EU and international regulatory agencies, ahead of a subsequent public consultation.

5. Other scientific topics for information/discussion

5.1 Preliminary evaluation of existing SC GDs for possible update/revision to be included in the work-programme

The SC was presented with an evaluation of existing EFSA cross-cutting guidance documents that are more than 5 years old. The assessment aims to identify guidances that should be considered for revision and therefore included in the SC work-programme 2027-2029, while also highlighting those documents that remain valid.

The preliminary assessment identified the need to revise the "Guidance on the use of the Threshold of Toxicological Concern approach in food safety assessment" (published in 2019, link here) and the opinion on "Exploring options for providing advice about possible human health risks based on the concept of Threshold of Toxicological Concern" (published in 2012, link here).

The assessment confirmed the validity of the Statement on "Derivation of Health-Based Guidance Values (HGVs) for regulated products that are also nutrients" (published in 2021) and of the "Guidance on uncertainties in scientific assessment" and the "Guidance on communication of uncertainties", both published in 2019. In addition, also the "Guidance on expert knowledge elicitation", published in 2013, has been considered still valid.

The evaluation of the existing cross-cutting guidances will be completed by autumn and presented to the SC before finalisation of the SC work-programme 2027-2029.

The Panel chairs were reminded to submit proposals to be considered for new cross-cutting guidance development by the end of August. The proposals will be presented and discussed at the SC plenary, and then consultations with Advisory Forum, sister agencies and other relevant international bodies will take place. Following consultation also with DG Sante, the final list of cross-cutting guidances to be developed or revised will be published in spring 2027.

5.2 Thematic discussion on Environmental Risk Assessment

The Scientific Committee received an overview of EFSA's activities in environmental risk assessment (ERA), a strategic priority under the EFSA 2027 Strategy. The session provided an update on ongoing developments across regulated areas, highlighted current and emerging scientific challenges, and explored opportunities for future Scientific Committee input.

The Committee was informed about ongoing efforts to advance ERA through updated methodologies, improved assessment tools and data, greater ecological realism, and increased collaboration across regulatory sectors and agencies. Particular attention was given to strengthening links between prospective risk assessment and post-market environmental monitoring as part of a more iterative, adaptive and learning-oriented approach to environmental protection.

The discussion covered a range of scientific and regulatory challenges, including biodiversity protection, climate change, multiple stressors, monitoring and surveillance, new assessment methodologies, and emerging technologies. Members also discussed the importance of systems-based and One Health approaches, improved use of environmental data, and greater integration across regulatory frameworks.

The Committee also revisited the Scientific Committee Guidance on environmental protection goals adopted in 2016. Members considered that the guidance remains broadly fit for purpose. The discussion highlighted the potential benefits of greater convergence of protection goals across regulatory sectors, with a view to supporting more consistent assessments and a stronger focus on overarching ecosystem and biodiversity protection objectives. The Committee noted that defining protection goals ultimately remains a risk management responsibility.

The Committee welcomed the update and expressed interest in continuing discussions on the future development of ERA methodologies and approaches to support environmental and biodiversity protection.

6. Feedback from the Scientific Committee/ Scientific Panels/EFSA/ EC

6.1 Update on WG activities:

- Guidance on Botanicals and botanical preparations

The SC was informed on the progress made concerning the forthcoming revision of the EFSA guidance on botanicals and botanical preparations. The Public Consultation on the draft mandate paper was launched on 8 June and will remain open until 3 August. The SC was informed that the composition of the new Botanicals WG is being finalised, with experts contacted in relevant areas including analytical chemistry, toxicology, NAMs and with consideration of expertise across areas such as novel foods, pesticides, feed, etc.

It was further noted that the mandate paper was presented to the Advisory Forum on 11 June to inform Member States of the guidance revision and the launch of the Public Consultation of the mandate. As next steps, the WG expert composition will be completed soon, with work expected to start at the end of September. Comments received during the Public Consultation will be analysed and addressed and the workplan and terms of reference will be finalised.

- Guidance on the Weight of evidence and on Biological Relevance (EFSA-Q-2026-00103)

The SC was updated on the status of the revision of the two guidance documents (GDs) under the (joint) self-tasking mandate (M-2025-00102). The WG has discussed the option of merging the two GDs and has recommended to keep them separate. Progress has been made with drafting of early sections laying down the general elements and principles of each GD including definitions of relevant concepts, in communication with the WG on appraisal of evidence for alignment. Drafting of the main (practical) sections of each GD is currently under way.

The next steps involve customisation of the main framework of the weight of evidence to different sectoral contexts and illustrating how the biological relevance concept is applied in non-chemical risk assessments. The WG aims to present to the SC an overview of one of the GDs in autumn.

-Guidance on Biomarkers of effect

The SC was provided with a brief update on the EC joint mandate (M-2025-00074), involving EFSA, EMA and ECHA, which formally started in February 2026. The mandate establishes the framework for the development of harmonised EU guidance on the use of biomarkers of effect in risk assessment. It replaces the previous EFSA Scientific Committee self-task (M-2023-00097) while ensuring continuity and knowledge transfer from that work. The SC will be kept informed of progress and consulted on upcoming project milestones.

- Guidance on Margin of Exposure (MOE)

A brief update was provided on the progress and timelines of the Margin of Exposure Working Group in revising the guidance on the use of the MOE approach, focusing on guidance for chemicals with a mutagenic mode of action.

6.2 EFSA horizon scanning – report back for information

The presentation outlined EFSA's cross-cutting approach to horizon scanning, aimed at identifying issues, including weak signals, emerging trends, and forthcoming policy developments, that may affect EFSA's future regulatory activities.

A structured overview of the signals collected during the first half of 2026 was presented and categorised according to their level of maturity. Several topics, such as climate-related impacts, ultra-processed foods, and the influence of digital technologies on science, are already being addressed through existing frameworks. Other topics remain under analysis, including AI-generated scientific content, geopolitical pressures on supply chains, emerging quantum technologies, and the re-emergence of legacy pollutants.

The Scientific Committee was invited to provide comments, share additional information on the signals presented, and suggest further topics that may warrant analysis by EFSA. The European Commission suggested establishing a more systematic exchange on upcoming policy developments and assessing their potential implications for EFSA's activities.

The SC was also informed about the publication of the external scientific report on the multi-agency foresight exercise conducted from a One Health perspective (link here). The findings of the report are contributing to the ongoing work for the development of EFSA's 2028–2034 Strategy.

6.3 Follow up of guidance architecture project

The Scientific Committee was informed about two related initiatives as follow up of the guidance architecture project: the development of a scientific glossary and the creation of a dedicated template for guidance documents.

Regarding the development of a scientific glossary, preparatory work has been initiated to define the principles. In particular, the glossary will start re-using terminology from most recently published guidance and a defined number of new terminologies will be added regularly. Internal alignment is on-going with communication colleagues who are responsible for the plain-language glossary already available on the EFSA website. The scientific glossary will be a live document to ensure a direct link with guidance and opinions.

In relation to the second project: EFSA currently uses the same template for scientific opinions and guidance documents. A draft template specifically designed for guidance documents has been proposed to improve transparency in the content for readers and to give greater visibility to the core guidance section. The core section should provide clear guidance on study design and conduct and/or on the application of methodologies, principles and criteria for scientific assessment processes. Methods, approaches and processes used to develop the guidance document should be presented in an annex.

Suggestions from the discussion included merging the abstract and summary sections, clearly marking optional sections; and considering separate templates for applicant-focused and risk assessors-focused guidance documents.

6.4 Overview of the ongoing work-programme of Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW) panel with specific focus on cross cutting issues relevant for the SC

The chair of the panel Animal Health and Welfare (AHAW) presented the ongoing work-programme. In relation to activities on animal welfare, work is currently ongoing on two scientific opinions: one on the welfare of horses, and one on the welfare of donkeys and hybrids. A specific request has also been received from Sweden concerning the welfare of heavy pigs during head-only electrical stunning at slaughter.

In relation to animal health activities, a major ongoing mandate concerns vectors, vector-borne diseases and mitigation pathways. This work covers 25 diseases transmitted by biting midges, mosquitoes, sand flies, ticks, mites and other vectors, and represents a substantial area of activity.

Work is also continuing on annual monitoring and on risk assessment on bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE; mad cow disease) related to possible alignment with the World Organisation for Animal Health framework. A recent opinion addressed the risks associated with such alignment, and further work is ongoing on specified risk material removal under that framework, with completion expected later in the year.

A new mandate has recently started on the potential transmission of Category A diseases, as defined under the Animal Health Law, through materials moved from outbreak zones. The work will begin with Rift Valley fever and aims to develop a broader framework for assessing pathogen transmission through different materials. Previous work on African swine fever showed that this type of assessment can be challenging, making the development of a structured framework particularly important.

Newcastle disease was highlighted as a current concern, particularly in Poland, where many

outbreaks have been reported. The planned work will describe the epidemiological situation, assess the effectiveness of available vaccines, examine different vaccination protocols, and potentially provide recommendations for improved surveillance. This work is expected by mid-next year. Reference was made also to New World screwworm, which has historically been contained below Panama but is now spreading northwards in Central America. EFSA will assess the likelihood of entry into the EU, the potential impact, and the zoonotic risk associated with this parasite.

African swine fever remains a long-standing area of work. EFSA has been producing scientific opinions and reports on this disease since 2007, with continuous monitoring and follow-up on emerging issues. African swine fever is currently widespread in parts of the EU and remains a significant animal health concern.

Avian influenza is another widespread disease for which activities are ongoing to support monitoring and control in Member States. In addition, EFSA is involved in a One Health project on the design of an EU-coordinated surveillance system for cross-border zoonotic pathogens that may threaten the Union. Regular surveillance of *Echinococcus multilocularis* is also carried out in selected countries, including Finland, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland and Norway.

The Commission's newly released livestock strategy was also mentioned. The strategy includes an implementation plan with key actions and may generate additional work for the Panel on Animal Health and Welfare. In particular, it places renewed emphasis on the Animal Health Law, which may undergo a fitness check, and on the use of vaccination as a preventive measure.

The strategy also refers to possible guidance on vaccination in combination with regionalisation and compartmentalisation, suggesting that EFSA may be asked to contribute scientific advice in this area. It was further noted that changes relating to animal health law, vaccines and welfare are expected to be based on advice from EFSA.

6.5 Overview of the ongoing work-programme of Plant Health (PLH) panel with specific focus on cross cutting issues relevant for the SC

The presentation provided an overview of recent and ongoing EFSA plant health activities, covering scientific assessments, stakeholder engagement, methodological development and cross-cutting work. Particular attention was given to *Xylella fastidiosa*, commodity risk assessments, pinewood nematode, the development of a rapid pest risk assessment protocol, and contributions to broader scientific guidance on weight of evidence and biological relevance.

Xylella fastidiosa is a plant pathogenic bacterium transmitted by insect vectors and responsible for major impacts in several EU outbreak areas. EFSA is updating its 2019 risk assessment at the request of the European Commission, with a stronger focus on EU outbreaks and on analysis at subspecies level, reflecting the complexity of the pathogen in terms of aggressiveness, host range, genomic diversity and sequence types.

The work on *Xylella fastidiosa* is organised into several work packages covering establishment, incubation and latency periods, spread modelling, impacts, host plants, climate suitability, genomic diversity, vector control and risk reduction options. Several supporting outputs are already in consultation or planned for consultation, with adoption of the main opinion expected in November. This modular approach is intended to make the final opinion more concise, accessible and useful for risk managers, end users and the wider public.

The February plenary open to observers and the fifth European conference on *Xylella fastidiosa* confirmed the high scientific and stakeholder interest in this topic. The conference, held in Mola di Bari, gathered around 400 in-person participants and included oral presentations, posters, satellite events and field visits in Puglia. These activities helped connect scientific evidence, outbreak

management, communication and public understanding, particularly in view of misinformation and unsubstantiated claims about possible curative treatments.

Two commodity risk assessments linked to Canadian requests are ongoing. One concerns birch wood imports and the assessment of a proposed systems approach that may include debarking, shaving, heat treatment and drying as alternatives to existing requirements. The second concerns apple propagating material, in particular budwood and one-year-old plants without leaves, which is currently not authorised for import into the EU.

A further important activity is the mandate on pinewood nematode, an American plant pathogenic nematode vectored by insects of the genus *Monochamus*. The assessment will consider risks linked to young plants for reforestation, ornamental and landscape use, review existing spread models, and examine risk reduction measures as well as possible containment or eradication strategies, in light of the evolving situation in Europe.

The development of a rapid pest risk assessment protocol was presented as a way to provide a faster and proportionate approach between pest categorisation and full quantitative risk assessment. The aim is to deliver robust assessments within approximately three to six months, using a tiered approach and drawing on input from European reference laboratories covering different groups of plant pathogens and pests.

Finally, the presentation highlighted plant health contributions to cross-cutting work on weight of evidence and biological relevance. These concepts are particularly important for integrating different sources of information and assessing pest impact in support of regulatory decision-making. Overall, the update illustrated the breadth of EFSA's plant health work and the importance of timely, robust and clearly communicated scientific advice for risk managers, stakeholders and the wider public.

7. Any other business

The SC was informed about the EFSA workshop on "Building EFSA strategy 2034", planned for the afternoon of 24 September 2026. More detailed information will be provided in due time, closer to the event.

End of the meeting