SCIENTIFIC PANEL ON BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS

189th Panel Plenary meeting

21-22 October 2026
09:00-16:45 / 09:00-15:45
MINUTES - Agreed on 1 October 2026

EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

Location: Teleconference

Attendees:

- Panel Members:
  Ana Allende, Avelino Alvarez-Ordóñez, Bojan Blagojevic, Sara Bover-Cid, Alessandra De Cesare, Wietske Dohmen, Laurent Guillier, Lieve Herman, Liesbeth Jacxsens, Maarten Nauta, Lapo Mughini-Gras, Jakob Ottoson, Luisa Peixe, Fernando Pérez-Rodríguez, Panagiotis Skandamis
- Hearing Experts[1]:
  Mary Lenahan (FSAI, item 8.3)
- Applicants participating in a technical hearing[2]:
  Not Applicable
- European Commission and/or Member States representatives:
  Gunilla Eklund (DG SANTE, item 6.3)
- EFSA:
  BIOHAW Unit: Sara Angelone, Sandra Correia, Beatriz Guerra, Ernesto Liebana, Winy Messens, Valentina Rizzi, Eleonora Sarno, Pietro Stella, Milica Stevanovic, Natisha Vatwani, Frank Verdonck, Anna Zdanowicz

  COM Unit: Joana Isabel Sousa Lourenco, Giorgia Zamariola (item 6.4)

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed the participants. Apologies were received from Valeria Bortolaia.

2. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

3. Declarations of Interest of Panel members

In accordance with EFSA's Policy on Independence[3] and the Decision of the Executive Director on Competing Interest Management[4], 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 Panel members at the beginning of this meeting.

[1] As defined in Article 34 of the document "Implementing Rule of the Management Board of the European Food Safety Authority laying down the rules on the selection, appointment and operations of the Scientific Committee, Scientific Panels and of their Working Groups": https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/paneloperation.pdf
[2] As defined in the "EFSA's Catalogue of support initiatives during the life cycle of applications for regulated products": https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.2903/sp.efsa.2021.EN-6472
[3] https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/independence-policy-2024.pdf
[4] https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/decision-ed-on-competing-interest-management-2024.pdf

4. Agreement of the minutes of the 188th BIOHAZ Panel Plenary meeting held on 16 and 17 September 2026

The minutes of the 188th Panel plenary meeting were agreed by written procedure on 1 October 2026.

5. Scientific outputs submitted for adoption/endorsement

5.1 Scientific opinion on the implementation of point 2 of Annex V of Regulation (EU) 2025/40 on Packaging and Packaging Waste (EFSA-Q-2025-00456)

The most recent working group (WG) meetings were held on 28 September and 2 October 2026. The WG Chair presented the draft scientific opinion, and the comments received from the BIOHAZ Panel were discussed. The structure of the conclusions was revised by removing the distinction between the two terms of reference. The draft recommendation addressed to food business operators was removed, as the relevant information was already reflected in the conclusions. The scientific opinion was subsequently adopted by the BIOHAZ Panel

6. Scientific outputs submitted for discussion

6.1 Statement on the update of the list of QPS-recommended biological agents intentionally added to food or feed as notified to EFSA. 25: Suitability of taxonomic units notified to EFSA until September 2026 (EFSA-Q-2025-00687)

The last WG meeting was held on 20 October in Parma. A total of 75 notifications were received between April and September 2026, including the pending 4 notifications for bacteriophages received for the previous Panel Statement. 33 were proposed for use in feed, 26 as food enzymes, food additives and flavourings, 11 as novel foods and 5 as plant protection products. 39 notifications were related to microorganisms generally excluded from QPS evaluation, 25 had the QPS status. Of the remaining 11 notifications corresponding to 12 taxonomic units (TUs), 2 were already assessed within this QPS 3-years cycle (*Enterococcus lactis, Hyphomicrobium denitrificans*) and therefore will not be reassessed. The other 10 TUs were assessed for the first time in this Statement: 2 undefined bacteriophages against *Clavibacter michiganensis* subsp. *michiganensis* (BACMM), 3 bacteriophages species and 1 family against *Erwinia amylovora* (BAEA), 1 bacteriophage species (1 undefined) against *Xanthomonas arboricola* pathovar Juglandis, 1 bacteriophage species of *Pecentumvirus* P100, *Tetradesmus obliquus* (microalgae) and *Weissella cibaria* (bacteria) and *Starmera caribaea (yeast)*. The assessments of these TUs was presented to the Panel. The ELS exercise was finalised and the summaries were also presented. The deadline for adoption of the Panel statement is 31 December 2026.

6.2 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-2025-00689)

The last WG meeting was held on 20 October in Parma, and the next meeting is scheduled for January 2027 (date to be defined). The follow up of the challenges for this three-years cycle was presented to the Panel, mainly on the aspects linked to the QPS assessment of bacteriophages notified to EFSA. The deadline for adoption of this Opinion is 31 December 2028.

6.3 Scientific opinion(s) on the current status of the occurrence and spread of carbapenemase-producing Enterobacterales in the food chain in the EU/EFTA

EFSA informed the Panel experts that Framework Partnership Agreement for the EFSA-funded Carba-R-ales project (CPEs in the EU/EFTA food Chain, ToR2 of the BIOHAZ Panel Mandate) has been updated with the inclusion of ANSES, DAFM, and NVL, from France, Malta and Ireland, respectively joining the consortium, and IHVPH, from Romania leaving it. This project runs until mid of 2027. Generated data will be used for the update of the CPE in the food chain scientific opinion Part 1[5]. The next meeting of the Carba-R-ales project will take place on 10 November, being linked to the next meeting of the Working group Carbapenemases in the food chain (10-11 November) in Parma.

6.4 Scientific opinion on Food Safety Culture and its microbiological food safety impact in the EU (EFSA-Q-2025-00553 and EFSA-Q-2025-00554)

The WG chair updated the Panel on the progress of this mandate and on the outcome of the WG meeting held on 23 September 2026. The WG chair presented all sections of the draft opinion for thorough reading, including draft concluding remarks from all sections, but excluding general draft conclusions and recommendations. The Panel provided comments, asking to clarify the concept of food safety climate vs food safety culture, the consistent use of terminology throughout the draft opinion, some parts of the text reporting the feedback from interviews with stakeholders, the information reported in relation to tools to evaluate maturity of food safety culture, and providing some suggestions to improve and simplify the current text. The next WG meeting will take place on 9-10 November 2026. The deadline for adoption of the first scientific opinion is end of December 2026.

6.5 Scientific opinion on the health risks posed by microplastics in food, water and air (EFSA-Q-2025-00702)

The Chair of the SubWG-BIOHAZ briefly updated the Panel on the progress of the mandate, which is allocated to the CONTAM Panel with the contribution of the BIOHAZ Panel. The BIOHAZ Panel covers the role of micro- and nano-plastics as vectors for human foodborne microbiological hazards in food of plant and animal origin (ToR5) and will contribute to the related issues within the One Health aspect (ToR1). Data extraction from the literature review performed until the end of 2025 has been finalized. A public Webinar to present the protocol and the on-going work took place on 20 October 2026. The last full WG (SubWG-CONTAM and BIOHAZ) meeting was on 22-23 September 2026. The next WG of the full WG will take place in January, whereas for the SubWG-BIOHAZ, the next meeting will take place on 15 December (with additional preparatory meetings scheduled for October and November). Deadline for the adoption of the scientific opinion is end of December 2027.

6.6 Scientific opinion on the microbiological status of fishery products following the stiffening process with focus on smoked salmon (EFSA-Q-2026-00032)

The latest WG meetings were held on 29 September and 2 October 2026. The WG Chair presented the full draft opinion for detailed review. Comments received from the BIOHAZ Panel were discussed and, for the most part, resolved. The remaining comments will be addressed with the WG members at the next WG meeting. The Panel agreed with the proposed approach to the uncertainty analysis and the expression of uncertainty in the conclusions. The next WG meeting will be held on 26 October and 19 November 2026. The deadline for delivery of the scientific opinion is the end of December 2026.

[5] https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.2903/j.efsa.2025.9336

7.Update on new Mandates

7.1 Application for an alternative processing method for animal by-products to produce tricalcium phosphate (EFSA-Q-2026-00511)

A new application for an alternative processing method for animal by-products to produce tricalcium phosphate arrived at EFSA on 15 September 2026 (applicant: Darling Ingredients Rendering and Specialties). The application is currently under completeness check.

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

8.1. Scientific Committee

The Panel Chair reported to the Panel the main topics discussed during the 132nd Plenary meeting of the Scientific Committee (SC)[6], that took place on 23 and 24 September 2026, in particular: a discussion on the building-up of the SC work programme 2027-2029 and an internal SC workshop related to the development of the EFSA Strategy 2034.

8.2. European Commission

No discussion took place under this agenda item.

8.3. Presentation on a retail prevalence study to investigate microbiological contamination levels in ready-to-eat (RTE) plant-based dairy, meat and fish substitutes (EFSA TMA activity)

Mary Lenahan presented findings from an EFSA-funded study on the microbiological safety of ready-to-eat plant-based dairy, meat and fish substitutes[7]. Around 1,500 retail samples from 15 Member States were tested near the end of shelf life. Overall microbiological quality was satisfactory, with pathogens detected only sporadically at low levels and no *Salmonella* spp. detected. However, many products had physico-chemical characteristics that could support microbial growth if contamination occurred. The study highlighted knowledge gaps and the lack of harmonised monitoring guidance, supporting the development of targeted guidance on hygiene, control of spore-forming bacteria, and shelf-life determination under realistic storage conditions.

9. Other topics for information and/or discussion

9.1. Topics of scientific concern in the area of biological hazards

No detailed discussions took place in relation to this agenda item.

10. AOB

No other topics were discussed in relation to this agenda item.

[6] https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/events/132nd-plenary-meeting-scientific-committee
[7] https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.2903/sp.efsa.2026.EN-10271

11. Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on 2 and 3 December 2026, in Parma. The meeting will be open to online attendance by observers (details on registration available on EFSA website[8]).

[8] https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/events/190th-biohaz-panel-plenary-meeting-open-observers