

16 January 2017

# ***International Scientific Cooperation***

## ***Work Plan 2017–2020***

### **Summary**

This document describes EFSA's work plan for international scientific cooperation for the period 2017-2020. It builds on the achievements and lessons learnt from EFSA's international activities between 2002 and 2016 and is aligned with the five strategic objectives in EFSA Strategy 2020. The plan aims to address current and future challenges such as globalisation of hazards, innovation in industry, economic pressures and societal demands for protection, transparency and engagement through focussed global cooperation initiatives.

The objectives of EFSA's international cooperation activities are:

- 1) provide scientific and technical support to the European Commission (EC) to meet its international commitments and to promote a coherent European voice;
- 2) widen EFSA's evidence base and optimise access to data;
- 3) increase international scientific assessment capacity and knowledge community;
- 4) contribute to international efforts aimed at development, validation, implementation and harmonisation of methodologies, tools and approaches in risk assessment and risk communication; and
- 5) increase EFSA's visibility and reputation as a competent and innovative regulatory risk assessment agency operating at international level.

EFSA devotes a significant amount of resources to the provision of support to the EU in Codex related activities. Based on positive feedback from DG SANTE on the level and quality of the support provided, this work will remain a main component of EFSA's international engagement. EFSA will continue the cooperation with the WHO and FAO Secretariats to JECFA and JMPR. The aim will be to develop multi-annual cooperation plans on specific substances of priority for EU and Codex to avoid duplication of work, to facilitate data sharing on substances of common concern and to avoid unnecessary divergence due to differences in datasets or lack of harmonisation of assessment methodologies.

EFSA's plan includes a gradual shift from bilateral to more multilateral engagements, organised, where possible, with a stronger involvement of Member States agencies and international organisations such as FAO and WHO.

Based on the positive experience with the International Food Chemical Safety Liaison Group, the International Microbiological Food Safety Liaison Group and the Global Coalition for Regulatory Science Research, EFSA will establish an International Risk Communication Liaison Group for the development and implementation of harmonised

risk communication practices, and an International Food Safety Risk Assessment Liaison Group for the harmonisation of chemical risk assessment methodologies.

In bilateral relations with third countries, EFSA will build on its cooperation with established risk assessment bodies in Australia, Canada, China, Chile, Japan, New Zealand and the USA and intensify the current exchange of scientific information and data with short term visits of staff to facilitate cooperation activities on topics of strategic nature, such as open data, collection and sharing of harmonised chemical occurrence and food consumption data, harmonisation and innovation in risk assessment methodologies, as well as the identification of emerging risks and the introduction of effective tools for risk communication.

In 2017-2020, EFSA will expand its risk assessment capacity building initiatives in selected countries in South-East Asia, South America, and possibly Africa, and the Arabian region. In the planning and prioritising of these bilateral activities, EFSA will work closely with the EC, EU agencies and institutions, food safety organisations in and outside EU and international organisations to optimise the use of available resources, expertise, existing frameworks and funding schemes.

Senior staff will be designated as continent coordinators to report on relevant trends and developments in food safety and public health in the different continents around the world. These reports will be used to inform the planning, prioritisation, and possible engagements.

**Key words:** international cooperation, multilateral relation, bilateral relation, capacity building, risk assessment, risk communication

## 1. Background

The 'Multi-Annual Programme for International Scientific Cooperation 2014-2016' (EFSA, 2014) was endorsed by EFSA's Management Board in June 2014. The key objectives for the international programme were derived from previous discussions in the Board about its international activities (EFSA, 2009), EFSA's Science Strategy 2012-2016 (EFSA, 2012a) and EFSA's External Review (EFSA, 2012b).

In line with the Multiannual Programme 2014-2016, EFSA provided scientific and technical support to the EC in Codex Alimentarius related activities and developed close working contacts with a range of international partners active in its remit. Administrative arrangements were made initially in the form of an Exchange of Letters and more recently, in the form of a Memorandum of Cooperation with international organisations (WHO) and eleven risk assessment agencies including Australia, Canada, China, Chile, Japan, New Zealand and the USA (see Annex 1). In addition, competent food safety authorities from various countries visited EFSA to get a better understanding about the EU food safety system and EFSA's role and responsibilities, not only in general but also in specific areas of its work. Over the years, a gradual shift to collaboration in multilateral platforms resulted in participation in International Liaison Groups in the area of food chemical safety and microbiological food safety, and the Global Coalition for Regulatory Science Research. In order to inform the prioritisation and optimisation of its international engagements, EFSA consults on a regular basis the European Commission's Health and Food Safety Directorate General (DG SANTE) and its partners in the Member States.

In April 2016, EFSA released its Strategy 2020 (EFSA, 2016) presenting the challenges and the opportunities that EFSA will encounter between now and 2020. The environment in which it operates is changing rapidly and, in some respects, dramatically. The International Scientific Cooperation Work Plan for 2017-2020 aims to address these challenges.

## 2. Work Plan for 2017-2020

The plan consists of activities along the following three main strands of action:

- support to the EU in its international commitments;
- multilateral cooperation with international organisations and multilateral liaison groups with responsibility for providing scientific advice or setting international standards, in the area of food and feed safety, animal health and welfare as well as plant health; and
- bilateral relations with third country risk assessment organisations.

### 2.1. Support to the EU in the framework of Codex Alimentarius and its Committees

EFSA will continue to provide scientific and technical support to the preparation of EU positions in the framework of activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) and its Committees in response to an annual request from the Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) or on an ad-hoc basis. This support will be provided through:

- technical briefings on substances of concern;
- a comprehensive report on health-based guidance values and Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) proposed for (multiple) substances by the relevant Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee;
- participation of EFSA's experts in the EU delegation at Codex Committee meetings, such as the CCCF<sup>1</sup>, CCPR<sup>2</sup> and the CCNFSDU<sup>3</sup>;
- response to calls for data and experts from Codex for meetings of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA), Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues (JMPR) and Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meeting on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA);
- submission of occurrence data collected from the Member States to the GEMS/FOOD<sup>4</sup> database in response to calls for data on contaminants scheduled for evaluation by the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA).

In cooperation with the WHO and FAO Secretariats to JECFA and JMPR, EFSA will develop multi-annual cooperation plans on specific substances of priority for EU and Codex to avoid duplication of work, to facilitate data sharing on substances of common concern and to avoid unnecessary divergence due to differences in datasets or lack of harmonisation of assessment methodologies.

Based on positive feedback from DG SANTE on the level and quality of the support provided, this work will remain a main component of EFSA's international engagements.

### 2.2. Multilateral cooperation with international organisations and liaison groups

#### World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

EFSA will continue cooperation with WHO and FAO through:

<sup>1</sup> CCCF: Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods

<sup>2</sup> CCPR: Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues

<sup>3</sup> CCNFSDU: Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses

<sup>4</sup> GEMS/FOOD: Global Environment Monitoring System on Food Contamination

- exchange of information, expertise and methods in the area of risk assessment, risk communication and emerging risks;
- joint activities aimed at international harmonisation of risk assessment, risk communication and capacity building;
- participation of EFSA staff in meetings of FAO and WHO and vice versa;
- EFSA scientists on the roster of experts contributing to JECFA and JMPR evaluations;
- implementation of harmonised methodologies for collection of chemical occurrence, food classification<sup>5</sup> and food consumption data for risk assessments at European and International level.

EFSA and WHO signed already Exchange of Letters in 2009 and 2013. In 2017, EFSA and FAO will have a high-level meeting to i) agree on an EFSA-FAO scientific cooperation roadmap and ii) prepare a Memorandum of Cooperation to facilitate and clarify the terms and conditions for the collaboration between the two agencies.

### **European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO)**

EFSA and EPPO will collaborate in the field of data collection and harmonisation and in the development of risk assessment methodologies outlined in the extensive implementation plan prepared following and in line with terms and conditions for collaboration which will be specified in a Memorandum of Cooperation to be signed in 2017.

### **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**

In 2017-2020, EFSA will continue to provide scientific input to OECD's activities in the area of development of international guidance documents in:

- environmental risk assessment;
- chemical mixtures;
- developmental neurotoxicity; and
- dermal toxicity.

In particular, cooperation will be ensured also when working on mandates EFSA may receive from DG SANTE in relation to subjects which also fall within the competence of the OECD.

### **World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE<sup>6</sup>)**

EFSA's cooperation with OIE in the period 2017-2020 will include:

- Exchange of information on risk assessments performed in the field of animal health and welfare;
- Nurture collaborations in the area of data collection on zoonotic diseases;
- Further develop recently initiated cooperation work in the area of emerging risks;
- Secure the participation of OIE in the International Risk Communication Liaison Group.

<sup>5</sup> EFSA introduced the FoodEx2 as part of the Standard Sample Description for the electronic transmission of harmonised chemical occurrence data to EFSA. FAO and WHO envisage to use FoodEx2 for the collection of data for evaluations by JECFA and JMPR which is a big milestone for the successful cooperation between the three agencies.

<sup>6</sup> Office International des Epizooties (OIE).

## Multilateral liaison groups and networks

EFSA will be a driving force at international level in the area of harmonisation and innovation of methodologies in risk assessment and risk communication. The multilateral model has shown to be very successful to exchange information and data with partners having a similar mandate as EFSA. Based on established interpersonal relations and a commitment to use a common code of administrative rules for exchanging documents and information, an efficient scientific and technical exchange of information and data can be achieved. In the period 2017-2020, the following activities are envisaged:

- Exchange information on risk assessment, risk management, emerging issues and food surveillance in the International Food Chemical Safety Liaison Group (IFCSLG) and the International Microbial Food Safety Liaison Group (IMFSLG) together with FSANZ, Health Canada, CFIA, FSCJ, NZMPI, US FDA, UK FSA, ANSES, BfR and the EC;
- Participation in the International Health Claims Liaison Group together with FSANZ, Health Canada and NZMPI to exchange experience in the scientific evaluation of health claims;
- Creation of two new liaison groups for international exchanges in the area of risk communication (International Risk Communication Liaison Group, IRCLG), and in the area of harmonisation and innovation in chemical risk assessment methods (International Food Safety Risk Assessment Liaison Group, IFSRA). For both liaison groups, EFSA has developed a terms of reference in cooperation with various international partners with the intention to organise the first meetings of these liaison groups in 2017;
- Contribution to the shaping of the agenda of annual global summits of the Global Coalition for Regulatory Science Research (GCRSR), in cooperation with other EU risk assessment agencies such as EMA, ECHA and JRC;
- Contribution to the GCRSR's Executive Committee composed of representatives from various regulatory agencies in the medical and food safety areas that provide programme input and oversight. EFSA will in particular ensure that the group focuses on subjects such as the facilitation of education and scientific training to support the research needed to support regulatory decision making, establishment of best practices to understand and interpret data from innovative technology, and the translation of basic science innovation into regulatory applications;
- Exploring a possible collaboration with the recently created ASEAN<sup>7</sup> Risk Assessment Centre (ARAC) in Southeast Asia. The aim is to widen EFSA's evidence base, optimise the access to data from the ten countries who are members of ASEAN, and increase the international risk assessment capacity, in line with the EC's interest. EFSA will develop a Memorandum of Cooperation with ARAC to clarify the scope, terms and conditions thereby enabling effective cooperation between EFSA and ARAC;
- Membership of WHO's Chemical Risk Assessment Network, grouping more than 70 institutions worldwide, including governmental institutions, professional societies, intergovernmental organisations and NGOs, which EFSA joined in 2013 together with ECHA<sup>8</sup>. EFSA will continue its participation in the Network's working groups on Combined Exposures, Mode of Action, Chemical-Specific Adjustment Factors, and Systematic Review, and it will host the second face-to-face meeting of the WHO Network from 20-22 June 2017 in Parma.

## 2.3. Bilateral cooperation with third countries

### Bilateral cooperation with third countries at the EC's request

In the forthcoming period, these will include:

<sup>7</sup> ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations (see <http://www.aseansec.org/asean-anthem/>).

<sup>8</sup> The network provides a forum for scientific and technical exchange, and is meant to facilitate capacity building, harmonisation, to share work programmes and to identify research needs



- Accommodating requests from the EC DGs TRADE and SANTE to receive delegations from countries with an interest in EFSA's role in the EU food safety system, in specific areas of EFSA's activities (e.g. health claims, food additive risk assessment, pesticide peer review), or in the scientific state-of-play of specific subjects for which trade problems between a particular country and the EU exist.
- Developing and maintaining working relations and scientific cooperation with EU Enlargement Countries<sup>9</sup> in the framework of the EU's Enlargement Policy and with Europe's southern and eastern neighbours in the framework of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)<sup>10</sup> on behalf of EC DG International Cooperation and Development (DG NEAR).
- Organising a multi-country workshop to enhance cooperation among the Mediterranean countries on emerging risks in the food chain in 2017 in cooperation with the Spanish Agency for Consumers Affairs, Food Safety and Nutrition, and the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Zaragoza.
- Project activities with pre-accession countries, focusing on facilitating data collection and reporting to EFSA primarily related to zoonoses, antimicrobial resistance and foodborne outbreaks. In addition, EFSA will continue to deliver training courses in food safety risk assessment to build capacity across institution in the pre-accession countries.
- Risk assessment training in the framework of the Better Training for Safer Food (BTSF) initiative of DG SANTE<sup>i</sup>, provided beyond the EU borders, to the Candidate and Associated Countries, to African countries, to countries in Asia<sup>11</sup> etc.

## **Bilateral cooperation with countries through agreements**

Annex 1 provides an overview of third country organisations with which EFSA has signed a cooperation agreement or has committed to do so in the forthcoming years. EFSA will intensify relations or expand this list with other risk assessment agencies, where this is in line with its strategic objectives outlined in Strategy 2020.

For 2017-2020, new bilateral developments are envisaged with two federal agencies in the US, as well as with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean Region, South East Asia and Africa, including the Arabian region. The plan foresees:

- Intensifying cooperation through the exchange of staff in the area of Open Data with US FDA, USDA FSIS and CFIA. Other agencies active in this field may be involved;
- Strengthening the cooperation with US EPA to develop, validate and implement new and alternative methods for chemical risk assessment in the area of a.o. pesticides, endocrine disruptors, chemical mixtures; a MoC will be signed to facilitate and clarify the scope, terms and conditions for the cooperation between the two agencies;
- Exploring a possible collaboration with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC) for exchange of data and information in the area of food consumption, biomonitoring and epidemiological data;
- Exchange of staff to share information and expertise on approaches for the identification of emerging risks with, in particular, US FDA and USDA-FSIS. Other agencies active in this field may be involved;
- Exploring a possible collaboration with the Brazilian food safety agency ANVISA. The aim is to widen EFSA's evidence base, optimise the access to data from the respective continents and increase the international risk assessment capacity, in line with the

<sup>9</sup> For further information, see <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/networks/euenlargement.htm>

<sup>10</sup> For further information, see [http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/index_en.htm)

<sup>11</sup> Such as the BTSF training dedicated to antimicrobial resistance in Thailand in November 2016.

EC's interest. EFSA will develop a Memorandum of Cooperation with ANVISA to clarify the scope, terms and conditions thereby enabling effective cooperation between EFSA and this agency;

- Furthering together with DG SANTE the relations with food safety structures in Africa initiated in 2015. Developing cooperation with the Arabian Region recently initiated by UNIDO, and in line with DG SANTE's recommendations.

## **Bilateral relations with new risk assessment agencies**

Also thanks to EFSA's endeavours at International level, the number of countries considering developing their own national risk assessment agency is growing steadily, for example in South-East Asia (ASEAN), Latin America and the Arabian Region.

It will be important to keep EFSA's international activities within reasonable proportions and in line with EFSA's mission and strategic objectives. Forward planning and prioritisation will be crucial. Therefore, the following measures are considered for 2017-2020:

- In the *planning and prioritising* of its international activities, EFSA will cooperate with the EC, EU agencies and institutions, the European External Action Service (EEAS), food safety organisations in and outside EU and international organisations to optimise the use of available resources, expertise, existing frameworks and funding schemes;
- EFSA will implement a gradual shift from bilateral to *more multilateral engagements*, organised, where possible, with a stronger involvement of Member States agencies and international organisations such as FAO and WHO;
- EFSA will designate senior staff as *continent coordinators*<sup>12</sup> to follow relevant trends and developments in risk assessment and risk communication in the area of food safety and public health in i) North America (US/Canada), ii) Latin America and the Caribbean Region, iii) Africa, iv) Asia, v) Australia/New Zealand and vi) Europe. These continent coordinators will report to EFSA every two-years to inform the planning, prioritisation, and the possible engagements EFSA needs to consider in these continents (e.g. a high-level meeting, a training event, a joint project, visiting scientists).

## **2.4 Concluding summary**

- For the forthcoming period, EFSA will devote a similar amount of resources to the provision of support to the EU in Codex related activities. Based on positive feedback from DG SANTE on the level and quality of the support provided, this work will remain a main component of EFSA's international engagements;
- EFSA will continue the cooperation with the WHO and FAO Secretariats to JECFA and JMPR. The aim will be to develop multi-annual cooperation plans on specific substances of priority for EU and Codex to avoid duplication of work, to facilitate data sharing on substances of common concern and to avoid unnecessary divergence due to differences in datasets or lack of harmonisation of assessment methodologies;

<sup>12</sup> The work of a Continent Coordinator includes: i) Horizon scanning of relevant trends and development in "their" Continent; ii) Deep knowledge of EFSA's work and ability to make identify what trends are relevant to EFSA's work; iii) Analysis of information in relation to EFSA's work in specific scientific area; iv) Report to the International Relations Team; v) Act as EFSA ambassador in the Continent; vi) Act as in-house ambassador to stimulate staff's interest in International scientific cooperation; vii) Organise missions of staff and experts to bring-in expertise on subjects of relevance for EFSA. A similar approach is applied in EFSA's Interagency Cooperation Project (AFSCO-12) in the form of *Leaders of (EU) Agency Specific Work Packages*. The designation of continent coordinators is further referred to on page 24 of the Implementation Plan of EFSA's Strategy 2020 (EFSA, 2016).

- In 2017, EFSA will have a high level meeting with FAO with the objective to i) agree on an EFSA-FAO scientific cooperation roadmap and ii) to sign an overarching Memorandum of Cooperation to facilitate and clarify the scope, terms and conditions of the cooperation;
- Following the development of a work plan in 2016, EFSA will develop a Memorandum of Cooperation to be signed with EPPO in 2017 to clarify the scope, terms and conditions thereby enabling effective cooperation between the two agencies;
- EFSA will create a new liaison group for international exchanges in the area of risk communication, and another new one in the area of harmonisation and innovation in chemical risk assessment methods. The first meetings of these liaison groups will be organised in 2017;
- In the *planning and prioritising* of its bilateral international activities, EFSA will cooperate with the EC, EU agencies and institutions, the European External Action Service (EEAS), food safety organisations in and outside EU and international organisations to optimise the use of available resources, expertise, existing frameworks and funding schemes;
- EFSA will intensify its cooperation with existing partners in areas of priority identified in EFSA Strategy 2020 (e.g. open data initiatives, optimising access to data, and innovation in risk assessment);
- For 2017-2020, new relations are envisaged with US EPA, US CDC, as well as with risk assessment bodies in Brazil (ANVISA) and South East Asia (ARAC). With the EC, EFSA will explore ways to develop relations with food safety structures in Africa, including initiatives taken in the Arabian Region;
- EFSA will implement a gradual shift from bilateral to *more multilateral engagements*, organised, where possible, in partnership with other agencies and international organisations such as FAO, WHO, EPPO and OECD;
- EFSA will designate senior staff as continent coordinators to follow relevant trends and developments in the area of food safety and public health food safety and to enhance the visibility and reputation of EFSA at international level. These continent coordinators will report every two-years to inform the planning, prioritisation, and the possible engagements EFSA needs to consider in these continents.



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### Document history

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**ANNEX 1**

Cooperation agreements with international organisations and risk assessment organisations in countries outside the EU (situation December 2016)

Organisation	Type of agreement	date of signature	expiration date	remarks
<b>International Organisations</b>				
EPPO	MoC			<i>to be prepared</i>
FAO	EoL			Roadmap for FAO-EFSA cooperation prepared; drafting of MoC postponed until high level meeting in 2017
IPPC	EoL			<i>to be prepared</i>
OIE	EoL			<i>to be prepared</i>
WHO/FOS	EoL (general)	29/03/2010	not defined	review from time to time/evaluation
WHO/FOS	EoL (data collection)	25/02/2013	25/02/2016	review every three years/periodic evaluation
<b>Third country Organisations</b>				
ASEAN Risk Assessment Centre (ARAC)	MoC			<i>to be prepared</i>
Australia - FSANZ	EoL	22/10/2010 & 8/2/2010	not defined	review from time to time; cooperation positively evaluated in Oct 2015 and Aug 2016; MoC to be prepared early 2017
Brazil - ANVISA				<i>to be prepared</i>
Health Canada	EoL	15/02/2010	not defined	review from time to time/evaluation
Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)	MoC	14/12/2015	13/12/2020	Cooperation continues for a further period of 5 years, unless one of the participants notifies the other to stop cooperation six months before expiration date

Organisation	Type of agreement	date of signature	expiration date	remarks
China - CFSA	MoC	01/11/2016	31/10/2021	Cooperation continues for a further period of 5 years, unless one of the participants notifies the other to stop cooperation six months before expiration date
Chile-ACHIPIA	MoC	17/10/2016	16/10/2021	Cooperation continues for a further period of 5 years, unless one of the participants notifies the other to stop cooperation six months before expiration date
Japan - FSCJ	MoC	15/10/2015	15/10/2020 (see remarks)	MoC remains valid after 15/10/2020 unless one organisation wants to terminate
India - FSSAI	MoC			Draft MoC received from FSSAI on 8/3/16; comments sent to Indian Embassy on May 18, 2016
New Zealand - MPI	EoL	28/08/2014	not defined	renewed on 24 August 2014
USDA/APHIS/CEAH	EoL	09/07/2013	not defined	review from time to time/evaluation
USDA/ARS	EoL	03/04/2013	not defined	review from time to time/annual evaluation
USDA/FSIS	EoL	10/04/2014	not defined	review from time to time/evaluation
US EPA (OSP, OPP, ORD)	MoC			to be prepared for signature in 2018
US FDA	MoC	23/07/2009	23/07/2011	2 years extensions upon mutual agreements