

EFSA Scientific Network for Risk Assessment of the use of Nanotechnologies in food and feed

Background

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is the keystone of European Union risk assessment regarding food and feed safety, animal health and welfare, nutrition, plant protection and plant health. In close collaboration with national authorities and in open consultation with its stakeholders, EFSA provides independent and transparent scientific advice and clear communication on existing and emerging risks associated with the food chain. On request from the European Commission, European Parliament or Member States or on its own initiative, EFSA provides scientific opinions on issues falling under its remit.

In 2010, the EFSA Scientific Committee adopted its scientific opinion on “The Potential Risks Arising from Nanoscience and Nanotechnologies on Food and Feed Safety”¹. In this opinion, the Scientific Committee concluded that EFSA would be in a position to assess possible future applications on a case-by-case basis and that it would be able to reach a conclusion only if sufficient data is submitted for such a risk assessment. There is however still a lack of data and a lack of harmonized and validated methodologies on crucial elements of the risk assessment. Upon request from the European Commission, the Scientific Committee subsequently provided in April 2011 guidance for assessing the potential risks arising from applications of nanoscience and nanotechnologies to food, feed and pesticides². Practical recommendations and provisions for such risk assessment were given to the extent possible with current knowledge, allowing industry to submit dossiers for nanotechnology food applications.

EFSA is closely following developments in the area of nanotechnologies in food and feed in order to address the need to provide further specific guidance where possible. In accordance with EFSA’s strategy for cooperation and networking with Member States (MS)³, a Network for Risk Assessment of Nanotechnologies in Food and Feed (Nano Network) was established in 2010. This Nano Network has helped to strengthen the scientific cooperation for risk assessment of application of nanotechnologies and products thereof in the relevant areas within EFSA’s remit. It aims at anticipating and reducing the duplication of activities and avoiding divergence of opinions. The network is an environment to share data and methodologies facilitating harmonisation of assessment practices and assist in anticipating emerging risks in the EU.

¹ <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.2903/j.efsa.2009.958/epdf>

² <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.2903/j.efsa.2011.2140/epdf>

³ http://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/efsa_rep/blobserver_assets/msstrategy.pdf

Objectives of the Nano Network

The specific objectives of the Network for Risk Assessment of Nanotechnologies in Food and Feed are to

- facilitate harmonisation of assessment practices and methodologies by:
 - Sharing best practices of risk assessment of applications of nanotechnologies,
 - Discussing ongoing issues in risk assessment of applications of nanotechnologies to avoid duplication and divergent opinions,
 - Discussing new guidance under development or developed for risk assessment of applications of nanotechnologies,
- enhance exchange of information and data between EFSA and MS by
 - Discussing issues of availability and quality of data required for risk assessment purposes of applications of nanotechnologies,
 - Sharing information and experience in data collection and surveillance of applications of nanotechnologies,
 - Identifying and mapping expertise in specific areas and on specific issues for risk assessment of applications of nanotechnologies,
- achieve synergies in risk assessment activities by
 - Discussing priorities for risk assessment activities of nanotechnologies at national and EU level,
 - Discussing new scientific developments in risk assessment activities of nanotechnologies and their implications on risk assessment practice,
 - Identifying priority research needs that support common progress in risk assessment,
 - Identifying common themes and areas for mutual cooperation for risk assessment activities of nanotechnologies.

EFSA may entrust certain tasks to the network, such as collection of data and identification of emerging risks, or some preparatory work for future guidance development.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the first three years had been discussed and agreed with the Scientific Committee and the Advisory Forum in 2010. For their first and second renewal, also the Network itself has been consulted on the above objectives. The current Terms of References are approved for December 2017-December 2020.

Members of the Nano Network

The Members of the Nano Network are organisations appointed for three-year terms through the EFSA Advisory Forum Members, in accordance with Articles 2 and 3 of the Decision of the Management Board of EFSA on the establishment and operations of networks. The network shall be composed of one member from each of the EU Member States, Norway and Iceland. In addition, one additional member per third country participating to EFSA's activities in accordance with Article 49 of Regulation (EC) No 178/2002, is invited in the role of observer. The Members of the Network appoint experts and alternates to represent them at Nano Network meetings.

The profile of expert appointed to attend the Nano Network should include the following:

- Experience in risk assessment, research or analysis of nanotechnologies and applications of nanotechnologies, preferably in the areas within EFSA's remit.
- Knowledge of the national status and of the European and/or international context of risk assessment of nanotechnologies.

The chair of the network shall be a member of EFSA staff designated by EFSA.

Working methods

Member States representatives in this Network shall commit to liaise as appropriate at national level before and after each Network meeting. The network shall meet at least once a year. In addition it will use other means of cooperation:

- Exchange of risk assessments of Member States' National Competent Authorities and other information via the EFSA Information Exchange Platform
- E-mails on specific questions or issues.

English will be the working language of the network.

Access to meetings

Representatives of the European Commission are entitled to attend meetings of networks as observers. Representatives of other agencies, bodies or Institutions of the European Union, third countries or international organisations may be invited to attend meetings of Networks as observers.

Outputs

The activities of the network are recorded in meeting minutes⁴ and in annual reports for the Advisory Forum, which are published in the EFSA Journal⁵.

⁴ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/cross-cutting-issues/networks>

⁵ For example <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/cross-cutting-issues/networks>