

ADVISORY FORUM AND SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION UNIT

Parma, 30 November, 2012

EFSA/AF/M/2012/442/PUB/FINAL

Minutes

FORTY FIFTH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

PARMA (ITALY), 26-27 SEPTEMBER 2012

MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

Chair: *Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle*, Executive Director, EFSA

Austria	<i>Roland Grossgut</i>	Latvia	<i>Gatis Ozoliņš</i>
Belgium	<i>Benoît Horion</i>	Lithuania	<i>Zenonas Stanevicius</i>
Bulgaria	<i>Boiko Likov</i>	Luxembourg	<i>Patrick Hau</i>
Cyprus	<i>Popi Kanari</i>	Malta	<i>Ingrid Busuttil</i>
Czech Republic	<i>Petr Beneš</i>	Netherlands	<i>Antoon Opperhuizen</i>
Denmark	<i>Anders Permin</i>	Norway	<i>Lars E. Hanssen</i>
Finland	<i>Matti Aho</i>	Poland	<i>Joanna Gajda-Wyrębek</i>
France	<i>Rozenn Saunier</i>	Portugal	<i>Jorge Reis</i>
Germany	<i>Reiner Wittowski</i>	Romania	<i>Liviu Rusu</i>
Greece	<i>Eirini Tsigarida</i>	Slovakia	<i>Zuzana Bírošová</i>
Hungary	<i>Maria Szeitzné Szabó</i>	Slovenia	<i>Urška Blaznik</i>
Iceland	<i>Jón Gíslason</i>	Spain	<i>Ángela López de Sá Fernandez</i>
Ireland	<i>Alan Reilly</i>	Sweden	<i>Leif Busk</i>
Italy	<i>Giancarlo Belluzzi</i>	United Kingdom	<i>Andrew Wadge</i>

OBSERVERS

Croatia	<i>Zorica Jurković</i>	Switzerland	<i>Michael Beer</i>
FYR of Macedonia	<i>Svetlana Tomeska Mickova</i>	Turkey	<i>Nergiz Özbağ</i>
Montenegro	<i>Nedeljko Latinović</i>	European Commission	<i>Jeannie Vergnettes</i>

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

Advisory Forum secretariat: *Saba Giovannacci, Elena Marani, Jeffrey Moon and Saadia Noorani.*

<i>Per Bergman</i>	<i>Juliane Kleiner</i>
<i>Stef Bronzwaer</i>	<i>Tobin Robinson</i>
<i>David Caira</i>	<i>Alberto Spagnolli</i>
<i>Anne-Laure Gassin</i>	<i>Bernhard Url</i>
<i>Mary Gilsenan</i>	<i>Didier Verloo</i>
<i>Gisele Gizzi</i>	

GUEST SPEAKERS

Ernst and Young	<i>Claudia Gallo</i>
FoodRisC - UCD	<i>Aine McConnon</i>

1 WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle opened the meeting and welcomed the AF members, particularly those attending the meeting for the first time.

2 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle advised that two additional matters had been raised for discussion after the draft agenda had been circulated: a discussion on EFSA's mandate in relation to the Seralini publication on a 2-year rodent feeding trial with Glyphosate Formulations and GM maize NK603 and a presentation from the Czech Republic on the recent problem with methanol poisoning associated with alcoholic beverages. With the inclusion of these items under Agenda Item 4.6, the agenda was adopted.

3 STRATEGIC DISCUSSION ON EFSA'S WORK WITH MEMBER STATES

3.1 External Evaluation of EFSA

David Caira introduced the External Evaluation Report to the Forum, followed by a presentation from Claudia Gallo from Ernst and Young on the main findings of the report.

Following the presentation, the members of the forum welcomed the report and saw it as overall positive in relation to cooperation with the MS.

The UK, Sweden, Germany and Ireland strongly advised EFSA to prioritise addressing the recommendations in the report, not necessarily working on all of them due to the large number.

In relation to the findings of the report, Ireland noted that some Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) would never be satisfied with any amount of openness and transparency and invited EFSA to stand by its current practices and not to succumb to outside pressure groups which may have their own agenda. With regard to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), Ireland saw that MS had a role in informing them fully on the role of EFSA, a view that was supported by the UK.

Austria saw the challenge of increasing the effectiveness of the Advisory Forum (AF) as a priority challenge and supported the continuation of the format of meetings which included few, well prepared topics using small discussion groups. Cyprus noted that progress is being made in the areas of Emerging Risks, but that EFSA could have a more important role in contributing to EU legislation and policy.

Sweden noted some of the factors that were beyond the remit of EFSA such as the fragmented legislation and targeting communications to the general public and also emphasised the role of Member States (MS) in risk communications and supporting cooperation initiatives. Germany noted the role of EFSA in communications during crises and supported the need for developing procedures in this area.

The Netherlands noted that some of the recommendations are not very precise and will need further consideration. Italy noted the importance of the AF as a tool for cooperation between EFSA and the MS and welcomed the challenge going forward in dealing with some of the issues highlighted in the report.

In response to a question from Ireland on how the evaluations on prioritisation were made in the report, Ernst and Young advised that for each recommendation, consideration was given to the estimated impact on the workload; the relevance of the issue to EFSA's mission and the intensity of the programme according to stakeholders and agreed that the evaluation of priority recommendations by stakeholders was not necessarily the same as that of EFSA and the Management Board.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle provided a summary of the discussions and welcomed the positive assessment of the cooperation between EFSA and the Member States in the AF supporting the comments made on the need to focus on key issues in consultation with the Management Board. On Article 36 activity, Catherine noted that while grants and procurements contributed to a large portion of scientific cooperation there was a need to look at other initiatives to increase effectiveness, a view that was supported by the members.

In conclusion, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked the members for their contributions to the discussion, stated that the comments would be conveyed to the Management Board and took note of the recommendation from the Forum to prioritise key areas for action, inviting members to discuss this further as a Strategic Topic early in 2013.

Action 1: Include External Evaluation report as a Strategic Topic for discussion in 2013.

3.2 Risk perception – risk communication

- **Review of the implementation of EFSA’s communication strategy.**

Anne-Laure Gassin introduced the topic followed by short presentations by the United Kingdom, Sweden and Czech Republic.

Ireland welcomed the discussion and noted the linkage between the discussion on risk communications in the external evaluation report and the importance of having clear risk communications in crises situations. Ireland noted that the strengthening of EFSA’s web site with additional news coverage and content such as videos was a very positive development and welcomed the review to be conducted on the terms of reference of the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications (AFCWG). The sharing of new releases under embargo was also supported by Ireland.

Germany raised the question of interaction with consumers and noted that although the ‘mission’ is the protection of consumer’s health, there are a number of other stakeholders also to be considered and noted the difference in risk perception between, for example, Germany and the Czech Republic, which requires different risk communications activities.

Lithuania indicated the need for having risk communications messages in the national language on EFSA’s web site when there are particular issues happening in specific countries. Anne-Laure Gassin noted the difficulties in having a quick response in different languages in such situations and emphasised the cooperation with the national food agencies at such times.

Anne-Laure Gassin welcomed the comments and saw the planned review of the Communications Strategy in the coming year as an opportunity to build on the existing arrangements, highlighting the digital environment and new social media as further means of disseminating coherent messages. Anne-Laure also informed the meeting of the increasing and enhanced contact with other stakeholders through the stakeholder platform and technical meetings.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle welcomed the discussion and noted that the revision of the Terms of Reference for the AFCWG would rely on input from the AF.

Action 2: AF members to contribute to the revision of the Terms of Reference of AFCWG

- **Communications in a changing media environment.**

Alan Reilly provided a brief introduction to the topic before the floor was given to Aine McConnon from University College Dublin and the FoodRisC research project. During her presentation, Aine provided the forum with an overview of the Framework Programme 7 project, which aims to map out the networks and information sources contributing to food risk and benefit communication across Europe and to create a toolkit aimed at policy makers, food authorities and other stakeholders that will facilitate effective and coherent communication on food.

Germany welcomed the information on the project and noted that the way in which information is disseminated has changed dramatically in recent years, with online journals updating news much quicker than traditional press. The Netherlands noted the importance of anticipating the needs of consumers which necessitates an alternative approach of assessing what information is needed. Sweden also welcomed the possibility of reaching specific target groups and questioned whether social media can be used to provide a demographic breakdown of users.

Aine McConnon noted that consumer's interests were high when there was high levels of uncertainty and that traditional and new media fed into each other. The tendency for groups and users to be centred on common interests was seen by Aine as a useful way of targeting information, noting that traditionally risk communications have been one way, but with social media there is a two way communication which can be used to inform on the reactions and concerns which need to be addressed.

The UK agreed on the importance of using new social media and noted the way in which people obtain information has changed and how social media can also be used internally within organisations to speed the delivery of information.

Ireland saw the potential use of social media as a means of early warning for emerging risks which could lead to earlier interventions.

In response to the Chair's question on when the project would conclude, Aine McConnon stated that the reporting is expected to be concluded by the end of October 2013 with a workshop proposed to engage with risk communicators. Anne-Laure Gassin indicated there would be the possibility of a joint workshop/seminar held on the project.

3.3 Feedback from the AF Discussion Group on Article 36.

Stef Bronzwaer presented a summary of the paper prepared by the AF discussion group, outlining the next steps on the management and review of the Article 36 list.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle raised the question of what types of organisations were not well represented and what were the areas not adequately covered. Stef noted that this varied from MS to MS, but overall the areas of plant health and nutrition were not well represented.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle noted that the majority of resources in scientific cooperation went towards procurement and it was necessary to consider the wider picture in using all tools and instruments to share expertise.

Germany raised the question of why many organisations on the list have never participated in calls and what the barriers were preventing this. Austria supported the question. Germany also noted that there could be potential conflicts of interest of food safety organisations at national level. Stef Bronzwaer indicated that the discussion group had suggested that this could be managed, for example, by having a review committee established at national level. Malta noted that there were no Article 36 organisations from that country, though the focal point had organised meetings and consultation, but this can not overcome the lack of resources and the limitations on the ability to subcontract work. Finland stated the importance of reviewing the outcomes of cooperation. Greece welcomed the guidelines as a useful tool to evaluate the list.

Stef Bronzwaer informed members that questions had been prepared for the Focal Points for the discussion at their forthcoming meeting and that the annual reports of the Focal Points had already identified some of the barriers preventing organisations from participating in calls, such as the administrative burden and lack of resources.

Stef stated that the review process aims to ensure: (1) that all organisations on the List are still relevant, i.e. that all organisations still comply with formal criteria for inclusion; (2) that all relevant organisations are on List, i.e. that they together cover EFSA's remit fully; (3) that organisation profiles on the Article 36 database are up-to-date; and (4) that the names of organisations are given as indicated in guidelines.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle concluded the discussions with agreement that a more structural review of the Article 36 list would be carried out helped by the guidelines.

Action 3: A review of the Article 36 list to be carried out in 2013

3.4 Gender balance and geographical diversity in EFSA's Scientific Panels and Committee

Gisele Gizzi presented information and statistics on the gender and geographical balance of members in the Scientific Panels and Committee.

Austria noted that statistics need to be interpreted carefully posed the question of how to get the best experts to EFSA. Sweden noted that it was important to get an increased awareness of calls for the renewal of panels.

Italy questioned whether EFSA's balance differed from other EU institutions. Ireland and Norway supported the objective of gender balance, however Norway questioned what the target was.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle emphasised the importance of getting the right expertise before gender and geographical balance and noted that in order to increase awareness of calls, the AF and Focal Points (FP) would be involved in the panel renewals in 2014.

Action 4: AF and FP to be involved in new calls for panel renewal.

3.5 'Self review' of EFSA networks

Jeffrey Moon outlined the proposals for the 'self review' of EFSA networks including the use of a questionnaire to gain feedback from the AF and Network members.

Sweden appreciated the initiative and noted that at national level there was good coordination within Sweden, but posed the question of the impact of the networks on national activities. Austria informed about a first meeting of AF, Focal Point and Network members held in the country which indicated good feedback overall.

Italy supported comments made by Sweden and Austria, but noted a problem of choosing experts at national level and difficulty in getting feedback. The European Commission welcomed the opportunity to identify strengths and weaknesses with the networks and stated that it was important to get feedback from AF members also. Belgium supported the comments of Sweden and indicated it was not so clear always what the status of the different networks were, as they all had different names and arrangements.

France welcomed the review and indicated a willingness to participate in the development of the questionnaire.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle concluded indicating that the review would take in the views of the AF as well as Network members and the AF Discussion Group on Medium Term planning would be consulted on the questions to be used in the questionnaire. The outcome would be reported at the December AF meeting.

Action 5: Members of the AF Discussion Group on Medium Term Planning to be consulted in development of questionnaire for network members.

3.6 Strategic Discussion Topics for the Advisory Forum 2013

Jeffrey Moon introduced the discussion on identifying strategic topics for discussion during the AF meetings in 2014.

Ireland supported the earlier proposal of further discussions on the external evaluation report and suggested data bases and sharing information as a topic. Bernhard Url supported this idea suggestion information on the warehousing of EFSA data and the data access policy. Sweden supported the suggestion of Ireland on databases and further suggested discussions on the interface between risk assessment, risk management and self tasking.

Austria, supported by The Netherlands, proposed a topic on the needs of risk assessment in the coming years and research activities in this area, linked to Horizon 2020. Germany suggested further discussions on crises preparedness and the question on clarifying roles when a smaller country with fewer resources has a food safety crisis. Cyprus supported this proposal.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked members for their suggestions and proposed that scientific cooperation should be included as a topic and welcomed further suggestions by mid-October, with a programme to be presented at the December AF meeting.

Action 6: Proposals for topics for strategic discussion to presented at the 46th AF meeting in December

4 OTHER MATTERS RAISED BY EFSA AND THE MEMBER STATES

4.1 Risk/Benefit Assessment of Mn, Fe and Cu

Sweden provided a brief overview of the results of a survey of children's food and the levels of trace elements, including Mn, Fe and Cu found, which while not exceeding the legislative requirement, raised some concerns. Juliane Kleiner provided an overview from EFSA on the accepted intake levels for the trace elements of Mn, Fe and Cu and asked what experience there had been in other MS.

Denmark and Cyprus indicated that surveys conducted in their country had included these elements in baby food, with Cyprus noting that the levels found were low. Sweden noted the scarce data base on the intake of the trace metals and Austria suggested there could be a call for data in the area for the Nutrition Panel to consider further.

Juliane Kleiner welcomed the sharing of any information from MS through the IEP and looked forward to the publication of the report from Sweden.

Action 7: Sweden to provide published report on trace metals in baby food when available.

4.2 Market Basket

Sweden provided a brief overview of a recent survey of ‘market basket’ for information which looked at the levels of contaminants found in typical selection of foods purchased by consumers. The report has been published and will be uploaded to the IEP.

4.3 Health Assessment of DDAC (didecyldimethylammonium chloride) and benzoalkonium chloride residues in food.

Germany presented a overview of the levels of DDAC (didecyldimethylammonium chloride) and benzoalkonium chloride residues found during a recent survey and posed the question whether other countries had conducted similar surveys with similar results. Germany noted that biocides are not under the remit of EFSA, but if contamination of foodstuffs with biocides occur, EFSA does have a role. Austria welcomed the information and noted a general problem with biocide residues and the unforeseen direct and indirect contamination of food and noted that through the SCoFCAH arrangements MS were to collect information on such residues. Lithuania supported the comments of Austria, noting the problem of residues in mushrooms gathered in that country.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle noted the limited role of EFSA in relation to biocides, which was under review, and suggested MS should share information through the IEP in order to assist Germany in gathering experience and information.

Action 8: Members to upload any additional information on Didecyldimethylammonium chloride (DDAC) and benzalkonium chloride residues in food to the IEP

4.4 Food safety and hygiene in the home.

Austria presented the results of a recent consumer survey, which has been published, relating to food safety knowledge and practices amongst consumers, posing questions on the usefulness of such information to EFSA, the panels and how the information can be used to optimise study design and influence risk communication targeted at consumers.

Germany welcomed the presentation and noted that similar surveys were conducted in Germany and the problem of TV chefs practicing bad hygiene and the effect this can have on consumers. Hungary advised that food safety was included in the national curriculum and Denmark informed the members of a study in day care institutions which indicated that hygiene was not as good as would be expected which led to a review of practices there. Greece found such studies useful.

Anne-Laure Gassin suggested the topic was one for the AFCWG to consider and that the tools being developed under the FoodRisC project would be useful in developing messages for consumers.

Action 9: MS to share information on levels of understanding of food safety and hygiene in the home through the IEP in response to questions posed by Austria. Topic to be discussed with the AFCWG.

4.5 Acrylamide

Sweden summarised the information on Acrylamide that had led to a request from Sweden, Denmark, France and Germany to EFSA to consider further the current situation regarding exposure levels, noting that the indications are that there has not been a decrease in levels in foods.

Mary Gilsenan gave an overview of EFSA's proposed actions which include discussion on the information provided at the CONTAM Panel meeting in November also taking into account the latest report by the Dietary and Chemical Monitoring (DCM) Unit on acrylamide monitoring that was published in October. The outcome is likely to be a Statement from the Panel. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle stated that EFSA will respond to the letter from the MS and will provide feedback to the AF after the discussions in the CONTAM Panel.

Action 10: Members to share additional information they have on acrylamide with EFSA; EFSA to respond to letter from DK et al and copy to members; CONTAM panel to provide feedback to AF by December.

4.6 Other matters raised by EFSA and Member States

4.6.1 Methanol Poisoning in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic provided information to members on the current situation relating to poisoning, resulting in a number of deaths, due to contamination of alcoholic beverages. The Czech Republic advised on the national control measures put in place to deal with the incident, which had been shared with the European Commission and MS.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked the Czech Republic for sharing the information on the tragic events and welcomed the sharing of any further information through the IEP and the AF secretariat.

4.6.2 Declaration by the Members of the Advisory Forum of the European Food Safety Authority

The members of the AF concluded discussion and agreed on a declaration of support for EFSA. The declaration is attached as Annex 1 to the minutes.

4.6.3 Séralini publication on a 2-year rodent feeding trial with Glyphosate Formulations and GM maize NK603

Didier Verloo outlined the proposed action by EFSA in response to the publication of the study and a question from the European Commission.

Germany, France, Austria, The Netherlands, Ireland and Belgium indicated the current activities being taken in reviewing the study outlining the timeframes and expect outputs.

Per Bergman invited the MS who were actively engaged in a review of the study to participate in a teleconference with EFSA and requested details of the relevant experts to be notified to EFSA via the AF secretariat.

Action 11: Members to notify EFSA of scientific experts involved in national reviews of the Seralini paper.

5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Austria proposed that in view of the large number of resources that are used in the printing of presentations for members, that the practice be reviewed.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle agreed with the proposal and recommended that for future meetings the presentations will be shared ahead of the meeting, with handout style printouts only made of those which had not been shared prior to the meeting.

CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked the AF members and observers for their active contributions and thanked EFSA staff for the support.

Annex 1: Declaration by the Members of the Advisory Forum of the European Food Safety Authority

On the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Foundation of the European Food Safety Authority

Ten years ago the European Union unveiled a new regulatory framework to ensure the safety of food and feed across Europe - one that would inspire confidence in the decision-making processes underpinning food law, their basis in science and the independence of the institutions protecting public health.

To mark this tenth anniversary the competent national food safety bodies in Europe that make up the Advisory Forum of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) issue the following statement:

“In the space of a decade European food safety has made resounding progress and to mark this milestone we hereby recognise the crucial contribution EFSA has made. EFSA has enhanced consumer protection, provided vital support to Member States and proved to be a crucial resource in times of food crises.

The Advisory Forum has confidence in the independence and scientific decision-making process of EFSA and has worked in cooperation with the Authority over the past ten years to strengthen EU risk assessment and all measures to ensure the objectivity of scientific advice.

Our members reaffirm their endorsement of the independent experts who contribute to EFSA’s scientific work and the vital role they play in the risk assessment process.

The competent national food safety bodies in Europe that make up the Advisory Forum declare their continued commitment to the strengthening of science-based policy-making. Looking forward, we will strive to ensure that scientific risk assessment evolves and develops to meet the critical challenges that lie ahead in an ever-changing environment.

We will build upon the progress made since 2002 and continue to champion this partnership of trust to secure the safety of food and feed in Europe.”

Made at the 45th meeting of the EFSA Advisory Forum, Parma, 27 September 2012