

Minutes

54th Meeting of the ADVISORY FORUM

Parma, Italy 10-11 December 2014

Chair: Bernhard Url, Executive Director, EFSA

MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

| | | | |
|----------------|------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|
| Belgium | <i>Pierre Naassens</i> | Lithuania | <i>Zenonas Stanevicius</i> |
| Bulgaria | <i>Boiko Likov</i> | Luxembourg | <i>Sarah Haunert</i> |
| Czech Republic | <i>Jitka Götzová</i> | Hungary | <i>Maria Szeitzné Szabó</i> |
| Denmark | <i>Apologies</i> | Malta | <i>Ingrid Busuttil</i> |
| Germany | <i>Mark Lohmann</i> | Netherlands | <i>Jos Cornelese</i> |
| Estonia | <i>Martin Minjajev</i> | Norway | <i>Gisle Solstad</i> |
| Ireland | <i>Raymond Ellard</i> | Austria | <i>Roland Grossgut</i> |
| Greece | <i>Eirini Tsigarida</i> | Poland | <i>Jacek Postupolski</i> |
| Spain | <i>Ana Canals</i> | Portugal | <i>Cristina Baptista Rodrigues</i> |
| France | <i>Bruno Garin-Bastuji</i> | Romania | <i>Nicușor Ciocănea</i> |
| Croatia | <i>Andrea Gross-Bošković</i> | Slovenia | <i>Urška Blaznik</i> |
| Iceland | <i>Apologies</i> | Slovakia | <i>Zuzana Bírošová</i> |
| Italy | <i>Giancarlo Belluzzi</i> | Finland | <i>Matti Aho</i> |
| Cyprus | <i>Popi Kanari</i> | Sweden | <i>Leif Busk</i> |
| Latvia | <i>Aivars Bērziņš</i> | United Kingdom | <i>Penny Bramwell</i> |

OBSERVERS

| | | | |
|-------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Switzerland | <i>Vincent Dudler</i> | European Commission | <i>Jeannie Vergnettes</i> |
|-------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|

GUEST SPEAKERS

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| <i>Malcolm Parker</i> | |
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REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

Advisory Forum Secretariat: *Jeffrey Moon, Saadia Noorani, Elena Marani, Daniela Benetinova*

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|------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Stef Bronzwaer</i> | <i>Juliane Kleiner</i> |
| <i>Hubert Deluyker</i> | <i>James Ramsay*</i> |
| <i>Dirk Detken*</i> | <i>Tobin Robinson</i> |
| <i>Mary Gilsenan*</i> | <i>Bernhard Url</i> |
| <i>Marta Hugas**</i> | <i>Victoria Villamar</i> |

* 10 December only

** 11 December only

1 WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

Bernhard Url opened the meeting welcoming the AF members and observers, noting apologies from Denmark and Iceland.

Attending for the first time were Mr Bruno Garin-Bastuji (France), Mr Mark Lohmann (Germany), Mr Gisle Solstad (Focal Point representative of Norway), Ms Christina Rodrigues (Focal Point representative for Portugal), Sarah Haurert (Luxembourg), Pierre Naassens (Belgium) and Jos Cornelese from the Netherlands.

On this occasion the pre-accession observer countries were not in attendance as the current programme supported by the Commission had concluded.

2 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Bernhard Url noted that on this occasion a large part of the meeting was to be dedicated to sessions discussing the results of a member questionnaire that was completed in October and on discussing how the Forum can best meet the objectives set down for it in the Founding regulation.

Two additional items were noted for inclusion on the EXPO 2015 Scientific Conference and the dates for AF meetings in 2015. Additional items were raised by Sweden (public consultation), Germany (requesting update on the Data Warehouse Project) and Italy (to announce an international event).

The members agreed the adoption of the final agenda.

Bernhard reminded members of the requirements to ensure they have submitted an up to date Annual Declaration of Interests and to ask for any Oral Declarations of Interest for this meeting.

No declarations were made.

3 MATTERS ARISING

Tobin Robinson provided details of a recent consultation launched on increasing robustness, transparency and openness of Scientific Assessments (and the terms of reference to the four activities a) Promoting methods for evidence use in science (Prometheus), b) Uncertainties in risk assessment, c) the use of the Weight of Evidence Approach in Scientific Assessments, d) identification of biological relevance of adverse / positive health effects. Comments were requested by 15 December.

Spain requested an extension of the deadline. Finland welcomed the initiative, but had concerns on the ambitious timelines. Tobin Robinson agreed that the timeframe was ambitious but noted that there were staggered timeframes for the different parts with some activities already under way, with the first deliverable to be in Spring 2015.

It was agreed to extend the deadline to the first week in January 2015.

(Action 1: AF members to provide comments on the consultation by end of first week of January, 2015).

4 STRATEGIC DISCUSSION ON EFSA'S WORK WITH MEMBER STATES

4.1 External Review of the impact of scientific grants and procurement projects

Stef Bronzwaer provided members with detail on an external review commissioned by EFSA this year to determine the impact of scientific grant and procurement projects, carried out in 2009 to 2012, on delivering EFSA's tasks. Findings demonstrated that EFSA science projects have had an important role in supporting EFSA in its task delivery and contributed positively to quality and robustness of EFSA outputs. The results of the review will be used by EFSA to formulate recommendations for outsourcing scientific work in the future. The Review Report has been published on EFSA's website.

Finland welcomed the evaluation and suggested that there should be improved project monitoring involving a robust system of outcome criteria to assess outcome of each grant/procurement. Spain appreciated EFSA's grant and procurement programmes, especially procurements which was of particular benefit to Spain and raised the issue of the ability to subcontract part of the work. Spain also posed a question of how to manage the Article 36 list better but noted good experience nationally on interest and cooperation between Article 36 organisations. UK noted potential problems when the level of funding was lower than 100% and questioned whether there was a breakdown by Member State of activities, noting that the level of co-funding is likely to become more of an issue with tighter restrictions on national funding. Germany noted short timelines, burdensome application process and restrictions on 'exclusivity of use' as weaknesses of the programmes.

Stef Bronzwaer acknowledged that the application, similar to that in other Commission grants programmes, is laborious but is easier once familiar with it and simplification has been done wherever possible. The timelines for application are increased wherever possible but still has been a problem over summer period and work is on-going to improve this. He also noted that the clause on 'exclusivity of use' EFSA use in grants had been changed to the advantage of the beneficiary. Stef Bronzwaer agreed that assessment of outcome was important and should be improved, as recommended by the consultants, noting that while the award criteria were well defined, this was not the case for the outcome assessment. For grants, subcontracting of non-core tasks can be outsourced. Regarding the management of the Article 36 list, Stef Bronzwaer agreed that managing a large number of organisations was burdensome but would allow for a larger network of organisations to work with not only through grants. In reply to the UK, Stef Bronzwaer informed that breakdown by MS was not available and that co-funding could be an issue, with usually a higher interest level associated with higher co-funding ratios. The benchmarking done by the consultants showed DG Research and Innovation having the highest rate of co-funding and DG SANCO rate similar for joint projects to that of the thematic grants (50%).

Italy welcomed the external review and the initiative on thematic grants and creation of consortia, noted that relative low rate of notifications via the Focal Point network and asked for suggestions how this could be improved. Stef Bronzwaer noted that while maybe not directly through their Focal Point, applicants in Article 36 organisations were informed through their network much more than non-Article 36 organisations. However, he would want to stop Italy's enthusiasm to do more on awareness raising and suggested to target possible experts more directly.

Bernhard Url summarised noting the constant evolution of Article 36 arrangements, and the changes in policy over years from EFSA from many small procurement arrangements to larger grants which have the advantages on networking.

5 UPDATES AND RELATED MATTERS

5.1 Scientific Cooperation Tools

Stef Bronzwaer presented an overview of mechanisms (networks, programmes) and cooperation tools to support the implementation of the Scientific Cooperation Roadmap, clearly indicating

which tools can be useful for the different objectives. The presentation ([link](#)) was made using *Prezi*, an online tool open for members to make use of.

In relation to the sharing of information, previously done via the Information Exchange Platform (IEP), Stef Bronzwaer informed members that the migration of information to the new document management system meant that the metadata was not currently searchable, limiting the use of the system. Members were invited to express interest in establishing a web based system for hosting of information exchange platform. Spain was disappointed that the information shared through the IEP was not longer searchable. Stef Bronzwaer stated with the move towards an open way of working, there was a need to have access to a larger audience, but also uploads from a wider community than the IEP had, so development of mechanisms and tools in this area was necessary.

Sweden welcomed the presentation on the toolbox which had clarified and improved understanding of the different tools and how they are used. Hungary welcomed the overview and the use of *Prezi* as means of delivery.

Finland noted that there was clarity on the tools available and there was on-going stimulation for scientific cooperation, but there was still a need to develop tools, particularly for cooperation between Member States to increase capacity. Stef Bronzwaer welcomed these comments and noted the thematic grants as one area where there was enhanced cooperation between Member States, as there is a requirement for consortia to be established. He also outlined the new tool of Twinning which is proposed to be implemented in 2016, which will support interaction between Member States. Italy noted the good experience of twinning with participation in the European Neighbourhood Programme.

Austria stated that the responsible bodies in Member States need to support co-working with EFSA and between Member States in an open collaborative way.

The UK and Portugal supported the exchange of staff. The UK noted with reduced resources it was particularly important for development of staff. Recognising that many experts were late in their careers and there was a need to find and develop younger talent. Portugal noted that experts do not always successfully report back nationally when involved in exchange programmes.

Bernhard Url suggested EFSA as a hub where support can be given to build the risk assessment community, particularly with younger scientists through arrangements of seconded experts, PhD students and guest scientists. Sweden supported this concept of EFSA being a hub for scientific cooperation between Member States.

(Action 2: Proposals/interest from members in developing open web platform to host IEP documents to inform secretariat.)

5.2 Article 30 guideline

The draft guideline on describing a procedure for dealing with cases of scientific divergence between EFSA and the Member states was discussed in the Advisory Forum at the September meeting. Juliane Kleiner introduced an updated draft of the guideline for further discussion highlighting the main areas covered by the guidance, in particular the arrangements of joint meetings where there was substantial scientific divergence.

Belgium expressed reservations on the development of guidance, asking how they would be enforced and noting that scientific bodies are independent and so should not be obliged to interact. Belgium welcomed the sharing of information, but also highlighted the importance of having divergence to progress science.

Bernhard Url restated the need to be clear and avoid confusion for risk managers and the public and the importance to have a joint document to explain clearly why different outcomes may have arisen. Bernhard Url emphasised the objective was to have a simple procedure to support Article 30 of the founding regulation and was not to force Member State bodies to have the same opinion as EFSA.

Italy, Sweden, Spain, the UK and Finland supported the development of the document. Norway noted that 'independence' should be more clearly reflected in the text of the document. The UK suggested it would be useful to 'road test' such guidance for it to be a recommended approach.

Cyprus agreed on the aim to minimize the possibility of divergence and public confusion, noting that scientific bodies must have independence, but at least before an opinion is published which is likely to contain diverging views there is a need to explain why there are differences, such as difference in methodologies or tools. The paper should focus more on the acceptability of the scientific bodies to have their position understood. Sweden sympathised with problems which may arise in some countries and with how opinions are developed, with the potential additional workload involved with discussions with EFSA however noted that independence did not mean that views did not have to be defended and that Article 30 paragraph 4 was an obligation and in force and national problems must be solved nationally. Ireland noted that there may not be awareness that there is an obligation at MS level and perhaps this needs to be explained.

The Netherlands noted the issue was one of implementation and there should not be fear of divergence, but there was a need to handle it in a smart and practical way. The Netherlands also noted that timing could be quite different between EFSA and MS, where the time constraints placed at national level do not allow for involvement of others. Finland raised the question of how to include peer review in EFSA's process and to ensure that all information is considered during the process. Sweden noted that peer review is a process which was not foreseen in the founding regulation, which established the panel system. Spain advocated the inclusion of other situations where EFSA has published an Opinion which MS have not agreed with, over discrepancies rather than scientific divergence. The European Commission noted that it was important to concentrate on the scientific issues and clarity on the types of scientific divergences would be welcomed.

Juliane Kleiner responded welcoming the support for the document and indicating that further drafting would try to address the issues raised and that the intent was not to try to reduce independence, but to have a procedure to clarify issues. On the timing Juliane Kleiner noted that for older opinions where there have been new studies, where this can be explained and there is no need to trigger an Article 30 procedure, just a need to inform the concerned bodies. Juliane Kleiner also noted to aim for EFSA to have public consultation on many opinions and to involve MS earlier in drafting opinions for public consultation. Regarding the timelines and the need to distinguish between urgent and normal situation Juliane Kleiner agreed the need for a different approach, but did not favour trying to put too much in the guideline in order to keep it workable.

Bernhard Url concluded noting that the tiered approach, starting with vigilance, then exchange information, then an obligation to cooperate to resolve or explain the divergence would continue to be the norm.

It was agreed that a further draft would be developed for finalisation and endorsement at the March AF meeting. The UK, Ireland and Belgium volunteered to assist in the drafting.

(Action 3: UK, Belgium and Ireland to develop further draft of Article 30 guideline for endorsement at March AF meeting.)

6 FORTHCOMING RISK ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

A summary table of mandates received by EFSA in October and November was tabled, with a number highlighted to members. Tobin Robinson presented an overview of upcoming works in the areas of the Scientific Committee and the RASA Department including the mandate on Ebola on exposure via the food chain in general, plants fruits and vegetables and from animal reservoir. This follows the published report transmission through bushmeat and pets and Tobin Robinson acknowledged the contribution from MS via the AHAW networks and Focal Points in providing information that assisted in this work. Other mandates received by EFSA included topics such as avian influenza H5N8, African swine fever and small hive beetle.

Juliane Kleiner also noted that the Opinion on Bisphenol A was adopted this week and would be published in the third week of January; the safety assessment on caffeine was also due to be discussed by the NDA Panel this week for endorsement for public consultation and that the 2011 guidance on nanotechnology was to be updated.

Spain, Greece, UK, Finland, Sweden and Portugal welcomed the exchange of information from EFSA. Spain noted the use of the information from Member States where national work was linked to an on-going activity in Germany identified from the spreadsheet shared via the Forum which resulted in good sharing of information.

The Netherlands advised members of a recently published risk assessment on insect protein for food, with a further opinion relating to feed expected in January. In 2015, the Netherlands indicated a new type of risk assessment on the whole supply chain for red meat, white meat, dairy products. Germany provided an update on the assessment arsenic in rice with consumption data having been gathered and exposure scenario, noting that the reason for difference in levels is being investigated. Germany noted other works in progress including Manganese in pineapple juice, micro plastics in food and aluminium, intake in relation to Alzheimer's disease and cancer. Greece informed members of a recently adopted opinion on cyanide from bitter apricot kernels with recommendations on consumption.

Additional updates on forthcoming and completed works were provided by Croatia (hemp products, Food for special dietary purposes, consumption of fresh and semi hard cheese), the UK (food for specific energy requirements of military personnel, updates on carbohydrates and potassium), Finland (Baltic herring), Sweden (risk comparisons, cumulative exposure to PAH), Norway (use of plants, amino acids, other substances apart from vitamins and minerals), Poland (mycotoxin in babyfood and heavy metals in wild mushrooms) and Bulgaria (Schmallenberg virus, pesticide residues and lumpy skin disease).

Sweden noted the value of exchanging information on risk assessments but also in relation to risk management and risk communication. Stef Bronzwaer reminded members that all of EFSA's mandates were available online in a register of questions which was searchable and also reminded members of the need to update the table available with details of forthcoming risk assessments, with any associated web links and contact person details to be useful to share this information with others.

In concluding, Bernhard Url reiterated the view, shared by members, that effort was needed to collect the information exchanged and therefore there was a need to ensure that it was used, both by EFSA and within Member States.

(Action 4: Details of completed and upcoming risk assessments presented at meeting to be provided to secretariat; Action 5: Update on EFSA mandates via spreadsheet to be provided at each AF meeting).

7 FEEDBACK FROM THE AF DG ON EU RISK ASSESSMENT AGENDA

On Tuesday 9 December, immediately before the AF meeting, a Discussion Group of the Advisory Forum met to discuss the development of the EU Risk Assessment Agenda.

Sweden presented a summary of the discussions and conclusions from the discussion group, outlining the approach of using the Delphi method to identify priority topics to be developed for inclusion on the Agenda. Sweden also outlined the next steps in the process which included outsourcing the running of the Delphi exercise and convening a meeting in the first part of 2015, keeping to the overall timeline of having first draft of the EU RAA prepared by end of 2015.

Bulgaria reminded members of methodology on the evaluation for infectious disease for prioritizing biological risks which could be useful for the prioritisation exercise.

8 OTHER MATTERS RAISED BY EFSA AND MEMBER STATES

8.1 Access to Document Requests

Dirk Detken presented information relating to Public Access to Documents (PAD) requests under Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001, noting EFSA regularly receives requests for documents and presentations relating to the Advisory Forum meetings. Dirk Detken noted that on each occasion, EFSA is required to have agreement from the members to share any information they have presented at the meeting in order for it to be shared and proposed arrangements to help reduce the administrative burden.

Austria agreed with the proposals and asked whether the high number of pages provided in complying with requests were charged for. Dirk Detken advised that charges could only be made in particular circumstances and that the provision of such information was an expectation of the Authority. Greece noted that regarding presentations, much of the information provided is orally, which puts the information provided on the slides in context. It was recommended to include a reference to a background report providing full detail, within the slides.

Bernhard Url noted the agreement of members to find a process for supplying information to comply with PAD requests.

(Action 6: EFSA to propose procedure for gaining agreement from members on sharing of information presented at meetings to satisfy public access to documents requests.)

8.2 Feedback on Discussions at the FIP network – non-plastic FCM

In 2013 the AF agreed to the development of a network in the area of FIP and the first meeting of the FIP network on Food Contact Materials (FCM) was held on 12-14 November. Juliane Kleiner presented feedback from the meeting noting in particular a proposal to involve the Member States (through the network) in consultation on draft guidance being developed on Food Contact Material by the CEF panel before the launch of a public consultation.

8.3 Energy Drink Consumption in Teenagers

Portugal presented details of risk assessment in teenagers aged 10-18 subject to exposure to caffeine in Lisbon area, noting a below EU average when compared to EFSA's study involving 16 MS.

Lithuania welcomed the study from Portugal and updated members on the national controls for sale of energy drinks for under 18 years old. Austria welcomed the study and asked whether caffeine intake from other products were considered and whether the EFSA opinion on caffeine would be subject to consultation. Portugal informed members that intake from coffee and tea was considered and the study was to be published in English at end of year.

Greece noted that the issue of energy drinks was regularly discussed in the Forum and suggested it should be considered a priority with a clear follow up. Cyprus noted that a lot of data had been gathered by different countries on caffeine intake and energy drinks and it was time to move forward. Cyprus noted that larger bottles of energy drinks were now available leading to altered perceptions of safe levels and would like to see assessment of the combined effect of caffeine, taurine and alcohol. Sweden questioned whether the EFSA Opinion on caffeine would include energy drinks and other components.

Juliane Kleiner advised that the terms of reference for the safety assessment of caffeine included looking at interaction with other substances, with the expectation being guidance values for intake. Juliane Kleiner noted that limited data on interactions was available and a public consultation was expected in January for 8 weeks. Although a stakeholder event was not planned, this would be considered in conjunction with the public consultation.

Spain suggested that the European Commission consider the issue of energy drink controls further as individual MS were taking different actions while a thorough risk assessment was lacking. Finland supported Spain in this proposal noting the lack of data, but a strong political will in MS to introduce controls. Spain also proposed that a nutriviigilance programme should be supported to ascertain a correlation between consumption and adverse health effects. The UK suggested that social media analysis may also help to identify trends in usage by children and teenagers.

Bernhard Url noted the need for EFSA to consider how to address the issue of data gaps and to look at the scientific aspects raised, with the matter to be discussed further at the next AF meeting.

(Action 7: Portugal to supply link to published study on caffeine intakes by end of year. EFSA to report back on subject at March AF meeting.)

8.4 Benefit and risk assessment of fish

Norway presented details of a report, but not the conclusions, of the Norwegian Scientific Committee on the benefit and risk assessment of fish, which is due for publication on 15 December, which updated a 2006 report on the benefit of fish in the Norwegian diet. Tobin Robinson also provided an update on the forthcoming statement from EFSA relating to the benefits/risk of fish consumption specifically relating to methyl mercury exposure and a separate benefit assessment of fish consumption which is due for publication in early January (which was to be combination of earlier works on risks and benefits).

9 AOB

9.1 Scientific Data Warehouse

Following the request from Germany at the start of the meeting, Mary Gilsean joined the meeting to provide an update on the Data Warehouse and the agreement of access rules. Mary reminded members that the schedule was to open the data warehouse on a pilot basis by the end of 2014, which was technically ready for food consumption and chemical occurrence data. Some refinements were needed in the access tool along with web site access and it was expected that the data should be accessible by the end of the year, which would be supported by a public relations campaign. The zoonoses data would be accessible by March 2015 (in line with annual summary report deadline) and fully operational in June 2015 – including history of data used in previous opinions.

Mary Gilsean provided details of the pilot access involving members of the chemical occurrence network and noted that the draft access rules had been further discussed within the Standing Committee on Plants Animals Food and Feed, with final agreement expected at the General Food Law meeting on 10 February 2015.

9.2 Scientific Conference/EXPO 2015

Hubert Deluyker provided an update on the programme for the Scientific Conference to be held in Milan, October 2015.

9.3 Public Consultation – Sweden

Sweden advised public consultation on document entitled 'Risk Thermometer' – on severity adjusted margin of exposure

(Action 8: Sweden to provide link to consultation on 'severity adjusted margin of exposure'.)
9.4 AF Dates 2015

Jeffrey Moon presented the dates for the AF meetings in 2015 which are to be:

- 55th AF Meeting: 4-5 March, Parma
- 56th AF Meeting: 11-12 June, Riga
- 57th AF Meeting: 13 October, Milan
- 58th AF Meeting: December, Luxembourg

CLOSURE OF PLENARY MEETING

Bernhard Url closed the session thanking members for their contributions to the discussions and colleagues from EFSA who participated and supported the meeting.

The remainder of the meeting was dedicated to discussion groups considering the future format of Advisory Forum meetings and the role of the Advisory Forum members. Proceedings from these sessions are included in Annex 1.

The next meeting of the Advisory Forum will be held on 4-5 March 2015 in Parma, Italy.

54TH ADVISORY FORUM MEETING

SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS

| Action Number | Action | |
|---------------|--|----------------|
| 1 | Members to provide comments on the consultation on increasing robustness, transparency and openness of Scientific Assessments by end of first week in January. | AF members |
| 2 | Proposals/interest from members in developing open web platform to host IEP documents to inform secretariat. | AF members |
| 3 | UK, Belgium and Ireland to develop further draft of Article 30 guideline for endorsement at March AF meeting. | EFSA/UK/B E/IE |
| 4 | Details of completed and upcoming risk assessments presented at meeting to be provided to secretariat | AF members |
| 5 | Update on EFSA mandates via spreadsheet to be provided at each AF meeting | EFSA |
| 6 | EFSA to propose procedure for gaining agreement from members on sharing of information presented at meetings to satisfy public access to documents requests. | EFSA |
| 7 | Portugal to supply link to published study on caffeine intakes by end of year. EFSA to report back on subject at March AF meeting. | Portugal |
| 8 | Sweden to provide link to the public consultation on the draft 'Risk Thermometer- a tool for comparing risks associated with food consumption. | Sweden |

Annex 1:

SUMMARY REPORT OF EFSA'S 54th ADVISORY FORUM MEETING DISCUSSION SESSIONS

Introduction

Following completion of the formal agenda of EFSA's 54th Advisory Forum Meeting Members of the Advisory Forum undertook a critical self-evaluation of the way the Advisory Forum functions.

Two areas of Advisory Forum activities were considered. The first related to the results of a Members' Survey dealing with operational issues of the Advisory Forum. The second area Members dealt with explored Members' perceptions of the efficacy of the Advisory Forum's operation in light of the Founding Regulation.

To ensure all Members had opportunity to participate fully in these deliberations, Members were invited to join small break-out discussion groups, with pre-assigned discussion topics. Subsequent feedback by rapporteurs from each break-out discussion group to plenary sessions ensured all Members an opportunity to consider, and contribute to, the full spectrum of opinions.

The Advisory Forum's self-evaluation concluded with a wrap up session that focused on recommendations resulting from the discussions, and outlined next steps to take recommendations forward.

Break-out Discussion Groups dealing with Operational Issues of the Advisory Forum

Following a presentation of the results of the Advisory Forum Survey that focused attention on the need for, and nature of, operational changes in the conduct of Advisory Forum meetings, Advisory Forum Members were allocated to one of five break-out discussion groups. Each break-out discussion group was allotted one of the following five tasks:

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Group 1 | considering the results of the Advisory Forum Survey and the purpose of the Advisory Forum, propose an ideal format and agenda (items/structure) for an Advisory Forum meeting |
| Group 2 | discuss objectives of interactions between Advisory Forum Members between Advisory Forum meetings and propose ways in which interaction could be improved and what tools could be used to facilitate this |
| Group 3 | considering the results from the Advisory Forum Survey, propose ways in which the interaction between the Advisory Forum and other groups could be increased and improved |
| Group 4 | consider how Members can best share information on the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. forthcoming risk assessment activities and workplans2. risk assessment opinions/outputs <p>(take into consideration that not all Members States are actively engaged in undertaking risk assessments and that there are political elements that may prevent Members from being able to share such information)</p> |
| Group 5 | consider what barriers there are for all Members participating fully in the discussion of plenary meetings, and how more engagement from all Members could be achieved |

Recommendations dealing with Operational Issues of the Advisory Forum

A rapporteur from each break-out discussion group reported the outcome of deliberations in his/her break-out group to the plenary meeting. After all five rapporteurs had reported, discussion

was invited from the plenary meeting. The following is a record of consolidated recommendations from Advisory Forum Members.

Group 1 Topic **considering the results of the Advisory Forum Survey and the purpose of the Advisory Forum, propose an ideal format and agenda (items/structure) for an Advisory Forum meeting**

Advisory Forum Members understood the purpose of the Advisory Forum was to address the eight functions of Advisory Forum as laid out in the Founding Regulation. In this context the Advisory Forum was understood to be a strategic body that decided on major topics for the following 12 months, that it was desirable to have two-way links with EFSA Panels and Networks, and that the Advisory Forum has oversight of emerging issues and risks.

With this in focus, the form of Advisory Forum meetings should include regular updates

1. from the European Commission
2. on international issues
3. on EFSA mandates,

and allow for Member States to lead Agenda items. Furthermore Advisory Forum meetings should allow for varied contributions, such as visits as well as presentations, and make greater use of break-out group discussions.

Group 2 Topic **discuss objectives of interactions between Advisory Forum Members between Advisory Forum meetings and propose ways in which interaction could be improved and what tools could be used to facilitate this**

Advisory Forum Members understood that their purpose was to be active advisors all the time. To enable this, interactions between Advisory Forum Members between Advisory Forum meetings was considered of paramount importance. Furthermore, to promote the reality of Advisory Forum Members being active advisors all the time, it was suggested that EFSA might raise the profile of the Advisory Forum in its other networks and amongst Member States, as well as Advisory Forum Members themselves using their own national networks to increase Advisory Forum visibility.

To facilitate inter-meeting interactions Advisory Forum Members understood that it is necessary consider ways to interact in five different situations

1. ad hoc requests
2. emergency situations
3. preparing for Advisory Forum meetings
4. follow up from Advisory Forum meetings
5. collaborating in risk assessment

It was recommended that effective interaction to ad hoc requests could be facilitated by including such requests in Advisory Forum agendas, and using email as a tool for speedy communication.

Emergency situations needed Advisory Forum Members to access the European Commission's RASFF, EMRISK contact points, using telephone, email and audioconference tools.

In preparing for Advisory Forum meetings it is proposed that Advisory Forum Members work in advance of the meeting together with EFSA in preparing the agenda.

The suggestion for improving interactions after Advisory Forum meetings is to issue a summary of the topic from previous meetings using e-tools including EFSA's DMS.

Members proposed that greater collaboration in risk assessment could be achieved through improving contact after Advisory Forum or Focal Point meetings using email, working groups and meetings.

Group 3 Topic **considering the results from the Advisory Forum Survey, propose ways in which the interaction between the Advisory Forum and other groups could be increased and improved**

Specific groups identified by Advisory Forum Members as working well included interaction between Advisory Forum and Scientific Committees and Panels, Management Board, Focal Points and Advisory Forum Communications Working Group.

Interaction between Advisory Forum and Member States and EFSA itself were considered as needing improvement. Specifically, at the Member State level, it was recommended to strengthen responsibility of Advisory Forum Members in their interaction with national network members. Between EFSA and the Advisory Forum, Members recommended that national networks could identify issues for discussion at Advisory Forum meetings, submitting information to Advisory Forum Members for 'pre-filtering' and prioritising for Advisory Forum meetings.

It was suggested that minutes, annual reports and physical presentations from national networks could be ways of improving the interaction between Advisory Forum and the networks themselves.

Group 4 consider how Members can best share information on the following:

1. forthcoming risk assessment activities and workplans
2. risk assessment opinions/outputs

(take into consideration that not all Members States are actively engaged in undertaking risk assessments and that there are political elements that may prevent Members from being able to share such information)

Advisory Forum Members suggested that the current tool for sharing information about forthcoming risk assessment activities and workplans (Excel) works well. Oral presentations at Advisory Forum meetings, with documentary support were seen as a useful, although it was recommended to clarify criteria for selecting risk assessment topics for consideration based on general interest and cross border relevance.

Suggestions for improving information sharing about risk assessment opinions included using Focal Points and sharing published information that contain English language summaries through a suitable exchange tool.

Group 5 consider what barriers there are for all Members participating fully in the discussion of plenary meetings, and how more engagement from all Members could be achieved

A question was raised as to whether Members of the Advisory Forum and the Executive Director should make a declaration of commitment to act independently in the public interest, in a similar way that Members of the Management Board operate in signing a code of conduct.

Concern was also raised about the amount of meeting documentation. It was suggested that the limited time Members have to read it thoroughly in advance of meetings might mitigate against some Members participating to their fullest extent in plenary discussion.

Specific recommendations to encourage greater participation included:

1. clarifying, and communicating, the role of Advisory Forum Members
2. clarifying EFSA's expectations of Advisory Forum Members
3. providing an induction programme for new Advisory Forum Members
4. assigning mentors to new Advisory Forum Members
5. working with Advisory Forum Members to identify the range, contact points and working relationships with national network bodies

It was also proposed that changes to Advisory Forum agendas might promote greater participation, namely that the agenda be more standardised, to include rota of current issues from Member States, items on emerging risks, feedback from Advisory Forum Communications Working Group, a presidency briefing, and that break-out groups discussions should be a standard feature of all Advisory Forum meetings.

This first area of the Advisory Forum's critical self-evaluation concluded with the Executive Director summarising EFSA's drivers going forward and offering his perception of the Advisory Forum as a principal forum for enabling cooperation.

The Executive Director identified increasing complexity, greater transparency, increased resources sharing, innovation, openness and cooperation as the drivers for EFSA over the near future. In that context he saw the Advisory Forum as an exemplar of cooperation, funding projects, training, sharing data, sharing staff, developing new methodologies. The next step, he proposed, was to see the Advisory Forum as a Steering Committee for the European Union's risk assessment agenda.

This last point raised several questions that EFSA with the Advisory Forum need to address:

1. Since it is essential to have support in home-institution and liase with national parties, how can Advisory Forum Members have more impact at national level?
2. How can we, EFSA, help you, Members of the Advisory Forum, be more effective on the national level?
3. How do we move to having a work plan driven by Member States as well as by the European Commission?

Break-out Discussion Groups dealing with Efficacy of the Advisory Forum in light of the Founding Regulation

Under Article 27 of EFSA's Founding Regulation the Advisory Forum is tasked to undertake eight duties. In this second phase of the Advisory Forum's self-evaluation, Advisory Forum Members were invited to begin consideration of their role as Advisory Forum Members and their perceptions of the efficacy of the Advisory Forum's operation in light of the Founding Regulation. Advisory

Forum Members were allocated to one of seven break-out discussion groups. Six break-out discussion groups were allotted one of the first six duties set out in the Founding Regulation, and the seventh break-out discussion group was asked to address the last two duties set out in the Founding Regulation. Group Members were invited to address two questions:

1. how does the group interpret the assigned task?
2. how best can the Advisory Forum fulfil its assigned task going forward?

Feedback from Break-out Discussion Groups dealing with Efficacy of the Advisory Forum in light of the Founding Regulation

A rapporteur from each break-out discussion group reported the outcome of deliberations in his/her break-out group to the plenary meeting. After all seven rapporteurs had reported, discussion was invited from the plenary meeting. The following is a summary of feedback from Advisory Forum Break-out Group Members and the subsequent plenary discussion.

Duty 1, Group 1 provide advice to the Executive Director of EFSA in the performance of his duties (including the work programme and prioritisation of requests for scientific opinions)

Advisory Forum Members identified that some differences exist between Advisory Forum Members in the interpretation of duties of the Advisory Forum, for example, should the Advisory Forum give advice on EFSA's budget and working procedures?

Advisory Forum Members also considered that more advice should be given to EFSA's Executive Director than is currently provided. Insufficient input is asked from Member States, for example in respect of the creation of working groups.

Proposals for addressing these issues included

1. greater involvement of the Advisory Forum in the prioritisation of EFSA's work programme. This might be achieved by EFSA asking for contributions before the work programme is drafted, and by EFSA taking a proactive approach in cases where the work programmes of Member States are used to prepare its own work programme
2. advisory Forum must ensure that procedures for this kind of involvement are efficient
3. improve better two way communication with regards to important items on the international level
4. find ways for Advisory Forum Members to be better informed about EFSA's activities and the activities of national bodies in their own Member States
5. EFSA should ask precise questions to Member States on specific topics
6. EFSA's Executive Director should visit Member States to increase the EFSA's visibility and to lobby national bodies for greater cooperation with EFSA

Duty 2, Group 2 avoid duplication of scientific studies or research projects/programmes

Members of the Advisory Forum differentiated between 'unwanted' and 'wanted' duplication, noting that 'wanted' duplication can yield advantages. Therefore, cooperation from the outset of a scientific study or research project is essential. This will help categorise any intended scientific study or research, and alert the potential for duplication. Information sharing, data sharing and trust between Member States are the building blocks for this level of cooperation. It was suggested the Advisory Forum could function as the facilitator (take a platform role) to foster such cooperation.

Finland and Norway were cited as a good examples of project and data sharing cooperation.

There was a cautionary note concerning the importance for the Advisory Forum not to stray into political or risk management issues.

Duty 3, Group 3 ensure close cooperation between national competent bodies and EFSA

'Competent bodies' was understood to include all national authorities responsible for food & feed safety, plant health and animal welfare.

Advisory Forum Members interpreted the duty of close cooperation to mean that the Advisory Forum should know the identity of the competent bodies in each Member State, and that mechanisms for sharing information, views and ideas should be established, and operate effectively, at national and EFSA levels.

Going forward Advisory Forum Members foresaw the need to work closely with Focal Points and national networks, to be more visible and act as ambassadors for EFSA, and for the Advisory Forum Communications Working Group to play a more effective ambassadorial role.

The need was recognised for greater cooperation between some Member States both to improve national cooperation and cooperation between themselves. A partnership model was put forward as a mechanism for better deployment of existing resources at both central and national levels.

Duty 4, Group 4 promote European networking of organisations (Article 36)

At the national level, Advisory Forum Members understood fulfilment of Duty 4 to involve identifying organisations with expertise to support EFSA's remit, to provide information about EFSA's priorities and to delegate the dissemination of information to Focal Points.

At the European level, Advisory Forum Members saw their role as bringing these organisations together to facilitate scientific cooperation (such as skills, capacity building), exchange of information, staff, best practices, and the development and implementation of joint projects.

Looking ahead Members of the Advisory Forum anticipated a significant value-add role in identifying the expertise of these organisations and their priority issues/themes over the year. An important secondary role would be for the Advisory Forum to support these priorities through scientific cooperation (conferences, seminars), promoting joint projects, deliver networking opportunities and deploying Focal Points to facilitate networking at EU level.

In plenary discussion, a question was raised as to whether the 'right' network organisations have been identified.

Duty 5, Group 5 ensure close cooperation where EFSA or Member States identifies an emerging risk

Advisory Forum Members recognised that this was a sensitive issue. While they acknowledged Members' had a responsibility to provide a link between EFSA and national authorities, they also reported that whilst there may be many institutions at national level, there were sometimes issues with institutions' willingness, or prioritisation, to provide response to EFSA information or feedback requests. Often this situation was linked to matters of public confidence in the Member States authorities' to deal with the risk, as well as lack of access to national networks.

It was noted that Member States' and EFSA interaction can be limited by the Advisory Forum's Members' participation in networks in his/her Member State. There is therefore a need to consider how best to broaden the base from which information is sourced and fed into EFSA from many Member States. Achieving this will ensure there is full access to relevant information for the Advisory Forum.

It was proposed that 'emerging risks'/horizon scanning should be a standing item attracting a dedicated session on Advisory Forum agendas, with time allocated for extended discussion.

Competing resource and expertise constraints as well as the prioritisation of more immediate issues, makes it difficult to focus on/invest resources into anticipating the future, whether to reduce future risks, realise efficiency gains or reduce surprises.

Cooperation between Member States and EFSA, between Member States themselves, and through regional Member States' networks, is essential if the Advisory Forum is to fulfil its duty on emerging risks.

Duty 6, Group 6 cooperate in situations where a scientific divergence is identified

It was recognised that scientific divergence is possible. In such a case the Advisory Forum has a role to play in ensuring cooperation, exchange of information, so that divergence is explained. No opinion should be issued before there is clarity.

The Advisory Forum also has a role to anticipate potential divergence by identifying divergences in data, data gaps and uncertainties. A plenary session question was raised as to whether the Advisory Forum is in a position to play this role.

Duties 7 & 8, Group 7 share and exchange information, and pool knowledge

Advisory Forum Members noted it was essential for the Advisory Forum to fulfil all tasks under Article 27. Although information is currently shared it was proposed that the flow of information be more structured going forward. For example, that information should formally flow from EFSA to the Advisory Forum to Focal Points to national networks, and from EFSA to the Advisory Forum Communications Working Group to the Advisory Forum to Focal Points to national networks. Currently the Advisory Forum does not regularly task Focal Points. To enable such an information flow the relationship between the Advisory Forum and Focal Points should be reviewed and the role of the Advisory Forum Communications Working Group be redefined.

A further proposal was for better feedback about the use of shared information. Members of the Advisory Forum felt that this would promote greater sharing of information.

Advisory Forum Members themselves could spur the exchange of information by visiting national networks to raise the profile of EFSA and provide a rationale for data/information sharing.

It was also suggested that EFSA might conduct risk assessment workshops in Member States to raise its visibility and to be seen to add value for Member States.

Conclusion

The high level of Advisory Forum Members' engagement in the breakout discussion groups and plenary discussions generated several proposals for changes to the conduct of Advisory Forum meetings. These proposals are testament to the awareness of ways to 'do better' the things that the Advisory Forum already does. EFSA will work with the Advisory Forum on the prioritisation and practical implementation of the proposals during 2015.

The Advisory Forum discussions also began to explore ways in which the Advisory Forum might play a different and greater value-added role going forward. These discussions will continue on a one-to-one basis with each Advisory Forum Member as 2015 unfolds with a view to specific recommendations being brought to the Advisory Forum for review in late 2015.

Malcolm Parker

Facilitator, 54th Advisory Forum Meeting

19 January 2015