



ENGAGEMENT AND COOPERATION UNIT

# Stakeholder Engagement

## 2019 Roundtable with NGOs

**Brussels, 13 February 2019**



## 1. Introduction

The Stakeholder Engagement Approach enables EFSA to benefit from stakeholders' input throughout different stages of the risk assessment process. EFSA's Roundtables are targeted engagement tools designed to provide specific stakeholder groups with an opportunity to engage with EFSA on relevant issues.

The objective of the NGO Roundtable was to exchange views on recent stakeholder initiatives, provide the latest updates on EFSA's activities which may be of interest to NGOs, and to seek feedback and suggestions to allow a continuous improvement of the engagement. The agenda of the Roundtable 2019 was co-designed by EFSA and NGO participants to allow space for interaction and discussion.

The meeting was chaired by Guilhem de Sèze, Head of EFSA's Scientific Evaluation of Regulated Products Department and was supported by EFSA Staff who presented different scientific and corporate topics, both in the room and via a video link from EFSA's headquarters in Parma. NGO representatives presented their views on topics such as bee health, endocrine disruptors, environment risk assessment, and alternatives to animal testing.

In his welcoming speech, Mr Martin Dermine (PAN-Europe), Member of the Stakeholder Bureau representing NGOs, stressed that NGOs highly value the opportunity to meet with EFSA and to have an open discussion on topics they find important. Mr Dermine encouraged the newcomer NGO organisations to take an active part in engaging with EFSA and to contribute to co-creation of the agenda for future meetings.

In total eleven out of eighteen registered NGO organisations attended. In addition, two consumer organisations, BEUC and SAFE attended the Roundtable because of their high interest in the agenda topics.



## 2. General overview

The morning part of the programme set the scene and informed participants on progress with the implementation of the Stakeholder Engagement Approach (SEA), where EFSA is testing different permanent and targeted models for interacting with a broad range of stakeholders including consumers, NGO, farmers, industry, distributors, practitioners and academia.

The Stakeholder Forum and the Stakeholder Bureau are two permanent mechanisms where EFSA focuses on more strategic aspect, while targeted models such as discussion groups, roundtables, info sessions and public consultations offer opportunities to gather stakeholder input at a technical level. The SEA approach allows for the engagement with stakeholders from an early stage of the risk assessment process.

The next topic on the agenda was EFSA's ongoing work on bee health where EFSA presented a holistic and integrated approach (MUST-B) for the risk assessment of multiple stressors in honey bee colonies.

Furthermore, in support of the European Parliament, EFSA organised two Scientific Symposiums on data sharing and collection in the area of bee health in the EU in 2017 and 2018. In May 2018, as a follow-up of these meetings and facilitated by EFSA, the various stakeholders (NGOs, industry, beekeepers, farmers, researchers) established an EU Bee Partnership to improve the collection, management and sharing of data and thus assist the development of a holistic approach to assess bee health in Europe and beyond. Support for these activities in area of bee health has since been further confirmed by the European Parliament in the form of a specific mandate sent to EFSA.

In a separate activity, the European Commission has indicated the intention to task EFSA with the review of its Guidance on the risk assessment of plant protection products on bees. NGOs pointed out that any change in the guidance document should be clearly explained to stakeholders and the EU should keep a high level of protection for bees as indicated in the original Guidance.

NGOs emphasised their expectations to take an active part in the stakeholder consultation that would be part of the review of the Bee Guidance.



### 3. EFSA & NGOs Working together - Updates on EFSA's scientific work and NGOs' perspectives

The second session allowed for an in-depth technical discussion and provided an update on EFSA's work and plans for several topics that have been identified as of interest to the participants.

First, EFSA presented its ongoing work in the environmental risk assessment of plant protection products, the way data is collected and used, and an indicative plan for updating relevant guidance documents.

In his presentation on environmental risk assessment of plant protection products, Mr Dermine (PAN Europe) stressed the importance of post authorisation monitoring and recalled the necessity to update the existing guidance on terrestrial ecotoxicology.

The session continued with the presentation of the scope of the technical guidance on the implementation of the endocrine disruption criteria applicable in the context of the Biocides and Plant Protection Products Regulation. EFSA explained the main elements of the guidance, including the way how to gather, evaluate and consider all relevant information for the assessment, conduct a mode of action analysis, and apply a weight of evidence approach.

Ms Costanza Rovida (ECOPA) presented the importance of appropriate definition of endocrine mode of action and addressed the five-levels approach in evaluation of endocrine disruption activity and validation of *in vitro* methods. In addition, ECOPA compared different toxicity studies and provided an overview of possible savings in time and resources that different studies could provide.

The next topic on the agenda was the Risk Assessment of Chemical Mixtures. EFSA presented the ongoing work of its Scientific Committee and the scope of the cross-cutting guidance on chemical mixtures. Following the methodology developed by the Panel on Plant Protection Products, EFSA will, by mid-2019 produce the first assessments in this highly complex scientific field. This work will cover two landmarks assessments, the nervous system and the thyroid on the risks posed to consumers by multiple pesticides.

Mr Jorge Casado (Greenpeace) presented results of an analysis of pesticides and veterinary drug residues in surface waters across ten EU Member States during summer 2018.

EFSA, in addition briefly presented its work on genotoxicity assessment of food contact materials, food additives and flavourings.

The following point on the agenda was EFSA's ongoing activity on 3Rs (replace, reduce and refine the use of animal studies) approach in the area of GMO risk assessment. For mandatory feeding studies on the whole food and feed detailed scientific guidance, communication and careful case by case evaluation is being performed.

Finally, Ms Emily McIvor (PETA International Scientific Consortium Ltd.) addressed the limitations of the use of animal testing. PETA referred to the 90-day feeding study in the context of results of the GRACE and G-TWYST studies funded under FP7. PETA invited all NGOs to cooperate more actively on reducing of animal testing.



#### 4. EFSA & NGOs looking ahead

During the third session EFSA and NGOs discussed development of EFSA's strategy 2027 and the opportunities for the engagement of stakeholders from the early stage of the process. The outcome of the two workshops with stakeholders will serve as a key input for the definition of EFSA's new strategic objectives in the period 2021 – 2027.

DG SANTE provided an update on the status of the initiative on transparency and sustainability of the food safety risk assessment regulatory process. This Commission's proposal presents an opportunity to enhance EFSA's efforts towards proactive data openness, to further increase transparency and to address citizens' demands expressed through the Citizens' Initiative to ban glyphosate. The proposal is an opportunity to make the EU food safety system more sustainable, as well as to increase the quality and reliability of studies, strengthening EFSA's operations, overall.

The NGO representatives acknowledged that this initiative presents a big step forward in ensuring raw data accessibility and transparency at the EU level.

The session closed with a presentation on the new EFSA's initiative on early engagement with stakeholders in the framing of self-mandates and guidance documents. The ambition of the EFSA's Management Board is to enable EFSA to capture societal needs and expectations at an early stage of the development of EFSA's self-mandate and guidance documents.



## 5. General Remarks and Next Steps

The Roundtable enabled the NGO representatives to engage with EFSA and exchange on ongoing work and recent stakeholder engagement initiatives.

Co-creation of the agenda for the NGO Roundtable has been recognised as a good practice that allows for an open discussion on topics of mutual interest.

EFSA is committed to seek feedback and suggestions from NGOs to continuously improve the way of working together and looking ahead.

EFSA will continue engaging with Stakeholders on the implementation of the revised Food Law, in setting the priorities of the next EFSA strategy, and looking for options to test the “framing of questions” initiative.

EFSA will look-into all the points presented today by NGOs and consider them carefully in its future work.

In summary, NGOs expressed satisfaction with the open discussion and useful exchange of views during the meeting.

Engagement with NGOs is key for EFSA in promoting a trusted science. The stakeholder engagement approach follows principles of openness and transparency and EFSA is committed to continuous improvement of the way it interacts with stakeholders and the society.