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Executive Director's Progress Report



European Food Safety Authority

GENERAL UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS AT EFSA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Members of the Board,

Please find attached the written progress report on matters of interest to the Board that have occurred since the last Board meeting and information concerning important future activities.

This report also includes the first report providing the Board with data and other information concerning the Performance Indicators discussed at the September 2004 Board meeting

Geoffrey Podger
Executive Director



GENERAL UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS AT EFSA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Update on Scientific matters at EFSA

Register of questions and opinions

1. Since the last meeting of the Management Board on 14 September an additional 37 requests for a scientific opinion were received. These included 3 GMO submissions and 13 scientific assessments by the NDA Panel of proposals for temporary labelling exemptions of products derived from major food allergens. During the same period 73 opinions were adopted. This brings the total number of adopted opinions to 173 (on 7 December), of which 146 were adopted in 2004.

2. In addition, EFSA issued three statements on scientific issues. These were: (i) the statement on the safety of goat milk and milk products with regards to possible BSE/TSE risks as made by the Scientific Expert Working Group on BSE/TSE of the Panel on Biological Hazards; (ii) the statement of the Scientific Panel on Genetically Modified Organisms on an evaluation of the 13-week rat feeding study on MON 863 maize, submitted by the German authorities to the European Commission; and (iii) the EFSA response to a report of Friends of the Earth Europe regarding risk assessments of the EFSA GMO Panel.

3. Following fruitful collaboration and consultation with stakeholders, the GMO Panel has concluded its guidance document for the risk assessment of genetically modified (GM) plants and derived food and feed. The guidance document is the result of a request submitted to EFSA by the European Commission for comprehensive guidance to applicants wishing to introduce GMOs or derived products to the EU market in accordance with the Regulation on GM food and feed. This guidance document was compiled by the GMO Panel, together with some members of other EFSA Scientific Panels and ad hoc experts. The document was published, after final editing, on 8 November.

Resignation and call for new scientist

4. The Authority has received a letter of resignation from one member Prof. Andrew Renwick from the Contaminants Panel. Prof. Renwick will continue his work on the Panel until a replacement can be found. Professor Renwick has stressed that his decision to resign were for personal reasons.

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Scientific Colloquia

5. The final report of the first Scientific Colloquium on the science behind tolerable intake levels for dioxins and PCBs, held in June and published in September has now also been published as issue Nr.1 of a glossy paperback series of publications of Scientific Colloquia.

6. On 13-14 December EFSA's second Scientific Colloquium was held in Brussels on: Micro-organisms in Food and Feed: Qualified Presumption of Safety (QPS). This Colloquium was attended by approximately 100 experts from Europe and North America and addressed scientific aspects of the QPS approach with the objective to determine whether the concept has a sufficiently sound scientific basis to be considered for future regulatory application.

Communication

Advisory Group on Risk Communications

7. EFSA is proposing to establish an expert advisory group on risk communications reporting to the Executive Director. The idea was put forward to EFSA by Professor Ragnar Löfstedt (Director of the King's Centre for Risk Management, King's College London). This advisory group will be constituted of a multi-disciplinary group of experts with a wide range of expertise in fields relevant to risk communications (eg sociocology, consumer science, anthropology, psychology, communications etc.). The group, which will be informal in character, will assist EFSA in the implementation of its mission with regards to risk communications by providing advice, regarding the development and implementation of its risk communications strategies and plans. Professor Löfstedt has proposed that this advisory group could provide EFSA with an annual review on risk communications, the first edition of which would be published jointly by King's College and EFSA. The group will have no decision making authority. EFSA is currently constituting this group which is expected to meet for the first time in March 2004.

Consumer research on risk perception

8. EFSA aims to initiate in 2005 research to seek the views of consumers in relation to their perception of risk in the food chain. EFSA is currently exploring the opportunity for collaboration with the European Commission on a project in the context of a forthcoming Eurobarometer related to risk perception. EFSA will also seek to involve Member States, notably through involvement of the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications. Findings from such research will provide important feedback to EFSA and will greatly aid the Authority's overall work in relation to its communications strategy, scientific activities and stakeholder relations.

Advisory Forum

Advisory Forum Event - feedback

9. On 8-9 November 2004, the Advisory Forum held its first public event, hosted by the Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung (German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment) in Berlin. The Event opened by Staatssekretär Berninger was to open up the work of the

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Advisory Forum to a wider audience and focused on the future of risk assessment an interesting debate on risk benefit.

10. Approximately 350 participants attended the meeting. Feedback from the Event based on the analysis of a questionnaire distributed to participants indicated that overall the event was well appreciated.

External Relations

Phare funding Programme to be managed by EFSA

11. During 2005 EFSA will be responsible for managing specific funding of 500,000 euros for the development of food safety capacity in the European candidate states under the Phare Programme. The objective of this PHARE programme is to prepare the remaining candidate countries Bulgaria and Romania for participation in EFSA.

Food safety has been a very important issue in the accession negotiations and therefore it is essential that the candidate countries will be informed about and involved in the operations of the EFSA, making it possible to take part in its operations on equal footing upon accession. An early introduction into how the European Food Safety Authority operates, including exchange of information concerning emerging issues, scientific expertise and findings will serve to help Romania and Bulgaria prepare themselves for membership.

12. The target groups are the officials and experts at the national authorities of Romania and Bulgaria who work in the fields where EFSA is active. A Programme is being drawn up implementing the Decision. Tendering and contracting for the implementation of the Programme have to be ready by the end of September 2005 and the Programme itself finalised before 31 December 2006. In order to draft the precise programme, seek approval from the Commission and execute it, EFSA has set up a Steering Committee made up of representatives from various departments of EFSA. The Steering Committee will also be responsible for managing the programme during 2005 and 2006 to follow up on the execution of activities.

Stakeholder Relations

13. The Stakeholder Event which followed immediately on the heels of the Advisory Forum Event at the Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung in Berlin on 9 -10th November was opened by Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle with about 80 people from academia, industry, retailers, distributors, farmers, consumer groups, animal welfare and environmental NGOs present. The meeting was also attended by members of EFSA's Management Board and EFSA's Advisory Forum, Chairs of EFSA's Scientific Committee and Panels and staff. The report of this meeting will be discussed under agenda item 8. Document MB 16.12.2004 - 6 - Report with recommendations from Stakeholder Event. Participants' reaction the event has been measured by questionnaire and telephone follow-up and has again been positive.

Crisis Event

14. In September, EFSA held in Rome with the Advisory Forum and with the participation of the Commission a crisis scenario exercise. Participants were encouraged

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to think through the different roles, responsibilities and activities that would be appropriate at each stage of a crisis, to identify any practical problems and make suggestions for what might be needed to ensure that all parties were acting within their roles and collaboration and coordination was maximized. The session was extremely valuable and the discussions focused on who would react and when and in particular how the various parts of the system should collaborate and keep one another informed. One key aspect greatly appreciated by the participants was the plans to develop the Extranet and videoconferencing capabilities to enhance communication during a real crisis.

15. During 2005 the European Commission and EFSA will hold a crisis scenario exercise involving also the national authorities to further develop crisis preparedness plans and its role in relation to the General Crisis Plan developed by the Commission.

Review – Update

16. Following approval by the Management Board of the Terms of Reference through written procedure and after having taken into account the editorial and clarification comments received, the tender documentation for EFSA evaluation was sent on 2 December 2004 to 12 selected evaluators.

17. The deadline for submission of the offers was set as the 5 January 2005. Upon receipt of the offers, the Technical Group will evaluate them and select the best offer according to the procurement principles. The Management Board will be kept informed.

Legislative issues

18. During 2005 EFSA is expecting more work based on new legislations. These include the new framework Regulation on food contact material and the proposal for a Regulation on maximum levels of pesticide residues in food and feed, expected to be adopted early next year. As regards the pesticides residues very strict time-limits are laid down for EFSA evaluations; e.g. within one year from the entering into force of the Regulation a temporary list of maximum residue limits, based on national limits and an EFSA evaluation, shall be established.

19. The proposal for a Regulation on nutrition and health claims is still being negotiated in Parliament and Council; due to delays in Parliament, the first reading is not expected until late spring 2005, with the final adoption unlikely to take place before early 2006. As this proposal will give EFSA a large number of tasks it remains important to closely follow the process in Parliament and Council. Related to the claims proposal is the proposal for a Regulation on the addition of vitamins and minerals and other certain substances which also will give EFSA an important role.

20. Given the imminent adoption of the Regulation implementing Article 36 of EFSA's founding Regulation, EFSA will be proactively implement these provisions, starting with the establishment of the list of bodies and institutes to which work can be contacted out.