

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE AND ADVISORY FORUM UNIT

Parma, 20 September 2007

EFSA/AF/M/2007/49/FIN

Minutes

TWENTY SECOND MEETING OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

BRATISLAVA (SLOVAKIA), 28-29 JUNE 2007

MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

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

Austria	<i>Roland Grossgut</i>	Italy	<i>Agostino Macrì</i>
Belgium	<i>Herman Diricks</i>	Latvia	<i>Gatis Ozoliņš</i>
Bulgaria	<i>Tsvetanka Voynova</i>	Lithuania	<i>Rolanas Kliucinskas</i>
Cyprus	<i>Constantinos Michael</i>	Luxembourg	<i>Félix Wildschutz</i>
Czech Republic	<i>Klára Zuzánková</i>	Netherlands	<i>Evert Schouten</i>
Denmark	<i>Henrik C. Wegener</i>	Poland	<i>Jan Krzysztof Ludwicki</i>
Estonia	<i>Hendrik Kuusk</i>	Portugal	<i>Manuel Barreto Dias</i>
Finland	<i>Kirsti Savela</i>	Slovakia	<i>Ján Štulc (outgoing)</i> <i>Zuzana Bírošová (new)</i>
France	<i>Valérie Baduel</i>	Slovenia	<i>Urška Blaznik</i>
Germany	<i>Andreas Hensel</i>	Spain	<i>Jesús Campos Amado</i>
Hungary	<i>Mária Szeitzné-Szabó</i>	Sweden	<i>Leif Busk</i>
Ireland	<i>Alan Reilly</i>	United Kingdom	<i>Andrew Wadge</i>

Observers and Invitees of the Executive Director

Croatia	<i>Davor Iles</i>	Switzerland	<i>Michael Beer</i>
Iceland	<i>Elin Gudmundsdóttir</i>	European Commission	<i>Jeannie Vergnettes</i>
Norway	<i>Kirstin Færden</i>		

Staff of the European Food Safety Authority

<i>Monika Adamova</i>	<i>Anne-Laure Gassin</i>
<i>Silvia Bellocchio</i>	<i>Herman Koëter</i>
<i>Thierry Beniflah</i>	<i>Djien Liem</i>
<i>Gian Luca Bonduri</i>	<i>Christine Majewski</i>
<i>Henning Bruno</i>	<i>Torben Nilsson</i>
<i>Lucia De Luca</i>	<i>Karen Talbot</i>
<i>Hubert Deluyker</i>	<i>Victoria Villamar</i>
<i>Giulia Frattini</i>	

1 WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, Executive Director of EFSA, opened the meeting and gave the opportunity to Miroslav Jureňa, Slovak Minister of Agriculture, to welcome all participants to the 22nd meeting of the Advisory Forum. The Executive Director thanked Ján Štulc, outgoing AF member from Slovakia, for the good cooperation, and she welcomed Zuzana Bírošová, new AF member from Slovakia. She also welcomed Henrik C. Wegener, new AF member from Denmark, and Davor Iles, representative from Croatia, who was present as observer, and introduced Torben Nilsson, new Secretary to the Advisory Forum from the 1st of September 2007.

2 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was introduced by the Chair and adopted. A request from the Netherlands to discuss the article 36 call on salmonella was referred to agenda point 8 on matters raised by the Member States.

3 MATTERS ARISING SINCE THE 21ST MEETING OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

Management Board meeting of 19 June 2007

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle informed the Forum about the outcomes of the Management Board meeting of 19 June 2007.

Draft guidelines for health and nutrition claims were published on EFSA's website for public consultation and are expected to be adopted in early July 2007.

The Management Board had expressed concerns over the increasing work load of EFSA and recognised the need to strengthen the capacity. Reflections on better planning, use of article 36 and external procurement of services had taken place during an "away day" of the EFSA Management. The AF members

received a hand-out of the presentation given by the Executive Director on *further improvements to the efficiency of EFSA's scientific activities*.

United Kingdom welcomed the opportunity to see the presentation and underlined the importance of ensuring resources and competencies to facilitate the work of the Panels in particular when a quick response to emerging issues is needed.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle agreed on the importance of EFSA's responsiveness. EFSA is in the process of strengthening its capacity, and discussions are ongoing with the Scientific Committee (SC) on ways to work quickly with the Chair of the Panel. An update will be provided at the September meeting of the AF.

The form of the Annual Declaration of Interests has been amended to become clearer and more detailed. It will be sent together with an updated guidance to the experts working for the Scientific Panels, the Scientific Committee and their working groups. The Management Board will be requested to adopt a general policy on the declaration of interests at its September meeting.

Report back on activities related to EFSA's 5th Anniversary

Several events will take place in relation to EFSA's 5th Anniversary, particularly during the week from 1-5 October 2007 in Parma and during the week from 19-23 November 2007 in Brussels.

4 PESTICIDE RISK ASSESSMENT – EFSA'S ACTIVITIES AND COOPERATION WITH MS

Henning Bruno, Head of the PRAPeR¹ Unit, gave an update on EFSA's activities and cooperation with Member States within pesticide risk assessment. The present peer review procedure is based on draft assessment reports (DAR) provided by a Member State and comprises four phases (commenting phase, comment evaluation phase, phase to address remaining issues and preparation of the EFSA conclusion on the risk assessment) within one year. Reviews cover existing active substances (presently at the third out of four stages), new active substances and setting of maximum residue levels. In the draft of the new Regulation replacing 91/414/EEC it is proposed to reduce the peer review period to three months, which raises concerns regarding the possibility to obtain additional information when required and allowing for sufficient consultation before reaching the conclusion. Hence, whilst welcoming the intention of the Commission to focus the peer review, EFSA will draw the attention of the Commission to the need to extend the proposed deadline for pesticide risk assessment.

¹ PRAPeR = Pesticide Risk Assessment Peer Review

Hubert Deluyker, Head of the Scientific Cooperation and Assistance Department, introduced a plan to involve the Member States through a working group in an evaluation to further strengthen the efficiency of the review process, while maintaining the scientific quality needed.

Sweden thanked for a good presentation and found that there are good grounds for harmonisation as a means of rationalisation, so that not all Member States should look at everything, since this is very resource demanding.

United Kingdom found that the peer review process is far too complicated and that timeliness is important, hence there is a need to be “radical” in defining how to speed up the process without compromising the scientific quality.

Germany emphasised that the present peer review process actually constitutes a simplification as compared to previous approaches and warned against downgrading the scientific quality of the work. It was suggested that EFSA could instead draw more on the expertise of different institutions in Europe and assume a coordinating role. It would also be important to cooperate closely with other international institutions such as for example WHO.

Italy suggested prioritising the pesticides to be peer reviewed, since not all of the thousand substances could be equally important from a health risk point of view.

Herman Koëter, Deputy Executive Director and Director of Science, recalled that it is already for many years that attempts are made to simplify the review process, but that the critical point was really the DAR, which is in the hands of the Member States. A good DAR would facilitate the work of EFSA, whereas a poor DAR would lead to more work for EFSA in order to guarantee the scientific quality. Hence, the issue is really to identify the most efficient way to involve the Member States. The AF members were invited to use their influence at Council level in discussions regarding EFSA’s role in the peer review of pesticide risk assessments.

Henning Bruno explained that also OECD guidance documents have proven useful and that a prioritisation of pesticides to be included in the peer review has already taken place, reducing the total number of substances to 400-450. He further explained that the use of pesticides classified as “dark red” are intended to be phased out after a grace period of six months and that producers of pesticides classified as “light red” will be offered a two-year voluntary withdrawal period, so that these substances are not expected to be included in the peer review. As Germany, he underlined that the efficiency has already improved over time.

Germany found that EFSA should be ready to peer review also the “red” pesticides in case their use is not discontinued within a reasonably short while.

The Chair concluded that there is a need for the proposed working group on further increasing the efficiency of the peer review process and also

acknowledged the need to reconsider the timeline. EFSA will contact the AF members on the type of expertise required for the working group on pesticide risk assessment.

5 COOPERATION AND NETWORKING

5.1 Feedback from the meeting of the Steering Group on Cooperation of 15 May 2007

Herman Koëter gave a feedback from the second meeting of the Steering Group on Cooperation (SGC) on 15 May 2007 in Brussels and thanked Charles Crémer for hosting this meeting. The minutes of the meeting are made available on EFSA's website². The SGC came to agreement on the terms of reference for the scientific cooperation projects considered under agenda item 5.2 and it identified two new subjects for further consideration at its next meeting i.e. on the risk assessment of nanoparticles, and on risk ranking.

Herman Koëter also introduced the new concept of EFSA Scientific Cooperation Working Groups composed of Panel experts and Member States' experts.

The Commission representative expressed concerns that these scientific cooperation working groups could compromise the independence of the Scientific Panels and the Scientific Committee and requested clear procedures. Herman Koëter explained that the final outcome of these scientific cooperation projects would be a scientific report or technical advice for the Executive Director and should be considered as a possible starting point for the Scientific Panels and the Scientific Committee in order for them to formulate scientific "opinions".

5.2 Mandates for scientific cooperation projects for discussion and possible approval

Fostering harmonised risk assessment approaches in Member States

Djien Liem, Head of the Scientific Committee and Advisory Forum Unit, introduced a draft mandate for an EFSA Scientific Cooperation Working Group on the harmonisation of risk assessment approaches in the EU. The proposal is based on discussions in the first two meetings of the SGC. The SGC agreed that the project would consist of two parts. The first part would be to prepare a report for the Executive Director that would summarise existing documents in order to take on board previous experiences, that would identify similarities and discrepancies in RA methodologies applied at national level compared with those used by EFSA and that would provide advice on specific methodologies or approaches for risk assessment which require further harmonisation at EU level.

² See: http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/advisory_forum/adv_meetings/af_22nd_meeting.html

The second part would then comprise the outcome of efforts made to achieve further harmonisation in the areas identified in the report.

Comments from various AF members were supportive of the suggested mandate and there was agreement that the end of 2008 would be a feasible timeline for the delivery of the report.

Italy suggested to consider a separation of the work into three subgroups on microbiological, chemical and nutritional risk assessment, respectively, since the methodologies to approach these subgroups may differ substantially.

The members agreed with a proposal of the Chair on a few amendments and a deadline of December 2008 for the delivery of the report. Austria volunteered to take the lead in the new ESCO WG on harmonised risk assessment approaches in cooperation with France and Germany. The other AF members were invited to express their interest or to identify an expert to take part in the scientific cooperation working group. The activities will start once the mandate is also approved by the SC. The SC will consider the mandate at its plenary of 9-10 July.

Analysis of risks and benefits of the fortification of food with folic acid

Ireland presented the revised terms of reference that had been circulated to the AF members prior to the meeting and pointed out that the main idea behind the project was to share experiences.

Comments from various AF members were supportive and a few suggestions for amendments were made. The AF approved the mandate subject to incorporation of the proposed amendments and Ireland offered to take the lead. Norway, France, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, United Kingdom and, possibly also, Austria announced an interest to participate in this scientific cooperation project.

Mandate for an EFSA scientific cooperation working group on Emerging Risks

A draft mandate was presented, which had been developed by the SGC and the Emerging Risk working group of the SC. The Scientific Cooperation and Assistance Department will become actively involved in this project through its Emerging Risk Unit.

France pointed out the need to clearly distinguish between information on food emergencies and horizon scanning or early warning systems and argued for the advantage of cooperation with researchers and the private sector in identifying emerging risks.

The AF approved the mandate with a slight amendment. Professor Dan Collins, Chair of the BIOHAZ Panel and of the Scientific Committee Working Group on Emerging Risks, offered his availability to continue as Chair of the ESCO WG on emerging risks. Belgium, France, Hungary, Portugal, Italy, United Kingdom and, possibly also, Austria announced their interest to take part in this activity.

Harmonisation of chemical occurrence data collection in food and feed

The AF discussed an updated draft mandate. The purpose would be to collect data in support of EFSA's scientific activities and to develop general principles for collection of chemical occurrence data. The proposed timeframe is two years.

Germany indicated that data ownership is not always with national authorities. The German member also noted that it needs to be discussed whether it would be EFSA's responsibility to define criteria for data collection. Attention was further drawn to the activities of EUROSTAT which is also collecting comprehensive data in the area of food and feed safety. It was found that there were still many open questions in the terms of reference, e.g. who are the target groups for the data and shall all data be harmonised or are new data needed? On this basis, as well as the legal complications related with data harmonisation, the proposal was considered too short to guide such an important task.

These observations were echoed by France. France saw also a need for increased coherence between data collection systems from EFSA and the Commission in order to avoid duplication of efforts.

Belgium supported the German remark on data ownership and mentioned also other sources of data (research institutes, industry).

United Kingdom wanted to explicitly mention that the terms of reference should consider both data collection and storage and requested the AF to pronounce itself on "intelligent" ways of data collection.

Hungary found that the role of the Commission in data collection should be strengthened.

The Commission mentioned that the Commissions' resources are limited and that it is happy with the role of the Data Collection and Exposure Unit in the collection of data. It stressed that since data collection systems were already in place (often in accordance with legislative provisions as it is the case for zoonoses), collaboration with the Commission services (SANCO, ESTAT) was essential to avoid duplication of work and promote synergy..

The Secretariat proposed two possible ways forward, either 1) the working group should define its focus at its first meeting or 2) the terms of reference should be

expanded and the mandate revised before the next AF meeting in September. Upon Germany's suggestion the first proposal was endorsed.

Mandate for an EFSA scientific cooperation working group on botanicals and botanical preparations

The AF discussed an updated draft mandate. The purpose of the work of the proposed scientific cooperation working group on botanicals is to enlarge the information basis, prioritise botanicals for safety assessment, test the proposed approach, and prepare updated compendia.

The Commission representative reiterated the earlier comment that there is a need to clarify the procedures in order to avoid compromising the independence of the Scientific Committee Working Group on Botanicals which is preparing the opinion.

France considered the proposed scientific cooperation as very important, but requested an update on the work of the Scientific Committee Working Group on Botanicals before establishing a new working group.

Ireland supported the proposed scientific cooperation underlining its importance due to limited knowledge today.

Germany suggested to take stock of the existing knowledge in order to be in a position to prioritise future work and suggested an EFSA workshop to this effect, as there seems to be a lack of cooperation between the countries.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle emphasised that the Scientific Cooperation Working Group will only provide the output as outlined in the terms of reference, which will then serve as input for the preparation of an opinion, so the independence of the Scientific Committee Working Group will not be compromised. She furthermore welcomed the idea to arrange a presentation of the status of SC's current work at a future meeting.

It was decided to arrange a presentation on the Scientific Committee activities at the AF meeting in September 2007 before approval of the terms of reference.

6 ESTABLISHING FOCAL POINTS IN THE MEMBER STATES FOR COOPERATION WITH EFSA

6.1 Feedback from Member States on the establishment of national focal points

The feedback from Member States had been compiled into a table and been circulated to the AF members prior to the meeting. Comments were supportive, but also showed different views on the modalities of establishing the focal points.

6.2 Updated discussion paper prepared by the Secretariat incorporating comments as received from the AF Members in writing – for discussion

Christine Majewski, Head of the External Relations and Management Board Unit, presented the updated paper taking into account the comments from AF members. She emphasised that the focal points were not mandatory and that the focal points could work in different ways in different Member States. Furthermore, EFSA does not intend to impose any specific system, but would like to allow Member States to make their own arrangements within the agreed objective. Finally, she mentioned that the document to be signed has the status of a legal contract.

Several AF members, including the Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, Hungary, Belgium, Austria, Portugal, France, Ireland, United Kingdom and Lithuania, expressed their interest in establishing focal points very soon. However, some questions were raised regarding the limited duration of the contract (one year), the relationship between the AF member and the focal point, the size and form of the financial support from EFSA, legal aspects of the contract, including who had the mandate to sign it on behalf of the member state and the view that the focal point could not ensure, but only facilitate, exchange and coordination.

Germany had not yet reached a final decision and was presently examining the legal aspects. There would be a need to make the mandate more precise and allow additional time for country-level consultation. A lump sum solution would be insufficient for Germany.

Christine Majewski thanked for the positive response and clarified that the intended role of the focal points would be to facilitate the work of the AF. The proposed one-year contract period had been chosen to allow for possible adjustments on the basis of the initial experiences.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle added that it was not the intention to stop the support to the focal points after one year, and that there is room for bilateral negotiation on the focal point contract with each Member State. EFSA will soon address a letter on the purpose of focal points to the permanent country representatives (with a copy to the AF member), requesting the designation of focal points. The focal points could be in place already this year in Member States that wish to proceed fast.

7 FEEDBACK FROM ADVISORY FORUM WORKING GROUPS

AF Working Group on Communications

Anne-Laure Gassin, Director of Communications, presented the outcome of the meeting of the AF WG on Communication in Larnaca in April 2007, mentioned that the next AF WG Communication meeting would be the following week in Helsinki, and thanked for the involvement of the AF members. There would be a need to brainstorm on the terms of reference for the AF WG on Communications to update, strengthen and make them more precise taking into account the EFSA/AF Strategy on networking and cooperation. She also described some of the key initiatives under consideration by the AFWG on Communications to raise awareness regarding the EU food safety system, and in particular the role of EFSA and AF Members in European risk assessment. These include: a common presentation of the EU Food Safety System and scientific cooperation in risk assessment on members' websites; arranging joint events at member state level as well as on occasion of the 5th Anniversary of EFSA , and preparing an occasional supplement to the EFSAnews on scientific cooperation. She invited AF members to volunteer to participate in the editorial board of this Newsletter supplement.

Anne-Laure Gassin also briefly presented the Advisory Group on Risk Communications, which has had its mandate renewed for a three-year term. The group presently has seven members and is open to a few more members, particularly nutrition and media experts. AF members were invited to make suggestions on additional members.

AF Working Group on Information Technology

Thierry Beniflah, Head of the IT Unit, presented the AF WG on IT, which aims at discussing and informing on ways to facilitate communication, collaboration and cooperation between EFSA and the AF members, e.g. through development of videoconference facilities and the Extranet. The AF WG on IT “meets” five times a year of which two are virtual meetings.

Comments from AF members complimented to the progress of the IT work and found that it deserved more visibility. It was suggested to pursue the reflections on new tools. Thierry Beniflah confirmed upon request that software for data collection and harmonisation was available and adequately licensed for such use.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked the Member States for their active involvement, and Thierry Beniflah added that also those who were presently not attending the meetings were most welcome to participate in the AF WG on IT, and for that matter to the AF WG on Communication.

8 UPDATE AND EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON MATTERS RAISED BY THE MEMBER STATES

Gluten content in food

Spain raised the issue that certain “gluten free” foods actually did contain some gluten in some cases. Ireland agreed that there is a need to explain to the consumers what the “gluten free” labelling actually means. Other AF members confirmed that this is an issue. *Austria added that those people who substitute gluten products by eg. corn products may have a higher exposure to some contaminants, eg. some mycotoxins than the average exposure using gluten products, which should be considered in the risk assessments.*

The Chair stated that EFSA will consider a possible request for scientific advice carefully, and Spain said that it is likely to submit such a request.

Possible behavioural effects of food colorants /preservatives

United Kingdom informed the AF that the Committee on Toxicology has been requested to prepare a statement within the coming weeks on the possible effects of certain artificial food colours on children behaviour. The UK representative promised to keep EFSA informed and to send the statement to EFSA once it becomes available.

Salmonella in fresh herbs

United Kingdom informed the AF that they had observed an increasing incidence of Salmonella in fresh products, latest in fresh, unwashed herbs from Israel, and further referred to similar findings from Denmark and Netherlands. Ireland too confirmed increasing problems with fresh products, while Germany added that also E-coli bacteria was occasionally a problem.

Listeriosis

United Kingdom informed the AF that they had observed a significant increase of Listeriosis and formed an UK expert group to look into the matter. They will share the outcome with the AF.

Article 36 calls

Netherlands, referring specifically to the recent article 36 call on Salmonella in pigs, found that the 7% overhead was insufficient and that article 36 institutions may therefore become reluctant to become involved.

Denmark informed that overhead rates would usually be significantly higher on research projects.

Portugal found that the time for the call had been insufficient for institutions to enter into consortia and that the procedure was too bureaucratic.

Germany asked how EFSA intended to monitor the scientific quality.

France wanted to know which selection criteria were used.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle said that EFSA would be learning from experiences and agreed to allocate more time for establishing consortia in future calls. Regarding the overhead rate, she mentioned that EFSA has to comply with EU Financial Regulations, that EFSA was currently covering up to 80% of all direct expenses, and that there might be differences in what was considered as overhead expenses in different countries. EFSA will look into how this division is done and prepare a written reply to the AF members, and an update on the status of all article 36 calls will be provided at the next AF meeting in September 2007.

Labelling of functional foods

Germany informed that a recent survey had revealed that only half of the consumers comply with the instructions provided in the labelling of functional foods, whereas the other half used them “to compensate for an unhealthy lifestyle”.

Avian Flu

Czech Republic informed that two cases of Avian Flu had been identified in Czech Republic and Germany informed that three cases were found in Germany.

9 FEEDBACK FROM EFSA ON THE SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE DEPARTMENT

The AF was updated about the activities of the new Scientific Cooperation and Assistance Department.

France stated that expectations were high to this new department and appreciated that EFSA allocated sufficient resources to this purpose.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle informed the AF that the recruitment process for the heads of the Scientific Cooperation Unit, Emerging Risks Unit and Data Collection and Exposure Unit was expected to be completed by early autumn.

10 DEMONSTRATION OF THE UPDATED SYSTEM OF THE EXTRANET BY THE PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

Gian Luca Bonduri, presented the AF Extranet on behalf of the AF Extranet Project Steering Committee, which is now ready for use, and user names/passwords were distributed to the AF members, who were invited to start using the system. The presentation also comprised an introduction to the Extranet

in terms of how to download and upload documents and how to know when there is something new on the Extranet. Next steps will be for the AF members to test the system until the next AF meeting and for EFSA to develop supporting tools for the users, e.g. a user manual, to distribute a questionnaire to the AF members, and to review the system on the basis of the feedback received from the users.

Austria/Luxembourg presented their initial experiences with the Extranet and advised that the best way to optimise systems is to use them. Netherlands asked about the access to the system. Ireland suggested using the system for electronic discussions. Belgium expressed a wish for Extranet training. France requested subgroups with specific access right.

Gian Luca Bonduri stated that access was not a technical problem, but that it requires a decision from the AF member on who should be granted access to which domain on the Extranet. He also mentioned that the AF Extranet Project Steering Committee will develop a user manual and suggested to arrange an Extranet training session in connection with the next AF meeting. A draft training schedule will be prepared. Thierry Beniflah confirmed that the system could be used for electronic discussions.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle invited the members and the different working groups to make lists of who should have access to the Extranet and thanked all those who have contributed to the development of the Extranet, including the Project Steering Committee, the AF WG on IT, and in particular Austria and Luxembourg for their valuable efforts in testing the system.

11 UPDATE AND EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON MATTERS RAISED BY EFSA

MON 863

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle informed the AF members about the statement of the GMO Panel concerning the evaluation of the re-analysis of the statistical evaluation of a 90-day rat feeding study of MON 863, the Report of the EFSA ad hoc Task Force which formed the basis of the Statement and related correspondence with the Commission and the Council on this issue.

The Chair informed the members also about EFSA's GMO action plan and a letter addressed to the Commission on the implementation of this action plan. A copy of the letter has been shared with the AF members.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle proposed to arrange a meeting with Member States' experts to compare EFSA's risk assessment approach for GMOs with those applied at national level in a dedicated meeting in the fall of 2007.

Austria and Sweden supported the idea of organising a dedicated meeting on GMO risk assessment. Germany found that such a meeting would mainly serve a communication purpose, since sufficient scientific knowledge exists already.

Austria and Italy stressed the importance of carefully considering whom to invite for the meeting to ensure that it would actually deal with risk assessment and not with risk management.

Animal cloning

Djien Liem gave an update on the work which will be conducted by the Scientific Committee. A working group under the Scientific Committee has been charged with the preparation of a draft opinion to be published on EFSA's website by November 2007. A public consultation is foreseen in December 2007; final adoption and publication of the opinion is planned for early 2008. The opinion will cover primarily cattle, pigs, sheep and goats (if data available), and possibly fish. EFSA will work closely with the French AFSSA and the US FDA.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle indicated that since animal cloning is a very sensitive issue, it would be essential to make EFSA's role, as source of scientific advice, clear in related communications.

Scientific Colloquium on Environmental Risk Assessment of GMOs

Djien Liem reported that a colloquium was held in Tabiano the previous week with the aim to launch a scientific debate focussing on environmental risk assessment (ERA) of GM plants and, in particular, the approaches of environmental risk assessment. The specific topics addressed were: the testing of the potential effects of GM plants on non-target organisms, the potential long-term effects of GM plants and how to assess such effects (e.g. via models) as well as the risks versus environmental benefits of GM plants. Nineteen EU member states and eight non-EU countries participated in the Colloquium. The draft conclusions of the Colloquium were supportive of the case-by-case approach, as required by the legislation and outlined in the EFSA Guidance Document, and there was a broad consensus on the current approach to ERA. The recommendations of the Colloquium will be carefully considered by the GMO Panel.

Pre-accession seminar on the AF

Christine Majewski presented the purpose of the pre-accession programme for Croatia and Turkey, including their involvement as observers in the AF and working groups, but not possible in the Scientific Committee, and a series of pre-accession seminars organised by EFSA. Specifically, a seminar on the AF will take place in Opatija, Croatia on 6-7 September 2007, and a similar seminar is scheduled in Turkey in November 2007. A few AF members are requested to participate in order for them to present their views on the work of the AF. Sweden had already agreed to participate, so one more AF member is requested to join the seminars.

Christine Majewski mentioned that Croatia would second two national experts to work at EFSA, and that hopefully Turkey would do likewise.

New publication of the Ramazzini Institute on Aspartame in Environmental Health Perspectives

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle informed that the Ramazzini Institute had not yet shared its data on aspartame that was underlying its new findings in Environmental Health Perspectives, but that a meeting is foreseen.

EFSA's Provisional Statement on Melamine and structurally related compounds

Djien Liem explained that a slight amendment was introduced in EFSA's statement on Melamine to clarify that the statement had been prepared by EFSA and not by EFSA's CONTAM Panel.

Note to the Advisory Forum about the follow up of the mandate on seal stunning and skinning methods

The Chair thanked Norway for sharing information on seal stunning and skinning methods.

Norway commented that it was a big challenge due to the strong political and consumer interests and the limited data available. Norway will have an opinion ready by 10 September 2007 and thanked EFSA for the close cooperation.

Requests for identification of assessors' experts in scientific substantiation of health claims and for identification of seconded national experts in EFSA's Scientific Unit on Dietetic Products, Nutrition and Food Allergy

Djien Liem briefly presented two requests from EFSA's NDA Unit for identification of assessors' experts in scientific substantiation of health claims and for identification of seconded national experts, respectively.

EFSA has sent notes on these two requests to the Member States in order to encourage them to designate experts that can support the preparation of the work of the NDA Panel.

Sweden requested an extension of the deadline for reply due to summer holidays in Northern Europe during the month of July. France announced its willingness to make experts available for EFSA.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle agreed to extend the deadline for reply to the end of August 2007 and also mentioned that both long and short term, i.e. a few months, seconded experts were welcome.

Harmonising reporting and monitoring of zoonoses

Djien Liem drew the attention of the AF members to a note that was sent to the members about harmonising the reporting and monitoring of zoonoses and in particular antimicrobial resistance in zoonotic agents.

12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The following AF meeting dates for 2008 were approved:

31 January – 1 February

10-11 April

12-13 or 19-20 June

18-19 September

20-21 November

It was suggested that all five meetings, as well as the meeting in Netherlands on 6-7 December 2007, will be 1 ½ day meetings due to the many issues that need to be considered, e.g. all the scientific cooperation projects.

France offered to host the September meeting in Paris and Norway reiterated its previous invitation to arrange an AF meeting in Oslo, either in April or June.

The eleven “missing countries” were reminded that they are welcome to join EFSA’s BIOHAZ/BSE network. The Chair said that letters in this respect would be addressed to the countries concerned.

Cyprus informed the AF that the Government has decided found an independent Food Safety Agency in 2008 to replace the present Food Safety Board. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle congratulated Cyprus and wished success to its new agency.

13 CLOSING OF THE MEETING

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking the Slovakian authorities and AF member for hosting the meeting and providing such a warm welcome and good organisation. She also thanked the AF members and observers for their positive and constructive contributions and the interpreters and EFSA staff for their assistance and contributions.