

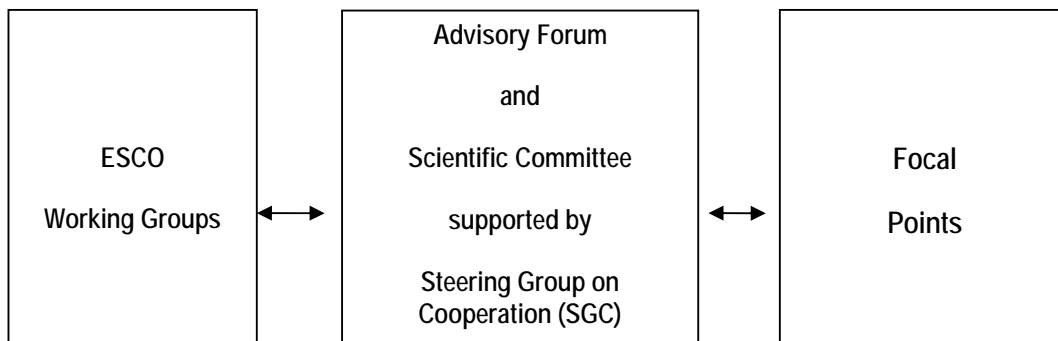
**Interim Review of the  
Strategy for Cooperation and Networking  
between EU Member States and EFSA**

In 2006, the Management Board endorsed the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking, thereby emphasizing cooperation and networking between EFSA and its counterparts in Member States to be a key priority. The overall objective of this Strategy is to strengthen cooperation between EFSA and Member States in order to support the development of risk assessments in all fields within EFSA's remit. The Management Board agreed, as laid down within the Strategy, that a review would take place within two years of its existence i.e. by the end of 2008.

**Cooperation through the Advisory Forum in collaboration with the Scientific Committee.**

The Strategy on Cooperation and Networking calls for strengthening Member States' cooperation through the Advisory Forum in collaboration with the Scientific Committee, which are both key in the strategic coordination of the cooperation (Figure 1). As foreseen in the Strategy, two new initiatives have been set up. First, since late 2007, Focal Points were established in all Member States. They support the Advisory Forum Members with their daily work related to networking and scientific cooperation. The Member States recommended that, based on the positive experience gained in the first year, the Focal Points network should be strengthened. Second, the Steering Group on Cooperation, in which both the Scientific Committee and the Advisory Forum are participating, was set up to provide oversight on joint projects (ESCO Working Groups).

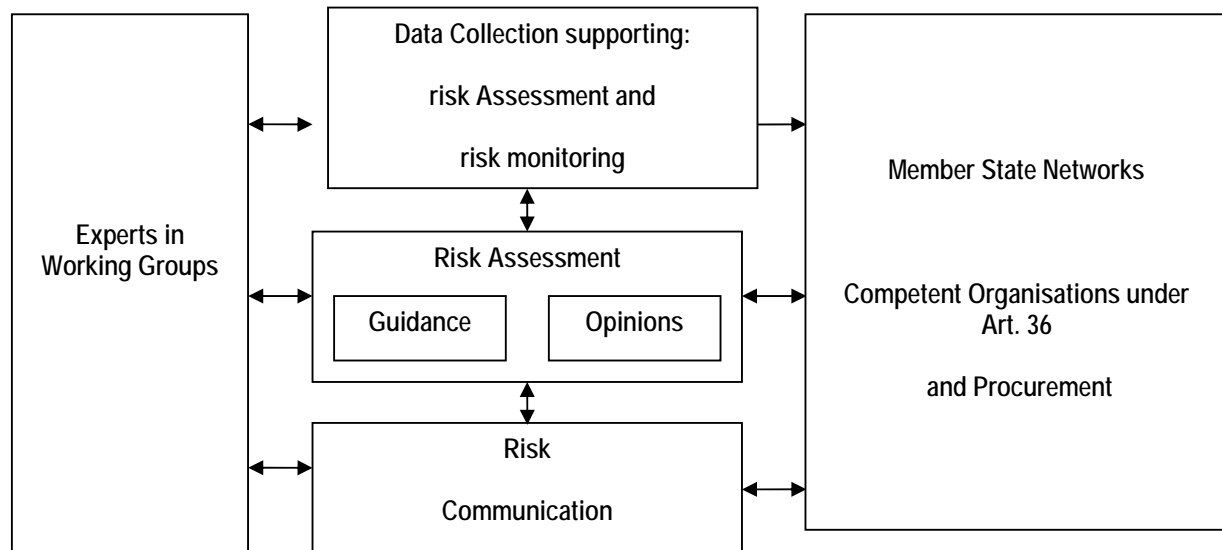
**Figure 1. Cooperation between Advisory Forum and Scientific Committee**



The cooperation was strengthened at all levels at which it takes place (Figure 2):

- the Member State networks;
- the individual organisations in Member States, and
- individual experts who join the Scientific Panels and their working groups.

Figure 2. EFSA Processes and Elements of Cooperation with the Member States.



With the implementation of the Strategy, several dedicated scientific networks have been created or strengthened in the areas of data collection (food consumption, chemical occurrence) and risk assessment (animal health, plant health, GMO, BSE).

Since 2007, the competent organisations under Article 36 carry out a variety of scientific tasks, particularly the preparation of opinions or data collection, which are financed through grants. In addition, research organisations are commissioned to carry out scientific work through public procurement. The total amount spent on both activities was 2.9 million € in 2007, whereas in 2008 EFSA will have spent 5.8 million € on these activities, with a proposed further increase in 2009 for a total of 7.5 million €.

The original list of competent organisations adopted by the Management Board was updated with organisations from Bulgaria and Romania (Dec. 2007) and currently includes 243 organisations. The additional 128 institutions submitted for approval to the Management Board will broaden the coverage of competencies in the Member States.

In addition to the more than 200 current Panel Members, some 1100 ad hoc experts have supported EFSA in its work. The upcoming renewal of the Scientific Committee and Scientific Panels, provides an opportunity to increase the number of experts from new Member States. To raise the profile of EFSA in newer Member States, two seminars, one in Budapest and one in Warsaw, were held in the fall of 2008. Also, in order to better support the work of the Scientific Panels, an expert database was created. The database holds information on external scientific experts capable of and willing to assist Member States and EFSA. The use of the database also enhances the transparency of the selection process. By mid November, more that 1000 applications have been received from over 40 countries. Member States will be invited to join by sharing their national databases.

The Strategy foresees activities to strengthen Member States' cooperation through the Advisory Forum in collaboration with the Scientific Committee. Furthermore, four priority areas were identified:

- Exchanging and collecting scientific data and information;
- Sharing risk assessment practices;
- Contributing to the harmonisation of methodologies for risk assessment;
- Promoting coherence in risk communications.

### **The four priority areas of the strategy**

Priority area 1. The exchange of scientific data and information between and among Member States and EFSA has been intensified. To streamline data collection, exchange, and analysis a strategy has been developed by EFSA in the last year. As noted above, the data collection activities through various networks have increased considerably. Focal Points play a key role in the information exchange, including on numerous questionnaires. To foster the information exchange, an Information Exchange Platform has been set up between EFSA and the Member States.

Priority area 2. EFSA and Member States have taken several initiatives to share risk assessment practices through the establishment of (five) Working Groups on Scientific Cooperation Projects (ESCO), two of which have been completed successfully in 2008 and will feed in the work of EFSA's Panels and Scientific Committee. In this area, workshops have also been organised in pre-accession countries and with current Member States to raise awareness of EFSA's work. Bilateral meetings between EFSA and Member States took place, e.g. in areas where diverging opinions occurred or could have occurred. To be prepared for crises situations, exercises have been conducted with participation from Member States.

Priority area 3. The first initiative on harmonisation of risk assessment methodologies concerned an ESCO Working Group on harmonisation of existing guidance which has completed its first report. For new scientific areas, EFSA regularly organises scientific colloquia and other scientific events which give the opportunity for an open exchange of scientific views among experts. Finally, during the development of new guidance, consultation with Competent Authorities of Member States, stakeholders and the public on draft documents has become routine practice at EFSA.

Priority area 4. Cooperation and coherence in communications has been implemented through the Advisory Forum Communications Working Group (AFCWG). EFSA initiated a review of that group's Terms of Reference in 2007 which was endorsed by the Advisory Forum. The updates to the Terms of Reference focused on strengthening cooperation and coherence in practical ways. Pre-notification and sharing of communications between members, including early warning on emerging and topical issues, is consistently the highest priority. Strengthening that practical two-way, timely and responsive cooperation will continue to be a priority for EFSA. Three newsletters focused on scientific co-operation have been published, 13 joint events organised in 2007/08 with national food safety authorities, EFSA's website contains a dedicated area on cooperation with Member States, and links between EFSA's website and websites of organisations of Advisory Forum Members have been established.

### **Recommendations**

For the interim review of the Strategy, an internal EFSA working group was established to carry out the review process. Feedback was sought from both the Member States and also the Scientific Committee through a questionnaire.

It should be recognised that the time for implementation of the Strategy has been limited and only an interim review of progress towards the Strategy is possible at this stage. Nevertheless, Member States' views on the implementation of the Strategy were very positive. There was a consensus that:

- the cooperation and networking between EFSA and Member States has been well developed and should be continued;
- there is no need to start new activities but there is a need to further strengthen some of the existing initiatives.

The Advisory Forum indicated the need to further strengthen the activities on harmonisation of risk assessment, data collection, and training.

With the first wave of Art. 36 projects to be finalised in 2009, EFSA will be able to assess and monitor the impact they have had on its work. For the competent organisations under Art. 36 to function optimally in all areas within EFSA's remit, it is essential that the list is regularly kept up to date, as described under the review of the activities carried out under Art. 36. Furthermore, it is proposed to further foster the networking of these organisations via additional initiatives i.e. to develop the Art. 36 list into a broadly available database with a dedicated extranet space.

The dedicated Member State networks that have been established could be further strengthened by giving them, where appropriate, a more permanent character. This includes the Focal Points.

The harmonization of risk assessment guidance is the activity identified by the Member States as having the highest priority. It is essential to foster good practices and enable mutual recognition of risk assessments among Member States. The efforts by the Scientific Committee and several organisations in the Member States provide a good basis for further development of this work both for general risk assessment approaches as well as for specific areas within EFSA's remit.

The request from newer Member States to further increase training activities is important to address. This can be resource-intensive though and hence needs to be well defined. EFSA could develop such training together with Member States that already have experience in this area and consider operating this through existing training programmes e.g. from the European Commission, thereby avoiding duplication of effort.

## **Conclusions**

The Members of the Management Board are invited to consider the positive outcome of the interim review of the Strategy on Cooperation and Networking and to confirm the need for EFSA to continue to foster scientific cooperation with Member States. In particular activities in the context of Article 36 should be further developed.