Parma, 20 April 2009
EFSA/AF/M/2009/219/PUB/FIN

Minutes

THIRTIETH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY FORUM
LJUBLJANA (SLOVENIA), 18-19 FEBRUARY 2009

MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY FORUM

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

Austria	*Roland Grossgut*	Italy	*Agostino Macrì*
Belgium	*Charles Crémer*	Latvia	*Gatis Ozoliņš*
Cyprus	*Stella Canna-Michaelidou*	Luxembourg	*Nathalie Welschbillig*
Czech Republic	*Jitka Götzová*	Malta	*Flavia Zammit*
Denmark	*Arne Büchert*	Netherlands	*Evert Schouten*
Estonia	*Külli Rae*	Poland	*Jan Krzysztof Ludwicki*
Finland	*Jaana Husu-Kallio*	Portugal	*Manuel Barreto Dias*
France	*Valérie Baduel*	Slovakia	*Zuzana Bírošová*
Germany	*Andreas Hensel*	Slovenia	*Ada Hočevar Grom*
Greece	*Spyridon Ramantanis*	Spain	*Ana Troncoso*
Hungary	*Maria Szeitzné Szabó*	Sweden	*Leif Busk*
Ireland	*Alan Reilly*	United Kingdom	*Alison Gleadle*

OBSERVERS AND INVITEES OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Switzerland	*Michael Beer*	FYROM	*Marina Popovska-Domozetova*
European Commission	*Jeannie Vergnettes*	Turkey	*Nergiz Özbag*
Croatia	*Zorica Jurković*		

STAFF OF THE EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

Bernhard Berger	*Riitta Maijala*
Per Bergman	*Christine Majewski*
Gian Luca Bonduri	*Pia Makela*
Andrew Cutting	*Elena Marani*
Hubert Deluyker	*Jeffrey Moon*
Anne-Laure Gassin	*Torben Nilsson*
Andrea Gervelmeyer	*Hermine Reich*
Georgi Grigorov	*Barbara Rotovnik*
Miriam Jacobs	*Didier Verloo*
Djien Liem	*Victoria Villamar*

1 WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle opened the meeting and passed the floor to Marjeta Racek (Head of Division of Health and Food Safety from the Slovenian Ministry of Health). Marjeta Racek outlined the positive work on food safety that had come about under the Slovenian Presidency and highlighted the importance for cooperation and networking and sharing of expertise particularly when resources are limited. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked Slovenia for the hospitality and for Slovenia's contribution to EFSA activities. She welcomed those members and observers who had joined the Advisory Forum for the first time and noted that apologies were received from Bulgaria, Lithuania, Romania, Norway and Iceland.

2 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted without changes. Ireland, Hungary and Greece raised additional issues for agenda item 5.5.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle reminded those AF members who had not yet submitted their annual declaration of interests electronically to do so as soon as possible.

Action 1: AF members and alternates who have not yet submitted their annual declaration of interests electronically to do so as soon as possible.

3 GENERAL MATTERS ARISING SINCE THE 29TH ADVISORY FORUM MEETING

An overview of the status of follow-up on action points agreed at the 29th AF meeting was provided for information. It was noted that most actions had been completed already, with some still ongoing. Such an overview will be provided at each AF meeting in the future.

3.1 Management Board meetings in Parma on 18 December 2008 and in Rome on 29 January 2009

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle updated the AF on the two Management Board (MB) meetings which had been held since the last AF meeting. In December 2008, the MB adopted EFSA's Management Plan for 2009 and an updated list of article 36 institutions. In January 2009, the MB adopted EFSA's Annual Activity Report for 2008 and EFSA's strategic approach to international activities. The MB congratulated EFSA on the good progress in 2008 and the AF for its valuable support. The MB also discussed the results of the expert survey in 2008, showing an overall satisfaction of 87 % as well as 95 % of the experts planning to reapply to continue working with EFSA in the new Scientific Panels and Committee.

At the MB meeting in January 2009, four AF members (France, Germany, Ireland and the Netherlands) had been invited to present their views on the work of the AF. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle indicated the background to their presentation and the feedback from the MB and Scientific Committee. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle noted that EFSA operated within a legislative framework which included not only the Founding Regulation (Regulation EC 178/2002), but also the vertical legislation which set specific ways for work to be done, such as that on pesticides.

France said it was important to consider what was said at the MB meeting and not what was subsequently reported in EU Food Law, which was not always accurate. The presentation was made jointly by the four AF members that attended, but it was not made as a representation of the AF as there was no mandate for such. France stated that it was important to reinforce the networking aspects of the AF and focal points in the context of growing workload and limited resources, and to consider how best to make long lasting efficient working practices. The French position was stated as being the desire to establish a means of a collective, networking peer review approach to working, avoiding the dangers of duplication of risk assessment and reconsideration of toxicology by each Member State. There is a need to differentiate between hazard and risk and to consider exposure at national level based on local knowledge. France stated that a sustainable model must be developed.

The Netherlands reiterated that the presentation was made as individuals having had quite substantial discussions prior to the MB meeting and not on behalf of the AF. Although satisfied with the role of EFSA, concern was expressed on the sustainability of the present model due to the workload, and the need for good mechanisms for workload sharing was emphasised. Harmonisation to build trust in risk assessments done by different parties was highlighted as important and there would be a need to distinguish what should be done by EFSA and what should be done by Member States. Austria supported this view.

Germany stated that there was no doubt that EFSA was considered the responsible body for risk assessment at EU level, but noted that there was occasional duplication. Suggestion was made on the use of the EMEA model and the use of a rapporteur system. Germany also noted from the expert survey that 54% of EFSA's Panel members came from national authorities which shows the contribution of the Member States in the EFSA structure, but which takes experts away from the daily work at national level and adds to their workload. Germany suggested that EFSA's Panels should not produce but rather peer review opinions in order to reduce their work load. Germany promoted further dialogue on the operation of EFSA and expressed concern that the continuing increase in workload may lead to a decrease in quality given the limitation of resources.

Ireland indicated that the countries presented their own perspectives at the MB meeting. Ireland cited the need for smaller countries with limited resources to rely on a collaborative process and said that EFSA is a relatively new organisation, so the scientific cooperation is still 'work in progress'. Ireland saw the risk assessments of EFSA having a much greater 'weight' than individual Member States' risk assessments and emphasised the usefulness of having EFSA during the recent dioxin crisis in Ireland. Ireland disagreed that the EMEA model would be adequate for EFSA, since too much work would be placed on the Member States. Small Member States would rely on EFSA to perform independent and transparent risk assessments.

Sweden welcomed the discussion on the best approach for using the available expertise, but was uncertain of the implications of the proposals from France and Germany and suggested further consideration and discussion on the topic. Belgium expressed high satisfaction with the work of EFSA and supported the view of Sweden. Belgium further said that the work model applied for pesticides and GMO environmental risk assessments could not be extended to other areas due to limited resources in many Member States that would also not have the same collective experience as EFSA's Panels. Denmark agreed with the comments of Sweden. Cyprus supported the comments of Ireland on the needs of small countries and the views of Sweden, Belgium and Denmark. Finland welcomed the discussion on the sharing of the workload, since duplication of opinions exists. The European Commission outlined some of the reasoning for the EFSA model and how authorisation of pesticides and medicines should be distinguished from other areas of food and feed risk assessment that are harmonised at the EU level. The EMEA model operates within a non-harmonised legal framework. The European Commission further noted that scientific cooperation between EFSA and the Member States was formally established in 2006 and was still developing.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle noted that the AF needs to work within the general legal framework of the Founding Regulation (Regulation 178/2002) provided and do not have responsibility for changing the legislation. She also made reference to the obligation to ensure that EFSA's activities are carried out within the specific

vertical legislative frameworks to make sure the systems work effectively. Regarding the work on pesticide risk assessment peer reviews, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle noted that for pesticides no fees are paid to EFSA and authorisation is still done at Member State level. In the case of EMEA, fees are paid by the producers. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle acknowledged that the increasing workload is a challenge and that it is necessary to find a way to deal with this, which has thus far been done through scientific cooperation and networking, increasing resources allocated to EFSA, better support given to EFSA's Scientific Panels and Committee, and reinforced dialogue with DG Health and Consumers on priorities and planning. The short time over which this has been developed has meant that it is not as yet totally effective. In 2009, in addition to the important work on the harmonisation of risk assessment approaches, an increased budget has been sought for the article 36 calls. The balance is changing between EFSA's Panels and working groups and article 36 that has substantially increased since 2007. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle further stated that while discussion is important, it must not negatively impact the work of the experts and that the positive approach that exists for EFSA's Scientific Panels and Committee should be maintained. As a way forward, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle invited concrete, operational proposals from the AF on ways to strengthen work with the Member States. She also suggested inviting EFSA's Heads of Unit to present how work is done in each of the scientific areas in order to discuss how there could be improvement in work practices using the AF as a forum for strengthening cooperation. It was agreed that a programme will be established for 2009/2010 and that the CEF Unit would present the work on food contact materials, enzymes, flavourings and processing aids at the next AF meeting. Germany suggested pesticides and GMO as other priority areas for discussion, while France suggested nutrition and novel foods.

Action 2: EFSA to establish a programme for discussion of its scientific work with the AF, starting with food contact materials, enzymes, flavourings and processing aids at the next AF meeting.

3.2 AFITWG

Hubert Deluyker briefed the AF on the proposal to discontinue the work of the AFITWG, taking into account previous comments from the AF that its scope was too broad, and to replace it by a data collection network. Specialised networks between EFSA and the Member States exist already for other areas, *e.g.* zoonoses. These networks have a specific remit and focus.

France agreed on the need for EFSA and the national authorities to collaborate on data collection. Austria agreed with the proposal, but requested clarification whether the main aim was networking or identification of technical solutions. Finland hesitated to agree with the proposal without better clarity on the remit and supported the view from Austria. Ireland saw the importance of the data collection work and agreed on the proposal. Belgium shared doubts about the

clarity of the remit and requested that the proposal should be considered further. Denmark agreed that EFSA should have a lead role in the data collection work and suggested that there should be further interaction at international level, *e.g*. with WHO, to avoid double reporting from the Member States. The United Kingdom expressed concerns on the clarity of the remit and suggested clearer inclusion of the consideration of metadata issues. Sweden agreed that collaboration on data collection needed coordination. Hungary supported the importance of the work, including cooperation with Eurostat, and saw the difficulty with the existing AFITWG and favoured the alternative approach. Austria requested an overview of existing networks.

Hubert Deluyker indicated that endorsement would be sought for each specific network, which would operate under a detailed mandate. The proposed data collection network would not set new definitions, but get involved in bridging different systems. It would be composed of IT people and focus on technical aspects, while strategic issues would be addressed by the AF. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle concluded that an inventory of existing networks between EFSA and the Member States would be prepared and shared with the AF and that a draft mandate, specifying the terms of reference of the proposed data collection network, would be shared with the AF for discussion at the next AF meeting.

Action 3: EFSA to prepare and circulate an inventory of existing networks between EFSA and the Member States.

Action 4: EFSA to share a draft mandate, specifying the terms of reference of the proposed data collection network, for discussion at the next AF meeting.

4 EFSA'S INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Christine Majewski presented EFSA's strategic approach to international activities, which had been approved by the MB in January 2009. She emphasised that EFSA was already engaged in a great deal of international risk assessment and information collection activities, *e.g*. with the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA), the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA), the Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residue (JMPR) and has concluded a bilateral agreement with the US Food and Drug Administration on exchanging confidential data while respecting each others legal provisions. Also, EFSA assisted the EU through its support to the European Commission in multi- and bilateral international activities, including *Codex Alimentarius*.

Italy saw the *Codex Alimentarius* work as being very difficult due to the various interests and the potential divergence from EFSA opinions, posing the question of how EFSA's involvement is coordinated with that of the European Commission. Denmark welcomed the paper, acknowledging the importance of a global strategy and the need to differentiate between EFSA participation and involvement of

EFSA's experts acting in their own capacity. Denmark also asked when EFSA can represent Member States and whether a Member State could represent EFSA. Ireland supported the view of Denmark on the importance of the strategy and posed the question of how scientific divergence in opinions from JECFA, JEMRA, JMPR and EFSA could be managed. The European Commission agreed on the importance of the strategy, informing the meeting that EFSA had consulted them in its preparation and noted that EFSA's involvement with *Codex Alimentarius* was to support the EU delegation and not just the European Commission, which is clear in the paper. The importance of managing confidentiality of information with third countries was also highlighted. Slovakia supported the view of the European Commission. Austria also welcomed the strategy and stressed the need for clarity on the different roles of risk assessors and risk managers. Finland expressed concern over the timeframes outlined in the strategy and noted that participation is easy to achieve, but influencing is not so easy and more focus should be placed on influencing. The involvement of experts from outside the EU should also be considered. Italy suggested that involvement of EFSA in *Codex Alimentarius* would be a key priority.

Christine Majewski provided some clarification on the role of EFSA in relation to *Codex Alimentarius*, indicating that EFSA's role is to support risk managers through scientific risk assessment advice. EFSA defers to the European Commission as it has primacy in international negotiations and would not represent Europe at an international meeting such as *Codex Alimentarius*. Regarding diverging opinions, these may arise due to the different perspectives being considered, *e.g.* EU compared to other countries' exposure and immediate health concerns, which is acceptable in the context. The long term objective of the strategy is to ensure that EFSA is able to participate in and remain at the forefront of international risk assessment activities and support the EU in its international risk management endeavours. She concluded that prioritisation will be based on resources and effectiveness of pursuing an international activity, and that the AF would be provided with regular feedback and updates. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle added that EFSA will remain open-minded on who will represent EFSA.

5 MATTERS RAISED BY THE MEMBER STATES

5.1 Uranium

Germany raised an issue relating to the maximum tolerable intake of uranium in mineral waters. Regulations in different countries are not harmonised and the matter was referred to EFSA for consideration from a chemical and radiological toxicological aspect. The BfR experienced the same situation as EFSA's CONTAM Panel, which was a lack of expertise to address the radiological aspects.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle advised that at EU level the expertise in the radiological area is within the remit of the group of scientific experts established

under article 31 of the EURATOM treaty. Hence, EFSA in consultation with the European Commission agreed a means of conducting a full EU risk assessment within the legal framework using EFSA expertise on chemical toxicology and other EU experts to contribute to the radiological toxicology in completing the risk assessment. Austria and Denmark underlined the importance of conducting the full risk assessment. Italy informed the AF about a national research project on uranium that would be presented at the 3rd International IUPAC Symposium on Trace Elements in Food in Rome on 1-3 April 2009.

5.2 EU Almanac on food and feed safety

Germany presented current work on establishing an EU Almanac on food and feed safety including country profiles following a decision of the Heads of Agencies meeting in December 2007. The EU Almanac is to include no more than three pages on each country's food safety agencies structure and interactions. The project had also been presented at the focal point meeting in Parma on 3-4 February where the focal point network proposed to create a working group to follow this project more closely, if appropriate.

Denmark supported the importance of the work and its link to the recommendations of the ESCO working group on fostering harmonised risk assessment approaches and believed that there should be greater linkages with EFSA in the work. Austria also supported the German initiative and emphasised the importance of having easy access to the country profiles via the web. Ireland supported the initiative and mentioned the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) country profiles, which focussed more on risk management, but which also contained useful information. France supported the work and saw it as being useful for benchmarking and supported linkage to the ESCO work on harmonisation. Finland raised a question on how the information would be kept up to date once it was published. Germany indicated that it would be the responsibility of each Member State to maintain their information up to date. The European Commission noted that the FVO country profiles were much more extensive and that they aim to satisfy a different need compared to those proposed by Germany. Hungary noted that the Heads of Agencies had a focus on risk management, but that the profiles were designed to be focussed on risk assessment. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked Germany for the information on the project and concluded that the focal point network should support the BfR in this project (*e.g.* via a working group, if appropriate), but mainly to update the information on each country profile in the EU Almanac. Germany agreed to proceed in that way and to report back to the next Heads of Agencies meeting.

5.3 Children's exposure to chemicals from food, water and food contact materials

Cyprus presented an overview of their current work on children's exposure to contaminants from food, water, toys and other materials, concluding that exposure to the investigated chemicals via food is minimal and within acceptable levels.

France noted the importance of exposure assessment, specifically in relation to endocrine disruptors, from the wide range of products. Sweden welcomed the study and was particularly interested in findings on food colours and benzoates. Cyprus replied that these substances were not found in combination.

5.4 TDI for melamine and its structural analogues: still adequate?

The Netherlands presented information on the appropriateness of the TDI for melamine and its structural analogues highlighting concerns on acute renal toxicity and recommended that the current TDI be re-evaluated together with increased monitoring of the structural analogues.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle informed the AF that EFSA had received a request from the European Commission asking to update the TDI for melamine. Denmark noted that a classical evaluation may not be appropriate because of the observed effect of crystallisation. Cyprus supported the proposal to update the TDI. Djien Liem advised that harmonisation of approaches will be discussed at a forthcoming meeting of the secretariats of EFSA and JECFA in April 2009.

5.5 Other matters raised by the Member States

Ireland presented an overview of the recent incident involving dioxin contaminated Irish pork, emphasising the importance of risk communications and thanking the European Commission, several Member States and EFSA for the valuable support during the crisis.

The Netherlands congratulated Ireland with the well handled crisis and raised the question on the exposure level and current considerations on the importance of short term high exposure to contaminants such as dioxin. The United Kingdom agreed on the role of the AF to facilitate contacts and indicated that a full report on the incident was to be discussed at their Board meeting in March 2009. Germany noted the importance of risk communications at national level in such circumstances and said that while for this incident the concentrations posed no risk to health making risk communication relatively easy to manage, this would not always be the case. A recommendation was made to the AFCWG to further consider the interaction of communications between EFSA and Member States. Hungary raised concerns that EFSA's statement has been interpreted in some food business sectors as dioxin is no longer a problem at the given level for short periods of time, which has given rise to problems for risk managers. France noted

the importance of information exchange at the earliest opportunity in cases like this and to share experiences such as Ireland has done. France proposed that the issue of the hazards from recycled material should be considered further. Portugal congratulated Ireland on the presentation and the handling of the crisis and emphasised the issue of recycling as raised by France. Italy proposed that the experience should be used as a means of developing guidelines and noted that the use of recycled material for food is contrary to legislative requirements. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle noted the comments made in relation to strengthening the communications in such circumstances and thanked Ireland for the comprehensive overview of the incident. Ireland informed that lessons learned on the communications aspects of the crisis had been discussed already by the AFCWG. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle referred the further discussion to agenda item 7.2.

Greece announced that a food safety conference would be organised in Athens in connection with the AF meeting in November 2009 and that the AF members would be invited.

Upon request from Ireland, Riitta Maijala updated the AF on the background and schedule of the ongoing public consultation and finalisation of the opinion of the BIOHAZ Panel on the use and mode of action of bacteriophages in food production.

6 COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES

6.1 AFCWG meeting in Parma on 13 February 2009

Anne-Laure Gassin provided the AF with an overview of the discussions at the AFCWG meeting in February 2009, highlighting the need for feedback on the usefulness of information shared under embargo. Feedback is to be requested from national authorities on whether initiatives are being taken to use such information at national level, and if not, what the reasons might be. A simple question will be asked after each significant release, such as that on Taurine. Other work discussed at the AFCWG meeting included the development of guidelines on risk communication, how media monitoring can contribute to identifying emerging risks, and communications during emergency situations.

Finland complimented the presentation of the Emerging Risks Unit provided at the AFCWG meeting.

7 RISK ASSESSMENT ISSUES

7.1 Follow up of the conclusions of the Environmental Council of 4 December 2008

Per Bergman provided the AF with a presentation on EFSA actions on the Council of the EU conclusions on GMOs. It was noted that Member States can

prohibit GMO use at national level where there is evidence of risk and the evidence must be submitted to the European Commission. The Standing Committee on Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH) failed to reach agreement on the proposals to have France and Greece repeal their safeguard measures on GM maize, after the GMO Panel concluded that there was not sufficient evidence of risk. The matter will be referred to the Council of Ministers. In such cases, EFSA's meetings with national authorities on safeguard measures will be included in the Register of Questions and will be published when there is agreement, along with the data provided.

Cyprus welcomed EFSA's initiatives in this sensitive area, appreciating the openness and supporting the continuation of the work. France welcomed EFSA's direct involvement of the Member States in the environmental risk assessment of GMOs, seeing this as an example of how they wanted EFSA to work. Belgium favoured the intensive cooperation with Member States, but mentioned EFSA's difficulties in finding Member States who will take on the dossiers. France clarified that the recent French measures opposing the use of GM maize were adopted on the basis of environmental considerations, which do not fall under the remit of AFSSA. There are also ethical issues to consider. Austria welcomed the additional initiatives on transparency. Per Bergman thanked for the positive feedback and invited the Member States to become involved. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle said that GMOs continue to be an important area for harmonisation.

7.2 Urgent requests for scientific advice

Lessons learned in 2008

Riitta Maijala provided an overview of EFSA's involvement in providing urgent scientific advice in 2008 using procedures specified in article 13 of the MB decision of 11 September 2007, in particular the provision of statements relating to mineral oil in sunflower oil, melamine in food and dioxin in Irish pork.

The Netherlands noted that the conclusion from EFSA in relation to the dioxin in pork may have been too reassuring and that at national level a more cautious approach was used. Ireland appreciated the difficulties in carrying out urgent risk assessments but welcomed the ability to be able to operate in the way presented when necessary, noting that the AF network greatly assisted in being able to contact colleagues involved in the other countries. Finland said that the urgent requests had been handled very well by EFSA and suggested that in the initial stages of incidents like those described, all Member States should be informed that EFSA is working on the issue. This would help in risk communications at national level. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle agreed that early information to the AF is very important. Riitta Maijala confirmed that the Member States had indeed been informed early in connection with the urgent requests in 2008.

Emergency manual and exercise in 2009

Andrea Gervelmeyer presented the updated version of EFSA's emergency manual and described the establishment of a working group to prepare for a crisis simulation exercise which will involve Member States later in the year.

France requested clarification on whether the emergency manual would replace the previous crisis handling manual. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle confirmed that this was indeed the case. Austria suggested that the emergency manual should include all relevant lists of contact details and that it should not be separate from the Member States' national emergency plans. Ireland welcomed the document and indicated support for the working group. Cyprus suggested that the requirement for 'two or more' criteria to be fulfilled as specified in the emergency manual would not be necessary in all circumstances for there to be an emergency.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle summarised indicating that the preparation of the crisis simulation exercise would proceed along the lines presented and that the AF secretariat would seek nominations for involvement of the Member States. The AF members were also encouraged to share national emergency plans through the Information Exchange Platform (IEP), with due consideration to confidential information/contact details.

Action 5: AF secretariat to seek nominations for the crisis simulation exercise working group

Action 6: AF members to share national emergency plans through the IEP.

7.3 Scientific Committee meetings in Parma on 1-2 December 2008 and 10-11 February 2009

Djien Liem provided an update on matters considered by the Scientific Committee at its meetings in December 2008 and February 2009. The document on transparency in risk assessment was adopted by the SC for public consultation in December 2008. The public consultation closed on 15 February 2009 and around 100 comments were received. The SC working group on transparency is due to meet again in March 2009 to finalise the document with an aim to have it adopted by the SC in April 2009. The final document on transparency will then be shared with the AF and, as it has linkages to the harmonisation of risk assessment approaches, will need further discussion in the AF. Work is progressing also on the benchmark dose approach. At the February meeting, the SC opinion on nanotechnology was adopted, following the consideration of over 200 comments from the public consultation. Publication of the opinion was due in the following weeks. The SC working group on nanotechnology will continue to monitor the development of science in this area. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle suggested the active networking with the Member States in this area and also to collect information on research development on cloning. Austria requested that all

comments made during the public consultation be made available. Djien Liem indicated that these will be included in a separate final report.

Action 7: SC document on transparency to be shared with the AF once adopted.

Action 8: Member States to provide information on research development on cloning.

8 SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE ISSUES

8.1 Focal point meeting in Parma on 3-4 February 2009

Bernhard Berger presented feedback from the focal point meeting in Parma on 3-4 February 2009, including suggested priorities of the focal points for 2009. The AF agreed to a proposal that focal points should have access to search the expert data base. The Netherlands indicated that the IEP should be accessible to more than just the AF members and focal points. Austria supported this view and suggested that all those with access to the Extranet should have access to the IEP. Bernhard Berger recalled that the IEP was still a pilot project and suggested broadening the access only after the initial testing and improvements. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle concluded that the focal points should receive access to the expert database immediately and that in April 2009 the access to the IEP should be discussed again with an aim to broaden it.

Action 9: EFSA to grant access to focal points to search the expert database.

8.2 International meeting on folic acid in Uppsala on 21-22 January 2009 – feedback and next steps

Alan Reilly (Ireland), Chair of the ESCO working group on folic acid, presented an overview of the discussions on folic acid from the international meeting in Uppsala on 21-22 January 2009, highlighting the incomplete toxicology and epidemiology information and data and uncertainties in relation to cancer. A draft report of the ESCO working group should be ready for the AF meeting in April 2009 and the outcome of the international meeting would most likely be annexed to the ESCO report.

Denmark asked whether the ESCO working group would continue after the report, to which Ireland responded indicating that once the report was complete there would be a need to consider what future work may be required. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked Sweden for organising the international meeting.

8.3 Implementation of the ESCO recommendations on fostering harmonised risk assessment approaches

Hubert Deluyker presented proposals on the follow-up to the recommendations of the ESCO working group on fostering harmonised risk assessment approaches, suggesting a ‘two tier’ approach. A ‘vertical’ risk assessment harmonisation

would proceed along the lines already started for the specific scientific areas, *i.e.* with specialist meetings having been held already in the areas of plant health, animal health and GMOs and more national expert meetings foreseen. At a 'horizontal' level, it would be possible to collate an inventory of topics that would benefit from harmonisation, which could be shared with the AF to identify priority areas. The SC document on transparency would be important to consider for agreeing on priorities. As for the other ESCO recommendations, the country profiles were covered under agenda item 5.2, publication of national risk assessment outputs was being discussed by the AFCWG, EFSA was preparing an overview of its guidance documents, and quality management tools could be considered further at Member State level or possibly collectively.

Sweden supported the proposal, and suggested that for quality management tools the way forward would be to share information though the IEP. Austria supported the vertical/horizontal approach and emphasised that harmonisation is not the same as standardisation. Finland agreed with the comments of Austria. Hubert Deluyker noted that there was agreement to proceed with the approach outlined and confirmed that space would be allocated in the IEP for the sharing of quality management tools. He suggested that quality management could be included for consideration in a survey on priority areas for further harmonisation. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle recommended to the AF that the further work on harmonisation should be a high priority for 2009. Djien Liem indicated that following the adoption of the SC document on transparency, the AF should be provided with a list of recommended areas for harmonisation, which would be discussed at the next AF meeting.

Action 10: Survey on priorities to continue the work on harmonisation of risk assessment methodologies to be discussed at the next AF meeting.

8.4 Isoflavones – draft mandate for approval

Miriam Jacobs presented the draft mandate for an ESCO working group on isoflavones, with the proposal to establish the working group by April 2009 and undertake data collection from June 2009.

France and Denmark supported the proposal and indicated that they would nominate experts to be considered for the ESCO working group. Germany suggested that the mandate should also cover soy infant formulae. This was supported by Cyprus. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle concluded that the mandate had been agreed by the AF with the suggested amendment and said that a request for expert nominations for the ESCO working group would be circulated to the AF members.

Action 11: Amended mandate for an ESCO working group on isoflavones to be circulated to AF members with a request for expert nominations.

8.5 EFSA's role in the pesticide MRL setting procedure in the EU

Hermine Reich provided a presentation on EFSA's role in pesticide Maximum Residue Level (MRL) setting in the EU, explaining some of the difficulties relating to the setting of safety margins and the interpretations that are made on MRL excedences. She also mentioned EFSA's role in preparing the annual monitoring report on pesticide residues comprising a consumer exposure assessment based on results submitted by the Member States. Denmark asked to what extent EFSA was involved in pesticides apart from MRL setting. France congratulated EFSA on the quality of work and cooperation in this area and questioned whether children were considered in the model used. The United Kingdom acknowledged the effort in setting up the comprehensive procedures. Austria thanked for the excellent presentation and raised concerns on how the workload can be sustained. Germany noted that the risk communication aspect of changing MRLs up- or downwards would need careful management and suggested there be a mandate to the AFCWG in this context.

Hermine Reich advised that EFSA was also involved in environmental risk assessments of pesticides and peer review including environmental and health and safety considerations. Regarding the model used, she explained that this was not new, but a combination of existing models, which simplified data entry and would reflect results that would be obtained at national level. She also acknowledged that the workload was expected to be very high for 2-3 years and that there would be ongoing discussions with the European Commission and the Member States in the Pesticide Steering Committee regarding how to prioritise, since a shorter period of time was available for the work than originally anticipated when the legislation was prepared, because its entry into force was delayed almost two years. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle agreed on the risk communication proposal made by Germany, and Anne-Laure Gassin confirmed that the AFCWG had discussed this issue previously and would do so again.

8.6 Community Zoonoses Report for 2007

Pia Makela presented an overview of the Community Zoonoses Report for 2007, picking out some main features which included the prevalence of *campylobacter* notifications and the trends in *bovine tuberculosis*, *brucellosis* and rabies incidences. Germany raised a question in whether viruses were to be included. Pia Makela indicated that the next summary report on foodborne outbreaks would include viruses and acknowledged that the reporting is driven by existing requirements. Hubert Deluyker mentioned the importance of trying to capture new trends. Anne-Laure Gassin highlighted the close cooperation between ECDC and EFSA on the related media activities.

8.7 Other issues raised by EFSA

Jeffrey Moon introduced a note from the organising team on aspartame preparing for the national expert meeting on aspartame. The organising team proposed that the national expert meeting scheduled for April 2009 be postponed until autumn to allow more time to consider the collected information. The AF agreed, as proposed by Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, that rather than deferring the national expert meeting, a preliminary meeting of the national experts would be held in April 2009 to consider the progress and advice on completion of the work.

Riitta Maijala informed the AF that EFSA had received an urgent request from the European Commission the previous day to evaluate the risk of the presence of 4-methylbenzophenone in food and whether the existing TDI for two structurally similar substances (benzophenone and hydroxybenzophenone) could also be applied to 4-methylbenzophenone.

Action 12: EFSA to provide further information on the urgent request from the European Commission on 4-methylbenzophenone to the AF members by e-mail.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Bernhard Berger provided an update on the scientific colloquia and advised that the details of the scientific colloquium on *campylobacter* held in Rome on 4-5 December 2008 are now available on the EFSA web site with the supporting documents. A publication summarising the main outcomes is 'in press' and accessible through Science Direct in the *International Journal of Food Microbiology.*

The Czech Republic invited the AF members to attend the conference entitled "Food research in support to science-based regulations: Challenges for producers and consumers" organised jointly with EFSA in Prague on 21-22 April 2009. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle confirmed that she would attend.

10 CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle closed the meeting by thanking the Slovenian hosts for the excellent meeting organisation, the AF members and observers for their contributions, the interpreters for their valuable work, and EFSA staff for their preparations for the meeting and their presentations.