

Management Board
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Subject :	Review of EFSA's Communication Strategy			
Concept:	This paper outlines the context for EFSA's communications work and a review at this time; provides an overview of achievement since the communications strategy was first adopted in 2006; reflects on developments since that date; and looks ahead. It also proposes an approach for Management Board members to consider for conducting the upcoming review of EFSA's communications strategy			
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Review of EFSA's communications strategy

I. Introduction

1. Communications is a central part of EFSA's core business and is integral to achieving the objectives behind the establishment of EFSA that were set out in the White Paper: *"... contribute to a high level of consumer health protection in the area of food safety, through which consumer confidence can be restored and maintained."* Since its inception, EFSA has had a clear mandate for its risk communications work laid down in its founding regulation (EC) N° 178/2002.

The regulatory requirements relating to EFSA's role in risk communication are as follows:

- To ensure that the public and interested parties receive rapid, reliable, objective and comprehensible information in the fields within its mission (Article 23).
- The Authority shall communicate on its own initiative in the fields within its mission without prejudice to the Commission's competence to communicate its risk management decisions (Article 40).
- The Authority shall act in close collaboration with the Commission and the Member States to promote the necessary coherence in the risk communication process (Article 40).
- At the request of the Commission, the Authority shall provide assistance concerning communication on nutritional issues within the framework of the Community health programme (Article 22)

2. It was against this background that EFSA established its Communications Directorate and developed its overall approach to implement its risk communications activities. Taking into account the development of that work programme, recommendations arising from EFSA's first external evaluation carried out in 2005 and consultation with key partners and stakeholders (ie the Scientific Committee, the Advisory Forum and its Working Group on Communications, the Advisory Group on Risk Communications and the Stakeholder Consultative Platform), EFSA formalised its communications strategy which was first discussed with the Management Board in 2005 and formally adopted by the Board in November 2006.

Why a review now?

3. EFSA's fundamental mandate has not changed since 2006, but there have been important developments in both internal and external environments. EFSA has grown and matured as an organisation; its workload has increased; and its external relationships and networks have further developed. The communications landscape has also changed, offering new opportunities and challenges. It is therefore understandable that the Management Board should review EFSA's communications strategy now.

4. Key developments for EFSA have been the strengthening of the cooperation with Member States which has been mirrored by the work with communicators in national food safety authorities. The establishment of focal points as part of the cooperation strategy has provided a new focus for communication and cooperation. These and other developments are reflected in the strategic plan 2009-2013, which recognises the importance of communications in priority 5: *"to reinforce confidence and trust in EFSA and the EU food safety system through*

effective risk communications and dialogue with partners and stakeholders". It is logical to reflect on the communications strategy in this wider strategic context.

5. EFSA's communications function has also matured since 2006 and is well placed to move forward with renewed strategic focus. There has been recruitment of additional professional staff and the development of specialist teams to cover the key communications functions: press, web, public information and events. Working relationships with communicators at national level have also been refreshed; and the review of the terms of reference of the Advisory Forum Communications Working Group (AFCWG) in 2007 has also provided firm foundations for the future.

6. The wider external communications environment has also evolved since 2006. New communications tools and technologies are available and impact on all communicators' approaches to targeting their audiences in the most effective ways.

7. In order to help inform the review of its Communications Strategy, EFSA has had initial discussions in-house and with key partners in March – July 2009 with: members of the Advisory Group on Risk Communications on the scope and key considerations for further developments; with members of the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications on the related topic of guidelines in risk communications as well as more generally with respect to strengthening cooperation with Member States; with the EFSA Management Team (concerning EFSA image and key target audiences); and within the Communications Directorate itself.

Mission and objectives

8. The original communications strategy was clear that the **prime task** was *"to provide appropriate, consistent, accurate and timely communications to all interested parties and stakeholders and to the public at large, based on the Authority's risk assessments and scientific expertise"*.

9. One of the key elements underpinning EFSA's establishment, enshrined in its founding regulation, is the principle of transparency. This not only underpins the ways of working of the whole organisation, but provides the backdrop to its communications approach. Transparency places a responsibility on the whole organisation, and focuses its communications efforts on developing tools and channels, delivering outputs and working in ways that live up to that key value

10. More specifically, EFSA's **objectives** in the areas of risk communications were identified as:

- Establish the Authority as an expert and trusted source of information on food and feed safety issues (within its risk assessment mandate)
- Promote the Authority's reputation as an organisation dedicated to scientific excellence, independence, openness and transparency
- Ensure that messages are relevant, understandable and address food safety concerns
- Enhance the coherence of information on food safety matters across the Community.

Target audiences

11. EFSA's 2006 Communications strategy defined and clarified the primary targets and recipients of its scientific advice and related communications activities (cf Section V, Communications Strategy). EFSA's main "customers" are the organisations who commission work from EFSA (ie the European Commission, European Parliament and Member States); therefore, much of EFSA's scientific work is by nature highly technical and specialised. However, food safety issues are important to everybody and EFSA's work can therefore be of interest to a wide range of audiences and ultimately to the general consumer.

12. To make sure that consumers receive the right type of information through channels they are familiar with and in a format and language that they can best understand, EFSA works in partnership with the bodies responsible for food safety in the EU Member States, in particular food safety authorities responsible for risk assessment at national level. As **principal targets of its communications activities**, EFSA seeks to reach out to those organisations who engage regularly in consumer communications at national level as well as stakeholder groups and other groups in direct contact with consumers. EFSA seeks to involve national food safety authorities in Member States in the development and dissemination of its scientific advice and related communications, in order to ensure that messages are culturally sensitive and appropriately address public concerns. EFSA also cooperates with the European Commission to ensure that EFSA risk assessment communications, whilst independent of those of risk managers, form part of a coherent approach to risk communications across risk assessment and management. This is particularly important when a risk in the food chain has been identified and confirmed and appropriate risk management action and/or an increase in public awareness is required.

Understanding public perception of risk

13. Many factors influence consumer attitudes to food and food safety, public perception of risk, reactions to potential risk and willingness to accept scientific uncertainty surrounding risk. The development of effective risk communications requires an in-depth knowledge of target audiences including: their level of awareness and understanding of food safety issues; their attitudes to food in general and food safety in particular; the possible impact of communications on behaviour; and the appropriate channels for effective dissemination of messages.

14. In 2005, EFSA initiated research to investigate views of consumers on risks associated with the food chain. Jointly commissioned with Directorate-General Health and Consumers, this research provided valuable insights regarding both consumers' food safety concerns and their views and confidence in the role of food safety authorities to protect consumer interests. Findings confirmed the diversity of consumer awareness and attitudes with respect to food safety and hence the importance of tailoring strategies and messages in order to address the diverse and multiple information needs of consumers in the EU Member States.

15. EFSA established in 2005 an expert **Advisory Group on Risk Communications (AGRC)**. This multi-disciplinary group of social science experts assists EFSA in the implementation of its mission with regard to risk communications by providing advice, on an informal basis, regarding the development and implementation of its risk communications strategies and plans. In 2006, a review of EFSA's risk communications work and results was commissioned following a call for tender. The review produced by King's Centre for Risk Management (King's College, London) as well as EFSA's comments regarding its principal recommendations and conclusions can be found at: http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/AboutEfsa/WhatWeDo/RiskCommunication/efsa_locale-1178620753812_AdvisoryGroup_onRiskCommunications.htm

II. EFSA communications: what has been achieved?

16. The initial task for EFSA was to establish its risk communications function and itself as an independent and trusted voice on food safety matters. As the organisation has matured, our focus has moved to strengthen cooperation and coordination of activities with other partners and stakeholders in order to maximise reach and effectiveness. As the communications function has also developed, an increased professional capacity has enabled the establishment of teams to deliver the key elements of EFSA's communications work plan: the press office; the web team; and the public information and events team. EFSA has pursued the implementation of its Communications strategy focusing on three inter-related key outcomes: *visibility* - building awareness for EFSA's corporate mission and scientific expertise; *simplicity* - enhancing the clarity and relevance of EFSA risk communications; and *coherence* - promoting coherence in risk communications across the Community.

Visibility

17. Visibility and outreach are essential elements of EFSA's communications strategy. Indeed, EFSA cannot contribute to building confidence in the EU food safety system if its role as provider of independent scientific advice and its scientific outputs are not known and understood. If our scientific outputs are not visible, then they may well not reach audiences for whom they provide potentially important advice. If we do not work to extend outreach, awareness of EFSA and its work may remain limited to already known and existing audiences.

18. A new EFSA corporate identity and logo were launched in 2007. This project was designed to refresh EFSA's identity in a way that would strengthen visibility and recognition. Similarly, the redesigned EFSA website was launched in 2007 and continual improvements are being made to usability and content.

19. EFSA has recently undertaken work in order to more clearly define its corporate image and identity as well as the key benefits which it delivers to its target audiences. This work will help foster more effective and consistent communications to its target audiences. Feedback on the image guide will be obtained through target audience research to be carried out in Autumn 2009.

20. Media outreach is also a priority. As well as meetings and briefings, work has been undertaken to build contacts and databases to ensure the widest and most appropriate range of media are reached in all Member States. EFSA-related media coverage has been steadily increasing, enhancing visibility across Member States and in diverse media outlets. Year-on-year increases in media coverage have been achieved: most recently the 2008 coverage saw a 62% increase on 2007, up to over 11,500 articles. Issues with wide public interest such as animal cloning, GMOs and health claims generate substantial coverage beyond specialist media; as do communications on rapid response issues such as melamine, dioxins in Irish pork and contaminated sunflower oil.

21. The range of EFSA's print publications is continually expanded and enhanced - new targeted newsletters, corporate publications available in all EU languages, colour versions of key scientific reports etc have been designed to target key audiences with relevant material packaged to suit their interest. Online subscription for all EFSA newsletters was launched in July 2009 to further increase user-friendliness.

22. All scientific outputs are also each year distributed as an annual compendium on an easy to navigate CD-ROM included in a leaflet presenting all EFSA panels and units involved. Key scientific outputs are also highlighted in a new set of three printed thematic newsletters (EFSA in focus; Plants, Food, Animals).

23. Webstreaming of the Management Board and other important meetings has been continued, to maximise transparency and expand outreach. Increasing numbers of other events are being held for international and local audiences to present EFSA and its work. EFSA's scientific work has been showcased through Scientific Colloquia, stands at international scientific conferences and joint EFSA-Member State events.

24. For both corporate as well as scientific events new communication panels and exhibition stand designs have been developed to explain more simply and effectively EFSA's remit within the EU food safety system, also showcasing key outputs of EFSA's work and their support to risk managers in protecting consumers.

Simplicity

25. Simplicity is essential for ensuring that EFSA's scientific work – not only the actual outputs but also the underlying processes-- are understandable as well as transparent and accessible. Simplicity requires translating science in an accurate and understandable way to a range of audiences, not all of which are scientific.

26. The in-house expertise in writing and editing across the communications teams has facilitated this work in all areas of outputs. The expansion of EFSA's multilingual policy, supported by increased translation and proof reading capacity, has facilitated both outreach in Member States and building understanding of EFSA and its key outputs. From 2009 key EFSA publications (e.g. Annual report and workplan and Strategic Plan 2009 - 2013)

are now published in all 23 official EU languages and other publications are available in EFSA's working languages (English / French / German and Italian).

27. Simple messages are now agreed on complex and high profile topics, supported by a sound scientific basis. These can then be utilised across EFSA's communications platform and tools: web, press, events and publications. Language is also tailored to ensure it is simple, accessible and relevant for target audiences, for example media messages that are accessible and understandable to journalists without a detailed scientific background. Whilst this work has been taken forward actively, it is also recognised that progress still needs to be made and it is an on-going priority.

28. Simplifying and bringing clarity to the risk assessment process more broadly has been a priority, so that outsiders can understand what is risk assessment, how EFSA develops an opinion and can access information on EFSA's published opinions as well as work in progress. EFSA's internal processes are also explained on the website, including illustration of the workflow of how EFSA develops scientific opinions, from receipt of question to publication of the final scientific output.

29. All scientific outputs are published on the EFSA website and work on improving site navigation has started to ensure that they are easy to find despite the large and growing volume. The document search facility was upgraded in June 2008 to address this point.

30. Transparency in relation to the appointment of experts has been strengthened. Their Declarations of Interests (Dols) are now in a Dol database, available on the EFSA website as of July 2009, so users can easily find Annual Dols for all EFSA experts. The process of the recruitment of experts has been promoted by marketing activities and the application process facilitated via the EFSA website.

31. A thematic approach has been taken to key content on the website so that issues of wide interest to external audiences are presented in a clear, concise way, linked to key scientific outputs, external information sources and further detail. Addressing issues from aspartame to pesticides, the "Topics A-Z" section accessed from the home page of the website is one on-going initiative to ensure simple and easily accessible information on topics of wide interest and to contextualise key areas of EFSA's scientific work.

32. Web news stories are now regularly published to accompany important scientific and corporate activities that have potential interest to a range of audiences that may appreciate a simple overview of an opinion or issue, again enhancing transparency and clarity. Press releases are also regularly issued for topical opinions of wide interest or significance and press briefings organised on other issues with a particularly high media interest such as EFSA's opinion on animal cloning. An increasing number of face-to-face meetings are held between journalists and EFSA, including the Executive Director, to explain EFSA's work in clear and simple terms and to increase interactivity and transparency.

Coherence

33. Coherence is about ensuring that there is a joined up approach to communications within the European food safety system. The aim is to maximise the consistency of approach and messaging, and coordinate communications around risk assessment and risk management, whilst respecting boundaries. Different approaches or just different timings can significantly affect the impact of communications and so this is on-going priority work.

34. EFSA has built an effective network with Member States through the Advisory Forum Communications Working Group (AFCWG). The group regularly addresses key topics of mutual interest, facilitates coordination and coherence; and builds best practise in risk communications, for example through discussing case histories at meetings. The group has taken stock of its work, and its Terms of Reference were revised in 2007, having built on the experience to date. Positive feedback on its role and work was also received from the Advisory Forum, as part of the review of the wider strategy on networking and cooperation.

35. Outside of meetings, the AFCWG cooperate on intelligence sharing and, in particular, through pre-notification, under embargo, of key public announcements to be published by EFSA or Member States. When relevant, key messages and supporting materials are also shared to facilitate a joined up and informed approach.

36. EFSA has also worked closely with risk managers to communicate timely advice on urgent assessments, such as melamine in Chinese milk products and dioxin contamination in Irish pork. These more recent experiences have helped focus the importance of coherence in such circumstances. When there is an urgent need for advice and action, joined up communications are even more important.

37. EFSA has also worked to develop broader coherence at an EU level, particularly where its work is linked to broader, societal issues that are substantially outside of its remit but of legitimate interest for stakeholders and consumers across Europe. This particularly applies to issues around new technologies such as nanotechnology and cloning. So for example, in communicating on its own risk assessment advice related to food safety and animal health welfare aspects of animal cloning, EFSA took care to also reference the work of the European Group on Ethics, which was charged with addressing the wider ethical and societal issues around animal cloning at the same time. The result has been to achieve separation and coherence at the same time.

38. EFSA Communications Directorate also works with Focal Points in Member States to ensure they are informed about our recent communication activities and tools available to them, such as communication tools for promoting calls for scientific experts (eg the re-establishment of EFSA's Scientific Committee and Panels, the Expert database recruitment), thereby encouraging and supporting their work in raising awareness of EFSA in the Member States. EFSA has supported national food safety authorities by providing a complete web toolkit to Focal Points. This has facilitated consistent messaging across Member States on EFSA and the European food safety system across Member States websites. Co-organisation and participation in meetings and conferences with national authorities and international partners, increasingly working with Focal Points, has been a developing trend that further supports coherence. Within EFSA itself, reinforced internal media handling guidelines and providing media training have helped ensure coherent messages from all parts of EFSA.

39. In 2009, EFSA is chairing the EU Agencies Communication and Information Network (HCIN). The key objectives pursued by the HCIN are to: strengthen the EU agencies' profile, positioning and cooperation within the EU networks and communications channels; co-operate and exchange information on procurement and tendering; exchange experience and expertise between agencies (eg sharing knowledge, best practices...); and continue to build visibility of the EU agencies in the European Union. The most important achievements so far support the objective of exchanging experience and expertise between agencies.

In figures	
2009 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 1,000 articles per average month featuring EFSA. • Press release and web news stories published by EFSA : 69 in 2008; 46 - YTD 15.08.09 - • Almost 200,000 visits per average month to EFSA website • Over 24,000 electronic newsletter subscribers. • Over 1,100 views on average for live webcasting. • 5 full-length newsletters available for different user groups, issued three to six monthly, with online subscription. • 18 events organised/co-organised and 63 different print publications produced (2008). • Multilingual publications (Three publications expected to be published in 2009 in 23 languages, 16 publications in 4 languages (EN/FR/DE/IT), remaining publications in English • Number of Communications staff 44 • Budget: € 2.507.000 	2006 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 400 articles per month • Press releases and web news stories published by EFSA: 40 • Just over 100,000 visits per average month. • 12,500 subscribers at year-end. • 210 views on average • One newsletter issued every 3-4 months. • 8 events organized and 6 different print publications produced. • Four publications in four languages (EN/FR/DE/IT) • Number of Communications staff 28 • Budget: € 1.254.000

III. Developments since 2006

40. The adoption in December 2008 of the EFSA strategic plan 2009-2013 is an important reference point, as it both takes account of developments to date and looks at future drivers for change in identifying strategic priorities and plans. EFSA has built up its organisation and put itself on the map. It is now looking ahead. EFSA's communications strategy needs to be considered within that corporate perspective.

Internal dimension

Vision and strategy

41. EFSA has articulated its mid to long-term strategic vision in the Strategic Plan 2009-2013 and sector-specific strategies including the Strategy for cooperation and networking with Member States and the Strategic approach to international activities. The strategic plan sets the framework for communications work in objective five: "*to reinforce confidence and trust in EFSA and the EU food safety system through effective risk communication and dialogue with partners and stakeholders*".

Processes and structures

42. EFSA's internal processes and structures have been strengthened through the creation of the RA and SCA Directorates, the consolidation of the DOI policy and electronic DOI database, the Decision on the selection of experts, the setting up of the Expert database, the establishment of the Mandates Review Committee and the development of the Risk Assessment Workflow. The Communications directorate has grown and developed specialized units for media relations, online communications, publications and events, increasing EFSA's communications capacity and expertise.

New scientific activities

43. EFSA's scientific outputs have increased and diversified. Work in the area of nutrition and health claims, nanotechnology and cloning have added new dimensions to its work and new relevance for a wide audience. Some of these issues provide opportunities to demonstrate further how EFSA protects and works for consumers and their interests. Others – such as nanotechnology and animal cloning – put EFSA into close contact with wider societal, ethical and moral debates in which it has no role and therefore present future on-going challenges.

Increased scientific output

44. EFSA has taken on an increasing amount of work in the process of fully implementing the Founding Regulation. A number of activities were carried out for the first time after 2006, including in the fields of data collection, emerging risks, coordinating European Scientific Cooperation (ESCO) projects and outsourcing scientific work under Article 36 of the Regulation. As a result, EFSA now issues more scientific outputs and a wide range of scientific output types. This work again presents communications opportunities. Data are not collected to be stored on a computer but support robust risk assessment increasingly in areas of wide interest around nutritional intakes and emerging risks such as melamine. Cooperation projects are undertaken because of the interest and concern across MS and so resonate with diverse audiences.

Increased dialogue and cooperation with scientific experts and staff

45. EFSA recognises that shaping the effectiveness of its scientific outputs and the communications associated with them starts when mandates are received, and has acted to address that issue. The participation of the Communications Director in the Mandates Review Committee supports that process, as does the Communications Review Committee that prioritises and agrees approaches to communicating key opinions and issues. Dialogue with the Scientific Committee has also begun on how further that work can be strengthened to systematise expert involvement in planning and priority setting; as well as to address issues around communicating science effectively for wider audiences, an issue for both EFSA scientists and communicators.

46. A key issue for further consideration concerns how questions put to EFSA are framed as mandates focused on very specific legislative issues do not always address broader, public concerns. This then affects public communications in that additional information or perspective beyond that contained in a final scientific output may be needed in order to communicate in a meaningful way to external audiences.

External dimension

New communications technologies

47. The increasing and quickly changing use of new communications technologies including social media need to be taken into account and evaluated in the context of EFSA's target audiences, message deployment and maximizing outreach among internet users. The non-stop global news cycle where citizens are both active information seekers and content providers may have profound effects on risk communications strategies and positioning of public authorities as trusted information sources.

Globalisation

48. The increasing impact of globalisation, the global economic downturn and their impact on the food industry and food consumption patterns need to be taken into account in terms of risk perception and increasing focus on the global food chain, trade in food products and related food scares. EFSA's new international strategy has set the scene for addressing this context. Communications is recognised as having a role, for example in relation to developing cooperation through for instance the pre-notification of EFSA public announcements shared with non-EU and international bodies under embargo, similar to those that exist at EU level.

Consumer attitudes

49. EFSA needs to stay up- to-date with changes in consumer attitudes and expectations regarding access to and trust in various information sources. It also needs to continue to gather information on trends in risk perception, awareness and attitudes regarding food and food safety, nutrition and health. In addition to pursuing research at pan-EU level, valuable work is undertaken in Member States and needs to be shared to further inform on-going understanding of consumer attitudes and trends.

Institutional framework

50. Through the Cooperation strategy, EFSA has expanded its outreach in Member States via the Advisory Forum, particularly by establishing the Focal Point network. This presents a significant set of new opportunities by putting a range of tools and networks at EFSA's disposal at national level. It also creates new needs in terms of the communications support EFSA provides to its partners. With the AFCWG network, EFSA is developing risk communications guidelines that will strengthen coherence and ways of working across the institutions at EU and national level working on risk communications, as well as promote best practice.

IV. Methodology for review of Communications Strategy

51. **Preliminary discussion with Management Board on approach.** At the 8 October meeting of the Management Board, EFSA proposes to discuss and agree with the Board on:

- the framework for the review of the Communications strategy;
- the key inputs and points of consideration;
- the methodology and the key milestones;
- and the timetable for delivery of the updated strategy.

52. **Drafting and initial consultation.** Following an initial discussion at the MB meeting on 8 October, the Communications Directorate will seek the views of staff and consult the Advisory Forum, the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications, the Scientific Committee and the Stakeholder Consultative Platform in the Autumn 2009, on this discussion document for further input on results achieved to date and key points for consideration in the review of EFSA's Communications strategy.

53. **Research.** In parallel, EFSA is launching qualitative research amongst its key target audiences (to be carried out in October-November 2009) in order to assess EFSA's overall image and better understand their needs and expectations, notably with respect to communications. This research will also help inform subsequent quantitative research that could be deployed across a broad range of target audiences.

54. **Management Board agreement on draft revised Communications strategy** EFSA proposes to submit to the Board a draft revised Communications strategy by March 2010 integrating the findings from the qualitative research carried out amongst target audiences and implications arising.

55. **Public consultation and adoption.** Following integration of comments made by the Management Board at its March meeting, EFSA proposes to launch a public consultation on the EFSA Communications strategy in addition to consultation of its key partners and stakeholders.

V. Conclusions and Questions for the Board

56. EFSA seeks endorsement of the Management Board for the methodology and timetable for the review of the Communications strategy adopted by the Board in November 2006.

57. In order to guide discussion, EFSA suggests the following questions for consideration by the Chair and members at the October meeting:

- Is the Board content with the proposed approach to this review?
- Are there any additional factors that should be considered in this review further to those referenced in the discussion paper put forward to the Board?
- In particular, does the Board endorse a public consultation on the review of EFSA’s communications strategy?
- Does the Board have any views on additional research or approaches to inform both the strategy development and an on-going review of its effectiveness?
- Given the importance of an evidence base and regular monitoring of effectiveness in achieving our mission and objectives, are there any further areas in which EFSA should consider regular monitoring or research on its audiences and activities, subject to resource availability?
- With reference to EFSA’s communications work, is there anything that is currently being done that should not be done, and/or is there anything that is not currently done that should be done?
- Does the Board have views either on ways to prioritise communications activities, or specific priorities in terms of audiences, themes and/ or approaches?