

The Image of EFSA

Qualitative research

Presentation 18 March 2010 - Toledo

FPA

Market and Management Advice

OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY

► Objectives

- Assess **awareness and understanding** of EFSA
- Assess **EFSA's overall image**
- Better understand **needs and expectations** of target audiences
- Assess **levels of satisfaction** re.working processes and outputs
- Help inform EFSA strategies and policies

► Methodology : Qualitative Research

- 46 in-depth interviews with key representatives of EFSA audiences

Audience	Organisation
EU Commission	DG Sanco / DG Environment
EU Parliament	MEP
EU Council (Swedish Presidency)	National Food Administration (Sweden)
National Risk Managers (CVO / CPO / SCFCAH)	CVO Belgium / Food Attaché Hungary / Food Attaché Spain
National Food Safety Authorities	FSA UK / Czech Republic / Poland / Denmark / France (AFSSA) / Belgium
Scientific Experts	EFSA scientific comm. / Wageningen Univ. Nether- lands / BIOHAZ Panel / NDA Panel / GMO Panel
Art. 36 Organisations	Ghent Univ. Belgium
Scientific experts (not involved in EFSA work)	Bologna univ. Italy / Valencia Univ. Biopolis Spain / Central Science Lab. UK / Teagasc Ireland
EU Agencies/Organisations	EPPO / ECDC / EMEA / ECHA
Non EU Safety Authorities	FDA USA / Food Safety Commission, Japan / NZFSA New Zealand / FSANZ – Australia / New Zealand
International Organisations	WHO / OECD / FAO / OIE
Media (Mainstream / Scientific / EU Publications)	Gazeta – Poland / Nature Magazine / EU Food Law / Reuters
Stakeholder Consultative Platform	BEUC / Greenpeace / CIAA / COPA-COGECA

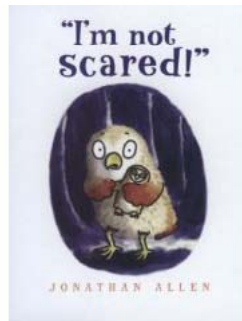
A positive overall image

- ▶ The good news : EFSA is relatively well known and understood and its image is quite positive
- ▶ All respondents are **aware of what EFSA is** and **what it does**
- ▶ **EFSA** is most often described as :

*“Europe’s Risk Assessment Agency
for decision support in food safety”*

- ▶ The image of EFSA varies somewhat according to who is speaking, but the **general take-out is quite positive and consistent**
- ▶ EFSA is **not just an anonymous institute** but it has a **distinct personality** of its own

EFSA personality : if EFSA were a person who would he/she be ?



Catherine G-L, Dumbledore, Barack Obama, Carl Sagan, a bureaucracy, a scientist, a machine, a magician, a member of a clique, a university professor, someone young, someone old, definitely a woman, social, ok for dinner but skip the dance, serious, a bit boring, Louis Pasteur, a woman in a lab coat, a butterfly...

A positive overall image

- ▶ There are **few “real negatives”**, rather **concerns and one-off issues** that offer **opportunities for improvement**, and may require **specific attention or approach** :
 - Openness of the scientific process
 - Complexity of the EFSA “language”
 - How to deal with **extremely sensitive issues** (eg. GMO)
- ▶ The general impression is that EFSA is **continuously getting better in some key aspects** :
 - More open, **more willing to discuss**
 - More efficient in **producing opinions**
 - Better **processes, systems**
 - **More ambitious**, taking the long-term view
 - **Improved communication**, better processes
 - Becoming **more international**
- ▶ An often-heard comment was that **respondents would never want to go back to the pre-EFSA period**

The positive drivers of EFSA image – EFSA strengths



EFSA's image strengths

1. Only EFSA has a truly European voice in Risk Assessment

- ▶ Set-up and scope **match the needs of the Commission and the EU Risk Assessment system**
- ▶ **Apart and above** country and European political pressures
- ▶ EFSA works to the benefit of **all member states** and is also **more cost-efficient**
- ▶ A key player in **the global food safety network** and the only institute that can **credibly represent Europe, confirming the Vision** laid down in the **EFSA Strategic Plan**

"They consolidate europeanwide expertise"

"It is the objective component of decision making across the EU"

"EFSA has the ability to bring European input in the global debate"

EFSA's image strengths

2. EFSA is a European networker

- ▶ The EFSA panel structure **consolidates European wide scientific expertise**
- ▶ EFSA **facilitates and leverages the European network** of national food safety agencies
- ▶ **EFSA helps raise the quality of risk assessment** in Europe as a whole
- ▶ EFSA is **a one-stop shop for customers, stakeholders and interested parties**

"You do not feel alone when you meet colleagues from the other countries"

"...creation of national institutes in the wake of EFSA, where they didn't have them"

"They are of enormous value to local agencies. The MS have become more closely linked"

"They push our food safety agenda – they force us to follow-up"

EFSA image strengths

3. EFSA is independent

- ▶ **Scientific advice requires independence from all sorts of pressures. EFSA has as much independence as can reasonably be expected**
- ▶ EFSA's focus on **avoiding conflicts of interest** is working very well (though some feel it may exclude some of the top scientists)

"its independence, more so than other agencies, also in the Management Board"

"There is an independent forum that the Commission can turn to; it fulfills a need"

"They are removed from national political context"

EFSA image strengths

4. The scientific basis and quality of the outputs :

- ▶ **Scientific assessment is the absolute cornerstone** for decision making
- ▶ EFSA has **access to the best scientific talent** in Europe
- ▶ EFSA's risk assessment approach is **appropriate, well-managed and effective**
- ▶ The EFSA **opinions are generally seen as high quality**
- ▶ The **quantity of output produced by EFSA is impressive**, and recent issues (melamine..) also proved their **capacity for quick reaction**

"They have access to the best scientists"

"I was impressed by the amount of opinions. That is a sign that the institution is working."

"Independent panels and scientists...They have excellent processes"

"The panel work, the systematic approach offers a real advantage; impossible without EFSA"

EFSA image strengths

5. Strong communication :

Respondents make little difference between “communication from communications department” and “scientific output” or anything else that gives visibility to EFSA

- ▶ EFSA is a **good communicator with massive output, and getting better all the time**
- ▶ Communication **material is all well-made, and the right tools are in place**
 - An excellent **website**, still room for improvement (eg. search engine)
 - Well-prepared **meetings and events**
 - Solid output of **reports and reference** materials
 - Helpful **participation in national agencies’ activities** (meetings, training...)
 - A **good selection of newsletters**
- ▶ Initial issues eg. **coherence between Risk Assessment/Risk Management communication**, are seen as **improving**, eg. thanks to **pre-warnings under embargo**, the setting up of **focal points** etc.
- ▶ Other EU agencies name **EFSA as their benchmark** in communication

“Their risk communications principles are very good”

“We take EFSA as an example, eg. in terms of communication issues – we look at their website and try to do as they do”

EFSA image strengths

6. EFSA is open and transparent (...up to a point)

- ▶ EFSA is **not** seen as having “hidden agendas”
- ▶ **Open outward communication and willingness to listen, to exchange**
- ▶ Transparent **communication** and **decision making processes**
- ▶ But **rather closed on engaging into debate or changing their perspective**
- ▶ And, in particular, the **assessment process is often considered as too “secretive”**

“They have built up in a short time an image of independence and transparency”

“The panels are not open to all, but isn’t that logical, it is often very sensitive”

“They should open up their panels”

EFSA image strengths

7. A strong EFSA team :

- ▶ Just about everyone has **positive things to say about the EFSA staff** :
 - A young, **motivated team of dedicated professionals**
 - **Open and always willing to help**
 - **Quick** to follow-up
- ▶ EFSA's **management is seen as high-quality** and extremely dedicated

"Extremely dedicated, efficient, good management throughout"

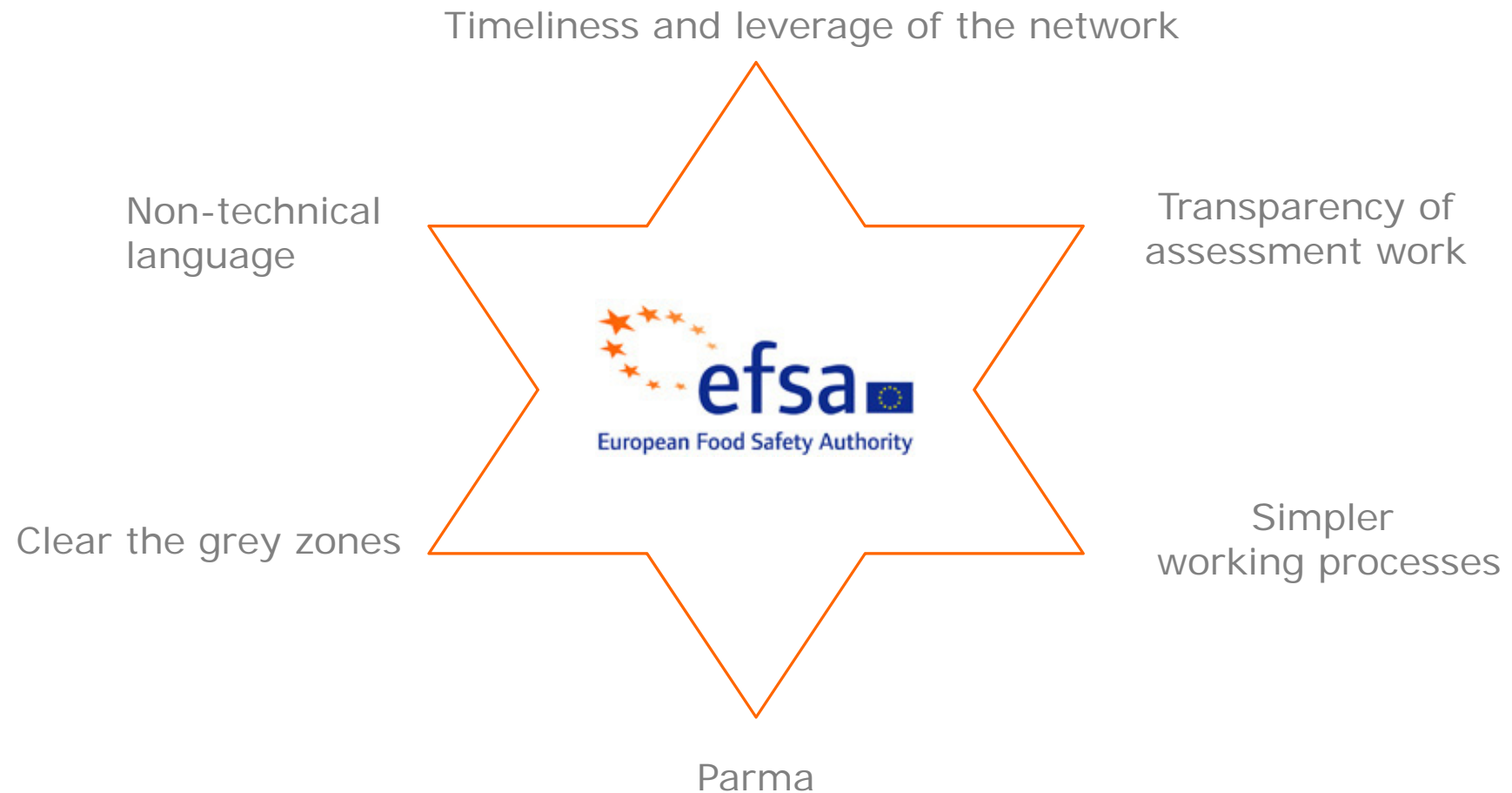
"EFSA staff answer very quickly to requests"

"They are listening when there is some tension between parties...always willing to address"

"A friendly, service-oriented team of people"

"They have a "capital sympathique"

The Opportunities – negative drivers of EFSA image



Opportunities

1. Timeliness and Leverage of the network

- ▶ **Timeliness** (driven by **massive demand**) is seen as a **huge challenge**
- ▶ EFSA's **timetables are considered unpredictable** and potentially delaying important decisions – sometimes things take too long
- ▶ EFSA is **not seen as very proactive** and **not always putting the right amount of resources** behind the right projects

*"The **unpredictability of deliveries** - pesticides, health claims...a tsunami of problems"*

*"I think they are at the speed they can be - They **need resources** still"*

"When a big dossier comes up, people have to be moved accordingly"

*"A **better understanding of the regulatory** aspect would be beneficial...when legislation is coming you know there is risk involved"*

Opportunities

1. Timeliness and Leverage of the network

- ▶ EFSA should better use its network, outsource and avoid duplication
- ▶ Network members feel they could contribute more or better (art. 36 sometimes still an issue). Even global/non-EU players feel they can contribute.

*"Are we yet at the optimal level of **contracting out re. article 36**"*

*"We should **not duplicate the usage of experts** – EFSA has done the claims study all over again"*

"There is complexity in the functioning of the network, we must come up with something new"

"...Plenty of room eg. in better leveraging the global networks"

"Offer our scientists a better opportunity to share their expertise. We do a lot of stuff for EFSA, but what do they do for us ?"

Opportunities

2. EFSA is open and transparent...yes, but with big gaps !

- ▶ The **closed panels** are seen as **in contradiction with aspiration of “openness and transparency”**
- ▶ It is not clear **what happens with data provided to EFSA, how the opinion development unfolds and how scientific consensus is achieved**, creating doubt about the robustness of the process and its outcome
- ▶ With few exceptions, **opening up the scientific panels was one of the most widely shared expectations** among respondents

“EFSA does not open the process. RA closed panels is history; we changed history and opened to the public”

“Economic operators who've made specific dossiers – I don't know if they find the process as open as EFSA aspires to be.”

Opportunities

2. EFSA is open and transparent...yes, but with big gaps !

- ▶ EFSA is not seen as transparent about **organisational issues**

"Obscurely chosen experts from a selected group of few people"

- ▶ Openness is also about **having a clear opinion, express it clearly and stand up for it**. Many respondents want EFSA to **be bolder, not overly cautious**

"They should command more respect, eg. on the subject of GMOs – some countries do not respect EFSA authority"

"Pretty cautious, a lot of precautionary principle"

"I would like to see a more assertive EFSA, which communicates the science - if politicians want to take a different decision then that is fine but it should be made clear that it is not for scientific reasons "

"They want to be friends with everyone and it slows down progress"

Opportunities

3. Create simpler working processes

- ▶ Size also seems to have brought bureaucracy with it: a lot of **paperwork and very formal relationships**, putting **strain on organisations**
- ▶ EFSA doesn't appear as very open to **new technologies** or **new ways of working**

"It's heavily bureaucratic, very slow"

"A lot of paperwork, a lot of reports, very far from daily life"

*"The size of EFSA becomes a challenge - **hard to follow, live up to requests** etc."*

*"The classical way to work with panel and secretariat needs revision. **More preparatory work must be done by the secretariat** to feed the panels"*

*"New **IT modelling tools** like computational toxicology - - **assess it and learn from them**"*

Opportunities

4. Parma is seen as a difficult location

- ▶ In fact, **often the most top-of-mind “negative” of EFSA**
- ▶ Most have learned to live with it but it is a burden, **not conducive to close networking, very costly and with a high eco-footprint**
- ▶ Can EFSA do more to **push new technologies** like **tele-conferencing** ?

“Chaque réunion devient une mission”

“It is an enormous problem, it costs a fortune, it is anti-ecological”

“Time of key scientists is wasted”

Opportunities

5. EFSA should clear the grey zones/be more outspoken

- ▶ Sometimes EFSA is felt to be **afraid/doesn't want to "speak up" or take a clear position**
- ▶ Reference is made mostly to **how EFSA is dealing with GMO issues** (there is **also respect** here for what EFSA does – it is a **polarised debate**)
 - Member states are upset about other member states not accepting EFSA positions – and **EFSA cannot/doesn't want to take a position** in the debate
 - The political debate puts additional pressure on scientists
 - Opinions are seen as too one-sided, with inconsistent consideration of risk/benefit
 - Opinions are said to be formulated so that **risk managers can only one take one decision**
 - Efsa seems to be **hiding its position under technical, hermetic language**
- ▶ **Sensitive issues like GMO seem to have a disproportionate effect on the image of EFSA**, and may require fine-tuned processes in terms of management and communication, perhaps very **different from "standard"**

Opportunities

6. EFSA communication is too complex, “technical”

- ▶ Non-scientists, even among EFSA’s very direct audiences often **do not understand the presentations** in meetings
- ▶ The **language in the opinions is very difficult** – even the **conclusions are sometimes all but clear**
- ▶ **Press releases and other** materials building on the scientific outcome **also reflect this complexity**
- ▶ **The “translation of science into human language”** is a big challenge for EFSA. Some interpret this complexity as **intentional i.e. EFSA wants to avoid a clear, bold point of view (eg. on GMO)**

“Shorter more accessible summaries”

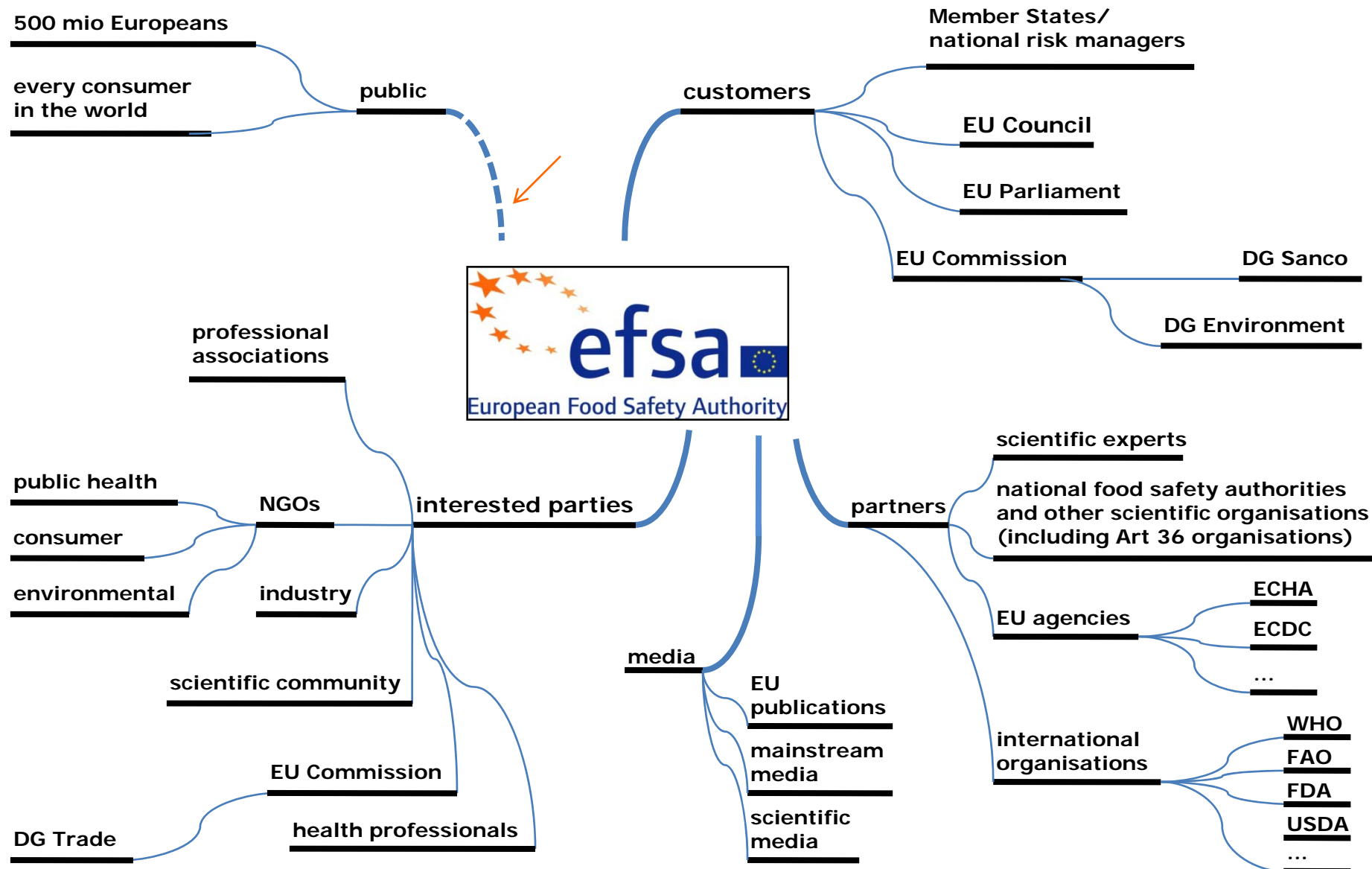
“Not necessarily the Director but sometimes panel heads cannot express themselves to laypeople”

*“The press releases are **still too technical, with too much information**”*

*“It is so important that **Opinions and Statements are clearer and that they say what the conclusion is: ie is it safe, is it unsafe, it is substantiated or not etc.**”*

*“Their material looks like it is aimed at the general public - **issue is the language, it's often much too technical.**”*

EFSA Audiences



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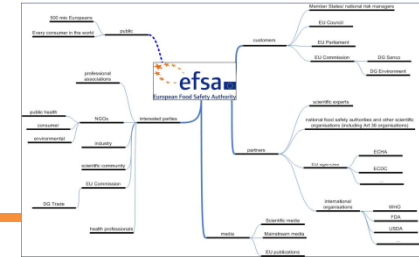
-
- 500 mio Europeans
consumer in the world
- public
- professional associations
- efsa
European Food Safety Authority

"They should prioritise"

"Member state agencies should be given a higher priority and be more visible on the map"

"The dotted line should be a full line"

EFSA Audiences and communication



► Most respondents are of the opinion that EFSA should directly engage with the public about its role and identity

- A prerequisite for building trust and credibility and achievable only by EFSA itself, **in a linked relationship with the national agencies**
- On the website, there should at least be **basic layman information about food safety/EFSA**, and **meaningful links** to the national agencies
- ...but **not everyone agrees here !**

► Specific issues should (for most) continue to pass via network channels

- But also here, others (fewer) say that **the public is entitled to a direct read of EFSA's opinion** so as to ensure that the public can clearly differentiate between the science and political views in the member states

"If EFSA really wants to regain confidence of the consumer that would imply they are recognized and acknowledged by the consumers. "

*"I would like to see **a more assertive EFSA, which communicates the science** - if politicians want to take a different decision then that is fine but it should be made clear that it is not for scientific reasons"*

"Communication can be in conflict with Commission work"

EFSA Outputs

- ▶ Respondents were shown a list and examples of EFSA outputs
- ▶ For practical reasons of time, discussion of specific outputs was limited, i.e. comments are to be seen as general perspectives, not in-depth analysis
- ▶ The full reports includes tables with item-per-item comment cf. example below

Output	Aware	Comments		Relevance*	Used *
Opinions (generic/ individual applications)	H	+ -	Latest science, thorough, reliable Not (always) reflecting conflicting views, not always clear Very technical, long-winding, Too narrow "food-safety only" scope (GMO) (Sometimes) leaving only one option for RM Process lacking transparency	H	H
EFSA advice on urgent issues eg melamine in foods	M	+	Positive surprise, relief even Not known by all, but always positive	H	H
Guidance documents for assessment of regulated substances (eg GMOs, pesticides)	M	+	Very helpful to those who use/need Seen as a key EFSA role	H	H
Scientific Colloquia and reports	M	+ -	Well organized – useful + good for image Not always well advertised Focus ? Lots of resources involved	M	M

EFSA Outputs

- ▶ Comments on the outputs largely confirm upfront perspectives
- ▶ **Robust scientific outputs...**
 - **Solid opinions** from **top-class scientists**
 - Positive surprise re. **delivery on urgent issues** (melamine, dioxins)
 - **Data collection and scientific cooperation** were seen as part of the scientific output process and most feedback was positive :
 - The **zoonosis initiative was seen as excellent** (data sometimes an issue)
 - More **polarised views on EFSA as a data publication centre**
 - Good **colloquia** and **scientific cooperation**
 - In terms of leveraging the networks, **“art. 36” is a step in the right direction, but with issues** of its own :
 - **Financing is not easy for (smaller) member states** (even though they have to provide “only” 20%, and EFSA providing the rest)
 - Some scientists criticise the **publication moratorium** that comes with art. 36 activities

EFSA Outputs

- ▶ Comments on the outputs largely confirm upfront perspectives
- ▶ **Also, good communications outputs**
 - An excellent **website**, with still opportunities for improvement (search engine, document identification..)
 - Well-prepared **meetings and events**
 - **Europe-wide consumer research (Eurobarometer)**
 - Helpful participation in national agencies' activities (meetings, training...), promoting **mutual understanding and teamwork**
 - EFSA has a **good selection of newsletters**...perhaps too many ?
 - **"Look & feel"** of all communications is said to be high quality and very consistent
 - **Technicality and clarity** cited again as the **key communication challenge**

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EFSA IMAGE IN THE FUTURE

Expectations for the future

Quite consistent expectations across respondents base :

- ▶ Key is a more **reliable timetable** regarding delivery of scientific outputs
- ▶ Increase efficiency and **leverage of the networks**
 - Outsource - Trust the partners – avoid duplication
 - Don't forget global networks (challenge legislative)
- ▶ Take **a bolder stance** :
 - in terms of points-of-view "Where does EFSA stand ?" (eg. vis-a-vis Codex)
 - in terms of leading the debate(s)
 - in terms of clear communication re. science
- ▶ Become **more transparent re. opinion forming processes**
 - open up the panels
 - sensitivity can be an issue but manageable cf. other agencies EMEA, non EU etc.
- ▶ Reconsider **communication with the consumer** re. EFSA

Ideas for consideration

1. Address the concern of timeliness of scientific outputs
2. Ensure motivation and commitment of the network of national agencies
3. Broaden “openness and transparency” (open panels)
4. Make a big push towards communicating in a “less technical, less complex” way
5. Simpler/more cost-efficient working processes (eg. teleconferencing)
6. Better align the tools (Mission/Vision/Brand image)
7. Amend the audiences matrix
8. Reconsider the communication about EFSA role and identity with the general public
9. EFSA-outputs: Generally fine -> fine-tuning only

Next steps

This **qualitative** research has pointed out a number of strengths and weaknesses of the - overall strong and quite consistent - EFSA image, and, most of all, thanks to the generous contribution of the respondents, yielded a great number of ideas and suggestions to continue to develop this image.

Quantitative validation of this perception and the suggested ideas for addressing some of the key issues, will provide more perspective and robustness for further meaningful enhancement of the EFSA image