



## **Review of EFSA's Policy on Declaration of Interests**

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# Why review the policy now?

- Scientific independence is critical in building trust in the EU food safety system
- Independence of scientific advice/experts in many sectors coming under increasing public scrutiny
- A series of high-profile controversies in pharmaceutical, environment sectors etc.
- EFSA is not immune from criticism, particularly in GMOs
- EFSA's Policy on Declaration of Interests (2007) is scheduled for review this year

- 5000 annual or specific DOIs screened
- 35,000 agenda items checked
- 24 experts excluded from EFSA activities
- 280 experts excluded from drafting
- 53 experts excluded from specific agenda items
- Resources committed: 3 FTEs and €180 k

## Organisational governance:

- Separation of RA/RM
- Independent MB
- Mandate for independent risk communication

## Scientific governance:

- Collegial decision making
- Selection of experts
- Rules of procedure of Panels/SC/WGs
- Quality review programme (INEX)
- Data validation
- Consultation
- Transparent workflows

## Eurobarometer survey on perceptions of food-related risk (2010)

- The majority of EU citizens think that public authorities:
  - take into account the most recent scientific advice (63%)
  - are quick to act when there is a health problem (63%)
  - consider citizens' concerns (63%)
- There is a high level of trust of EU citizens in both scientists (73%) and national and European food safety agencies (64%) as sources of information on food risks

### but.....

- Less than half of the EU citizens (47%) think that scientific advice on food related risks is independent of commercial or political interests

## Eurobarometer survey on science & technology (2010)

- 58% of Europeans feel that scientists cannot be trusted to tell the truth about controversial scientific and technological issues because they depend more and more on money from industry

# External review of implementation of DOI Policy

Review of implementation of 180+ screenings by independent consultants

Outcome: EFSA is effectively implementing policy with only minor compliance issues

Recommendations:

- Increasing experts' contribution to and awareness of conflicts of interest
- Shifting the focus from individual measures to a more balanced, group-level approach
- Enhancing the level of detail provided on how conclusions regarding conflicts of interest are reached
- Reducing the retrospective period for declaring an interest from 5 years to 2 years.

Independent comparison of EFSA with ten peer organisations carried out by external consultancy

Focus on: governance; policies for development of scientific advice; appointment of external scientific experts; declaration of interests; and management of potential conflicts of interest.

Peer organisations:

- European Chemicals Agency
- European Medicines Agency
- DG SANCO
- Codex Alimentarius Commission /joint FAO/WHO committees
- ANSES (France)
- BfR (Germany)
- Food Standards Agency (UK)
- Health Canada
- FDA (US)
- National Academy of Sciences (US)

Outcome: EFSA has one of the most advanced and robust systems in place for ensuring the independence of its scientific advice

## Recommendations:

- More comprehensive definition of conflict of interest
- Reinforcement of the positive obligations of experts
- Emphasis on the application of ethical standards
- Focus on scientific work carried out by EFSA's own staff members
- More opportunity for input from the public on independence
- Better definition of consequences if a conflict of interest is identified
- Shortening of the retrospective period in which an interest has to be declared
- Increased opportunities for stakeholder involvement



- Audits: internal and external
- Ad hoc feedback from partners and stakeholders: key audience research (2010)
- EFSA's experience of implementing policy (experts and staff)

# Proposal on how to take the review forward

- Creation of an integrated *Policy on Independence and Scientific Decision-Making Process* drawing together the various strands of EFSA's policies and scientific decision-making processes
- Making it easier to implement while maintaining its strength

# Questions for the Board (1)

1. Does the Management Board support the proposal for the creation of an integrated *Policy on Independence and Scientific Decision-Making Processes* as described?
2. Have the expectations of the Founding Regulation been met in relation to independence?
3. As the European research funding model increasingly involves links between the academic/public-sector and the private sector, how do we define “appropriate” independence for EFSA?
4. As many experts have links with industrial groups or other stakeholders, NGOs etc., how will EFSA foster and communicate the concept of “acceptable” independence?
5. What areas should EFSA focus on to guarantee independence – and the perception of independence – going forward?
6. As independence and scientific quality are intimately associated, how should independence be reflected in EFSA’s forthcoming Science Strategy?

# Questions for the Board (2)

7. How can EFSA balance the need for access to the required expertise, particularly in highly specialised fields, with the sometimes competing demand for independence?
8. The emphasis of the *Policy on DOIs* is on EFSA checking to ensure the compliance of experts. Should a more balanced approach be adopted that reinforces the responsibility of scientists?
9. As the challenges to independence are shared by other risk assessment bodies, how can EFSA work more closely with Member States, other European agencies and partners to strengthen processes and develop a common approach?
10. As perception of independence is also closely related to the openness of an organisation, are there any additional measures/practices which EFSA could consider to strengthen its openness and transparency?
11. As the independence of science is a subject of broader societal debate, are there other activities which EFSA could consider, possibly in cooperation with organisations in other sectors?

## MB decision 2007: Review of the policy

*“The policy set out in this document shall be reviewed within 3 years of its adoption. The members of the Management Board are asked to adopt the EFSA Policy on Declaration of Interests”*



**Reflection paper for the MB  
Public consultation (March 2011)**



**Revised policy**

**Public  
consultation on  
Policy in  
July/August 2011**