

EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Management Board
20 October 2011
Parma

Subject :	Cooperation with the Member States – Discussion paper	
Document number:	mb 20 10 11 - item 6 doc 5	
Submitted by :	Science Strategy and Coordination - AFSCO	
Document for :		Information
	X	Discussion
		Possible adoption

Cooperation with the Member States – Discussion paper

BACKGROUND

The legal basis for EFSA's cooperation and networking with the EU Member States is EFSA's Founding Regulation: Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council. The objectives and modalities of the scientific cooperation were further defined in the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking between the EU Member States and EFSA, adopted by EFSA's Management Board (MB) in December 2006. In 2007, a dedicated Scientific Cooperation Unit was established by EFSA and in May 2011; this unit was merged with the secretariats of the Advisory Forum (AF) and EFSA's pre-accession and neighbourhood programmes. The Interim Review of the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking in 2008 confirmed the strategic orientations and Member States complimented the good progress of the scientific cooperation. Selected AF members were invited to discuss the scientific cooperation at MB meetings in 2009 and 2010 and a document on Moving ahead from cooperation between EFSA and the Member States to boosting the capacity of risk assessment in Europe was adopted by the MB in June 2009. To guide the future cooperation and learn from the past experiences, the AF engaged in strategic discussions on EFSA's work in its different scientific areas and on medium-term planning of its risk assessment work over the coming years. The resulting document entitled Cooperation between EFSA and Member States: Taking Stock and Looking Ahead will, together with EFSA's Strategic Plan 2009-2013, EFSA's Communications Strategy 2010-2013, and EFSA's Science Strategy 2012-2016, serve as the framework for the future cooperation with the Member States, as well as EFSA's work in general, and allow for multi-annual projects under Article 36. Discussions on medium-term planning are currently continuing with the European Commission (EC) to ensure an overview on EFSA's foreseeable future tasks.

In March 2011, a joint meeting between the MB and AF was organised to address how to further enhance the cooperation between EFSA and the Member States in the areas of risk assessment and risk communications. At this occasion, an overall satisfaction with the progress of the cooperation was expressed both by the MB and AF members and some action points were jointly identified to further strengthen the cooperation. The key achievements in the implementation of the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking comprise the streamlining and facilitation of data collection and exchange through networks and IT tools, the development of the Information Exchange Platform for sharing of risk assessments and other relevant information between Member States and with EFSA, enhanced networking on EFSA's scientific work and the harmonisation of risk assessment methodologies, and cooperation on the coherence of European risk communications through events, pre-notifications and sharing of communications.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief update on the current status regarding the action points formulated at the joint meeting between the MB and AF and, thus, to serve as a basis for further MB discussions on the cooperation with Member States.

CURRENT STATUS

Below, the eight action points agreed at the joint meeting between the MB and AF are listed and commented as regards the current status:

Action point 1: There is recognition that the needs of Risk Assessment must be taken into account at national and EU level and agreement that there is a need to ensure continued and adequate research activities in the area of food safety risk assessment.

The dialogue on EFSA's medium-term planning on risk assessment tasks is a valid way to enhance the identification of the needs of risk assessment in the medium term and the dialogue with risk managers at national and EU level on priorities. Furthermore, it allows the Member States to gain an overview of actions foreseen at the EU level in the medium-term perspective, which will allow them to better plan their contributions to EFSA's work, *e.g.* by focussing on risk assessment activities in specific areas.

As regards ensuring continued and adequate research activities, EFSA has provided inputs to DG Research and Innovation during the last three years on proposed food safety related research activities. These inputs were based on extensive consultation of the Member States and EFSA's experts. They were highly appreciated by DG Research and Innovation and led to funding of several of the proposed research activities. A discussion paper on research priorities and research funding at EU and national level is currently being drafted for discussion with the AF in November 2011. The intention is to influence the formulation of the eighth Framework Programme of DG Research and Innovation as well as other research funding institutions. In addition, EFSA is represented at the advisory boards of several food related research projects funded by DG Research and Innovation under its seventh Framework Programme. Furthermore, EFSA liaises closely with the EC Joint Research Centre on the implementation of their food related research activities.

Action point 2: There is an ongoing need for dialogue with Risk Managers at national and EU level in order to set priorities for Risk Assessment taking into consideration aspects such as health burden.

EFSA and the EC are in close dialogue to establish EFSA's medium-term plan on risk assessment tasks. EFSA's draft Science Strategy 2012-2016 recognises the need to strengthen risk monitoring and risk ranking. The work of EFSA's Emerging Risks Unit supports this effort to prioritise the risk assessment tasks. Furthermore, a brochure on scientific cooperation between EFSA and Member States was prepared to raise the awareness in the Member States of the importance of the close scientific cooperation to face the future challenges of the European food safety system.

Action point 3: The use of scarce resources needs to be optimized to ensure sustainability of the risk assessment system which has been built up by, amongst other things, making best use of available experts, preparing the development of the next generation of experts with the support of the European Commission and increase the contribution of National Risk Assessment Bodies in EFSA's work.

The scientific cooperation between EFSA and the Member States aims at harmonising risk assessment approaches, sharing information, and avoiding duplication of efforts. EFSA's medium-term planning and the Information Exchange Platform for sharing risk assessments enhance the opportunity to avoid duplication of efforts and EFSA's scientific networks and projects under Article 36 actively promote cooperation. With 40% of EFSA's Panel experts being employed by national food safety agencies, a good scientific interaction is ensured, while also other scientific experts are involved in developing EFSA's scientific outputs. EFSA recognises the need to ensure that Panel experts are valued and involved in challenging scientific work. Hence, the Science Strategy proposes EFSA staff handling routine tasks in the area of applications in the future. In this regard, the role of national risk assessment bodies can be strengthened, particularly in areas where the methods are well-established and the workload is predictable. Furthermore, EFSA has examined training needs and developed course proposals in the area of risk assessment for implementation through the "Better Training for Safer Food" initiative of the EC in order to ensure the availability of skilled risk assessors also in the future.

Action point 4: There is a recognized need to ensure best use of mechanisms and tools that have been developed such as the EFSA Networks, the Information Exchange Platform, Focal Points and Article 36 activities.

EFSA's scientific networks in various scientific areas play an increasing role in sharing information, fostering cooperation, and avoiding duplication of efforts within these areas. In addition, the Scientific Committee network on the harmonisation of risk assessment methodologies supports transversal discussions, while the Emerging Risks Exchange Network assists EFSA in its work on emerging risks. Another successful and by now well-established network is constituted by the national EFSA Focal Points in the Member States who actively support the AF work and scientific cooperation and facilitate broader networking within and between Member States.

In addition, the Information Exchange Platform enables the sharing of information on risk assessment activities between and with Member States. This tool is developing to become more and more useful for EFSA's Scientific Committee, Panels, working groups, networks as well as for risk assessors in the Member States and thus also helps to facilitate networking between organisations on the Article 36 list. Further awareness raising on the usefulness of this tool as well as an enhanced commitment by more Member States to share national risk assessments via this platform will help to reach its full potential for the scientific cooperation and EFSA's scientific work. Hence, the intention is to continue using and raising awareness about these tools.

Action point 5: Best practice on Independence and Transparency should be shared in order to increase confidence between Member States and EFSA for the benefit of consumers.

EFSA has implemented its Policy on Declarations of Interests, since it was adopted by the MB in September 2007, and regularly organised public consultations and stakeholder consultative workshops on key scientific opinions and guidance documents. In the beginning of 2011, the policy was reviewed and a draft policy on independence and quality of scientific decision making processes was discussed with the AF and MB in May/June 2011. In addition, EFSA has organised a stakeholder consultative workshop on independence and scientific decision making processes in Brussels on 12 October 2011 to discuss some of the key issues behind independence and trust in science and to explore in more detail comments on the draft policy made during the online public consultation.

Action point 6: Data collection activities must be reinforced to ensure that there can be comparison between Member States and the data can be used at national level for exposure assessments.

Collections of dietary and chemical monitoring data are important tasks for EFSA and requisites for microbiological and chemical risk assessments. The amounts of different foods consumed and the levels of chemical substances in the respective food are important aspects in estimating dietary exposure as part of the risk assessment process. EFSA also has an important role in collecting and analysing data on biological hazards, such as zoonoses, microbiological contaminants, food-borne outbreaks and antimicrobial resistance, and pesticide residues. Specific EU legislation assigns EFSA the task of analysing and publishing annual summary reports on these data. EFSA is also tasked with providing recommendations to the Member States and the EC on how to improve the technical comparability of the data it receives and analyses. Hence, EFSA's data collection activities are performed in close cooperation with the Member States, e.g. scientific networks with Member State representatives address issues related with data on food consumption, chemical occurrence, pesticide residues and zoonoses, and EFSA liaises with all organisations operating in the field of data collection. The food classification working group completed its tasks earlier this year and total diet studies are ongoing in the Member States to collect further data for exposure assessments. The AF unanimously expressed its strong support to the EU Menu project aimed at harmonising data collection on food consumption across Europe and regularly discusses developments in the area of harmonised data collection. This year, a dedicated AF working group elaborated a technical report on data collection, which will form the basis for strategic AF discussions at the meetings in September and November 2011. Also, legal aspects of the sharing of confidential data are being addressed in close cooperation with the EC. *Action point 7: EFSA must continue to build its international context by reinforcing the importance of EFSA as a European voice during crisis even at national level and contributing to Risk Assessment on the global scene.*

EFSA's international activities are conducted in accordance with the strategic approach on international activities adopted by the MB in January 2007. The activities comprise liaison with non-EU countries through the pre-accession and neighbourhood programmes, the International Food Chemical Safety Liaison Group, visiting delegations, and bilateral agreements with Japan and the United States, including an exchange of liaison officers with the US Food and Drugs Administration. In addition, EFSA staff and experts frequently attend international scientific conferences and, upon request of the EC, participate in meetings organised by the Codex Alimentarius, the World Organisation for Animal Health, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Health Organisation, and other international bodies. EFSA's Science Strategy 2012-2016 recognises the strategic importance of these activities that will be handled by the newly created Science Strategy and Coordination Directorate.

Action point 8: The developing communications strategy must take account of the need for simpler more relevant communications and of the opportunity for greater outreach in Member States. One proposal is to implement a thematic approach to support this. EFSA is currently developing an approach for possible use of social media in the future. This could be used in ad hoc situations such as crises.

EFSA reviewed its communications strategy in 2010 and, on the basis of lessons learned, research on the target groups and broad consultations, developed its Communications Strategy 2010-2013. In order to increase the impact and effectiveness of EFSA's risk communications activities, the strategy proposes the implementation of communications in key thematic areas in cooperation with the EC, Member States and in consultation with its stakeholders. The involvement of Member States in thematic communications is

discussed at meetings of the AF Working Group on Communications (AFCWG) in view of integrating ideas and plans, *e.g.* communications in the area of zoonoses. The use of social media is a standing agenda item at AFCWG meetings in order to share approaches and experiences. Importantly, the AFCWG aims to complete by the end of 2011 risk communications guidelines in order to foster coherence in risk communications and provide practical guidance to communicators regarding the selection of approaches, messages and tools. The extensive communications activities of EFSA during the recent *E. Coli* outbreak in Germany illustrated the importance of this work.

DRAFT