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Cover Note

Reflection Paper: Strategic Considerations in Finalising EFSA Multiannual Plan 2014-2016

The preparation of the first Multiannual Plan (MAP) covering the period 2014-2016 coincides with the endpoints of EFSA's Strategic Plan 2009-2013 and Communications Strategy 2010-2013.

In this context, EFSA has taken the opportunity to respond to previous Board requests to simplify strategic and operational planning documents. EFSA had pledged to align existing strategic documents in the main pillars of operation (Science, Communications, IT and Human Capital) under a single overarching EFSA Strategy that would be finalised by the end of 2013. The plan was that the Strategy would run from one external evaluation to another (a six-year period) and would set out goals, priorities, operational guidance and activities.

The new EFSA Strategy would be accompanied by operational "Roadmaps" for the main pillars of activity; these set out in more detail the key objectives and initiatives in the various areas in line with EFSA's strategic goals. On a work planning level, addressing in particular resource implications, the implementation of EFSA's strategy and operational Roadmaps would be supported by the rolling three-year MAP, to be updated annually in alignment with the annual budgetary and planning cycle.

With the departure of Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, it was considered prudent to delay the development of the new EFSA Strategy until a new Executive Director is in place. EFSA has therefore decided to focus on the finalisation of the MAP 2014-2016 to ensure that the organisation provides a multiannual perspective on its work. To support the process, Science, Communications, IT and Human Capital, have reviewed existing strategic documents with a view to developing operational Roadmaps. As well as informing the multiannual planning process, these Roadmaps will support the preparation of the new EFSA strategy that is now scheduled for preparation during 2014.

The aim of this Reflection Paper is to update the Board on the latest strategic thinking and initiatives in the key EFSA sectors and inform the Board's discussion on the finalisation of the MAP. The final MAP 2014-2016, which will be submitted to the Board in December, will include information on resource allocations as well as an analysis of corporate risks.

In the Board discussion, EFSA will present a number of key questions on which Members' views will be sought.

Reflection Paper: Strategic Considerations in Finalising EFSA Multiannual Plan 2014-2016

1. Background

In March 2013, EFSA presented a first draft Multiannual Plan (MAP) for the period 2014-2016 to the Management Board followed by a progress update in June. Adoption was deemed inappropriate as the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) was still under negotiation, which meant that some assumptions made on available resources could not be sustained. Since then, the EU is closer to finalising the MFF and EFSA's strategic planning has evolved across the main pillars of its activities. Before resubmitting the MAP to the Board for adoption in December, EFSA will update the document based on the aforementioned considerations.

The MAP will take the form of a rolling 3-year operational plan that is intended to be reviewed annually in parallel with EFSA's annual management planning and budgetary cycle. It will in essence be an operational planning document but will also describe the strategic context that drives the planned activities. The work being done to finalise the MAP 2014-2016 will feed into the review of the corporate EFSA Strategy that will begin in 2014 when a new Executive Director has been appointed.

The first draft of the MAP took a number of strategic inputs into consideration, in particular the Board recommendations of December 2012 based on the second external evaluation of EFSA. That evaluation confirms that EFSA is delivering its core mission of providing scientific advice to European risk managers and the subsequent Board recommendations provide direction to the organisation on how it can further improve on the delivery of its mandate. Other key inputs included the EFSA@10 events held towards the end of 2012 to mark the tenth anniversary of the organisation, EFSA's existing sectoral strategies (Science Strategy and Communications Strategy), the outcomes of EFSA's high-level risk assessment exercise and the various audit recommendations.

In addition, a series of internal EFSA strategic workshops were organised in 2012/2013. The latter have driven the development or review of some key sectoral strategic documents: Science, Communications, information technology (IT) and human capital (HUCAP). As part of this process, each sector has identified its key priorities for the period covered by MAP 2014-2016 along with an accompanying set of initiatives to ensure that those priorities are met.

In parallel, EFSA has identified a well-defined portfolio of organisational development projects (see section 8), i.e. investments aimed at enhancing EFSA's long term effectiveness and efficiency in delivering its core mission. These projects need to be aligned and duly prioritised in view of EFSA's goals and resources for the coming three-year period.

The objectives of this document are to update the Board on the latest strategic thinking and initiatives in the key EFSA sectors and inform the Board's discussion on the finalisation of the MAP.

2. Operating context towards 2016

The draft MAP, prepared with input from the Commission, Member States and stakeholders, predicts that incoming work will remain steady until 2016, with on average 500 mandates received per annum. It is predicted that there will be a growing demand for risk assessments and scientific advice in areas such as novel foods, pesticides, plant pests and enzymes, while demand may diminish in other areas such as health claims. New areas of risk assessment may also emerge such as the evaluation of botanicals. The boundaries of EFSA's work will continue to be challenged with a growing demand for EFSA's scientific advice in areas such as environmental risk assessment, post-market monitoring, risk benefit and efficacy. Coupled with the inevitable impact of technological and scientific advances, the existing trend of EFSA's mandates growing in complexity

mb 24 10 13 item 6 doc 3 – Strategic considerations and multiannual planning

is predicted to continue. Moreover, in light of the challenges posed by an increasingly globalised trade in foodstuffs and ingredients, EFSA must remain positioned to respond rapidly – sometimes with both scientific advice and hands-on technical assistance – to urgent food safety-related incidents, the majority of which are likely to be trans-national in nature.

In parallel, societal demands for more openness and transparency will continue to grow and EFSA's initiatives on a diverse range of associated issues such as data access, meaningful communication, stakeholder engagement, and public consultation will require appropriate resources. EFSA will continue its programme to enhance its services to regulated product applicants and to build trust by ensuring the quality and timeliness of its outputs and transparency in its working practices.

3. Budgetary context

Since the draft MAP was presented to the Board, the EU is closer to finalising the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020. While uncertainties still exist as to the final picture, the Commission circular on resources for decentralised agencies released in July proposes a reduction of 10% of the workforce available to EFSA by 2017 compared to a 2012 baseline. This implies a 2% per annum reduction in the establishment plan in the period 2014-2017 and an additional 1% reduction in 2018 (EFSA already implemented a 1% cut in 2013). This will result in a reduction in EFSA's resources of seven posts and €0.63 m in 2014. At the time of writing, the Commission proposal has been rejected by the European Parliament. Without prejudice to the Budgetary Authority decision, EFSA is preparing to apply the reduction of resources proposed by the Commission by putting in place a number of steps:

- Focus resources on must-have and high value-added initiatives, building on the enhanced monitoring and planning capacity built up since 2011;
- Mutualise shared corporate services (as was done over the period 2012-2013 for meeting organisation logistics for example) to gain efficiency through harmonised and specialised service delivery;
- Optimise the role of experts, staff and other partners within the risk assessment process;
- Systematically outsource services for which EFSA's needs are stable and standardised;
- Identify working processes that can be streamlined to reduce processing times and resource consumption.
- Use natural turnover to achieve the objectives of a 10% reduction in posts.

4. Management Board Recommendations and Follow-up

Against this context, the Board recommendations to EFSA of December 2012 focused on: (i) ensuring the long term sustainability of the organisation; (ii) increasing the trust of stakeholders and citizens; (iii) further enhancing EU risk assessment capacity; and (iv) enhancing the clarity and accessibility of EFSA's communications. On that basis, in its draft MAP presented to the Board earlier this year, EFSA identified three key priorities for the period 2014-2016 and described the ongoing initiatives to meet those priorities.

i) Strengthen the utility and fitness for purpose of its scientific advice

EFSA must ensure that its advice is fit for purpose and perceived as useful to risk managers. To meet this objective, EFSA is further developing the collection of input and feedback on its scientific advice from the European Commission, Member States, the European Parliament and stakeholders. In addition, EFSA aims to ensure that its scientific outputs meet user needs and are written in a manner that risk managers and other stakeholders can understand. While the Authority's core public health mission will continue to be prioritised, the organisation is also committed to supporting the EU 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and aims to provide food and feed operators with a more predictable regulatory environment, a higher level of service and enhanced interaction. To achieve this, EFSA is reviewing its efficiency in handling applications within the context of existing legal frameworks and good administrative practice as well as streamlining its working processes.

ii) Build the "EU risk assessment community" and optimise the use of resources

With restricted resources, EFSA must ensure that it makes optimal use of the resources at its disposal, internally by enhancing its efficiency and externally by improving its cooperation with national food safety agencies, European bodies and international organisations. More cooperation, better distribution of work throughout the EU scientific community, improved communications and streamlined working processes are at the heart of EFSA's efforts to build a functional EU risk assessment community. In addition, the Authority is stepping-up its efforts to enhance the scientific expertise at its disposal through the implementation of

mb 24 10 13 item 6 doc 3 – Strategic considerations and multiannual planning

an integrated approach to human capital management. More specifically, the wider implications of a redistribution of work between external experts, scientific staff and outsourcing are being evaluated with a case study, using the Food Ingredients and Packaging (FIP) unit as an example.

iii) Build more transparency and trust

Trust in EFSA's scientific advice is central to the value of its work for European citizens. In addition to the programme to open various science meetings to observers, EFSA has launched a multiphase transparency initiative (covering EFSA's working processes and access to the scientific data it uses in its risk assessments) which has been further explored with stakeholders, including the conference on transparency in risk assessment held on 3 October 2013. Effective communication is an essential component in building trust and in EFSA's Communications Roadmap there is a renewed focus on: increasing the relevance and understanding of its communications; meeting the needs of target audiences; cooperation with Member States, the international risk assessment community and stakeholders; communicating on the role of EFSA and its contribution to consumer protection.

5. Sectoral considerations

5.1 Science

EFSA's Science Strategy adopted by the Board in December 2011 identified four strategic objectives related to (i) the excellence of EFSA's scientific advice, (ii) optimising the use of risk assessment capacity in the EU, (iii) development and harmonisation of risk assessment methodologies and approaches, and (iv) strengthening the scientific basis for risk assessment and risk monitoring. Implementation is ongoing with a variety of initiatives in areas such as transparency and openness (including the opening of certain scientific meetings to observers), the development of a quality management system, training for experts and staff, and the establishment of helpdesk assistance for applicant industries. The renewal of eight Scientific Panels and the Scientific Committee in 2012 marked an important milestone for the organisation as it was the first such exercise under EFSA's new independence policy and implementing rules. Other important initiatives underway include the development of methodologies for the identification of emerging risks and strengthening the evidence base for EFSA's scientific advice with particular focus on data collection and access to scientific literature. The capacity of the Scientific Committee has been strengthened with a renewed focus on coordinating the development/harmonization of guidance and methodologies and the groundwork has been laid for a public health risk ranking exercise to support EFSA in identifying the priorities in its work programme.

Looking forward, the strategic imperatives will focus on: defining a multiannual risk assessment agenda with institutional partners; continuing development of initiatives to boost access to expertise; enhancing trust in EFSA's work; refinement in the distribution of risk assessment tasks between experts, staff and outsourcing bodies; building EFSA's international reputation; coordination of guidance development; enhancing the scientific evidence available for risk assessment; and development of systems for storing and accessing scientific information.

5.2 Science: Strategic Objectives and Actions

Objective	Action	Timeframe
Build a multiannual EU risk assessment agenda	Work with EC, MS and EU partners to define common long-term needs and medium-term actions taking into consideration the international dimension. Priority setting to be based on public health and emerging risks	End 2015
Optimise the role of experts, staff and other partners within the risk assessment process	Implement and evaluate a case study for an optimised distribution of scientific work between experts, staff and EU partners	Mid 2017
Define EFSA's international role and build	Define and implement roadmap on	2014

mb 24 10 13 item 6 doc 3 – Strategic considerations and multiannual planning

reputation as reference point for risk assessment	international scientific cooperation	
	Define EFSA's contribution to international risk assessment and the visibility of EU risk assessment	
Strengthen the utility and fitness for purpose of EFSA's scientific advice	Implement the outcomes of customer feedback	2014
	Put in place an effective system for enhanced interaction and dialogue with risk managers and other stakeholders	
Increase trust in EFSA's work	New policy on openness and transparency	2014
	Revised approaches to increase engagement with stakeholders	2016
	Develop EFSA's approach to data warehouse access	2015
	Revised format for EFSA scientific outputs to increase understanding	2014
	Review of independence policy and implementing rules	2014

5.3 Communications

EFSA's mission in risk communications is to provide appropriate, consistent, accurate and timely communications on food safety issues to all interested parties, stakeholders and the public at large, based on the Authority's risk assessments and scientific expertise. The 2012 External Evaluation suggests that this is being successfully achieved. However, whilst EFSA's communications are regarded by stakeholders as useful and clear enough to inform and support the decision-making of risk managers, the evaluation confirms previous findings that greater clarity of messages must be prioritised to facilitate outreach to broader audiences. The evaluation calls on EFSA to improve the effectiveness of existing tools, in particular its website. It further recommends strengthening of the Authority's role in facilitating coherence in communications, particularly when urgent scientific advice is needed, through more effective cooperation with national food safety agencies.

EFSA's future communications need to be more tailored and focused on the impact of its work to human health, animal health and the environment. The implementation of a thematic approach will be pursued and amplified, bringing in other scientific information sources and partners in order to build more holistic, relevant and compelling stories. Over the planning period, the Authority will focus on the following strategic priorities: strengthening the clarity and improving information delivery; better understanding and meeting target audience needs; building awareness, understanding and recognition of EFSA in the EU and beyond; promoting coherence in risk communications with EU and international partners; and increasing transparency, openness and stakeholder dialogue.

In order to better meet user needs, EFSA will increase its efforts to identify and understand its audiences and their respective (and diverse) information needs. The Authority will provide its target audiences with easier access to the information which they need in a format which they can readily use, taking advantage of innovations in information technology.

5.4 Communication: Strategic Objectives and Actions

mb 24 10 13 item 6 doc 3 – Strategic considerations and multiannual planning

Objective	Action	Timeframe
Better understand, define & meet target audience needs	Use qualitative & quantitative research insights to inform EFSA communications and monitor perception regarding food safety-related issues	2014-2016
	Review brand identity & corporate image	2014
	Draft & implement Internal Communications Roadmap	2014-2016
Strengthen the clarity of EFSA's communications and improve the information delivery via its website and other communications tools	Redesign & re-launch website including a clearly defined role for the <i>EFSA Journal</i>	2014-2015
	Develop guidelines for defining the selection of optimal communications tools	2014
	Develop methodology to ensure and track clarity of all EFSA outputs	2014-2016
Build awareness, understanding and recognition of EFSA and its role as risk assessor in the EU and beyond	Increase visibility of the <i>EFSA Journal</i> among the scientific community	2014-2016
	Increase proactive media outreach	2014-2016
Promote coherence in risk communications with EU and international partners	Develop best practice in risk communications: (i) Lexicon, (ii) Risk communications guidelines, and (iii) Crisis communications guidelines	2014-2016
	Strengthen coordination of communications with Member States, risk managers, EU agencies and communications practitioners in international organisations	2014-2016
Increase transparency, openness and stakeholder dialogue	Develop educational tools on science and risk assessment including those tailored for informed lay audiences	2014-2016

6. Information Technology

IT is an important enabler of EFSA's strategic objectives, specifically for the automation of business processes. Many organisational ambitions are heavily IT dependent as indicated in the development projects listed in section 8. The IT Operational Strategy is centred on three overriding goals:

- EFSA is the EU information hub for risk assessment, scientific advice, data and talent;
- EFSA is a trusted and transparent source of scientific advice with outreach capability to all information consumers;
- EFSA benchmarks highly efficient and effective in all of its services.

The vision to transform EFSA's IT operations depends on strong data and process integration and will require trade-offs in technology, business process, organisation and risk. A guiding set of IT principles are part of the Operational Strategy and will help EFSA management quickly make decisions on IT that are consistent and supporting the execution of the multi-annual plan.

These principles include:

mb 24 10 13 item 6 doc 3 – Strategic considerations and multiannual planning

- EFSA will centralise data and applications to improve data accuracy and data availability;
- IT staff will focus their expertise on business process, service management, quality management, project management and innovation and will outsource operations where economically advantageous;
- When feasible, EFSA will purchase commercial-of-the-shelf software packages and interfaces as a preference.

6.1 Information Technology: Strategic Objectives and Actions

Objective	Action	Timeframe
Information hub for risk assessment, scientific advice, data and talent	Develop talent management systems & integrate with core business	2017
Trusted and transparent source of scientific advice with outreach capability to all information consumers	Move from document workflow to business process management	2018
	Automate business analytics with intelligent IT	2018
Efficient and effective in all of its services	Automate business rules in a regulated environment	2018
	Centralise business data and provide universal access	2018
	Manage content through multiple online channels and embrace social media platforms and “Web 2.0” functionality	2018

7. Integrated Human Capital Management

EFSA’s core business requires the bringing together of expertise from different backgrounds and with different contractual bases to work together on specific scientific issues using established processes and standards. The changing nature of the issues – and their time sensitivity – requires timely and accurate identification of the skills required as well as the documented identification and efficient deployment of individuals. EFSA has launched a human capital transformational Roadmap to move from administratively focused, inward-looking, traditional personnel administration services to a set of policies and tools that are more aligned with EFSA business objectives. EFSA recognises that the two different workforces – staff and experts – need to be managed in a comprehensive and integrated talent management strategy.

During 2012 and 2013 EFSA has reviewed: knowledge management practices; career development processes; roles and responsibilities; and workforce planning with a view to achieving the right level and mix of competencies to support future targets. With these pillars of the Roadmap in place, the strategic vision of EFSA is to deliver by 2017 an Integrated Talent Management (ITM) programme for EFSA that will enable the organisation to attract, retain and develop its Human Capital, namely staff and experts.

7.1 Human Capital: Strategic Objectives and Actions

Objective	Action	Timeframe
Complete the establishment of an effective, state-of-the-art human resource (HR) infrastructure	Review and update policies and practices in all HR-related areas, evaluate HR systems and Expert Support Systems, develop methodologies for assessing the effectiveness of HR programmes, evaluate the HR information system as a key tool to deliver services, develop talent analytics to support management decisions	2015

mb 24 10 13 item 6 doc 3 – Strategic considerations and multiannual planning

Objective	Action	Timeframe
	Review recruitment practices to accelerate time-to-hire, diminish cost per hire and target better key strategic competencies	2014
Foster competency development and engagement of staff and experts	Review approach to enhancing staff commitment, develop systems and metrics to evaluate staff engagement, develop a learning strategy for staff and experts, and implement an “EFSA Academy” that serves as a hub for capacity building for the EU risk assessment community	2015
	Research and recommend a leadership development strategy aligned with core EFSA leadership competencies.	2014
Use change and innovation projects as a source of talent development opportunities	Research change management programmes and initiatives to establish a customised EFSA approach	2015
	Develop and implement strategies to promote project assignments and secondments to sister organisations as a unique source of learning	2015

8. Organisational development projects

In programming its activities in line with the objectives and actions in the various sectors identified above, EFSA has singled out a number of projects that represent development initiatives and investments that are central to the future success of the organisation. Together these organisational development projects represent a significant investment (potentially €5-6 m per annum) – concentrated in IT – as well as a significant human resource requirement. Hence, they are evaluated under EFSA’s project evaluation framework on the basis of strategic alignment, organisational risk/reward and impact and are followed throughout their lifespan (from initial concept to project proposal to implementation). The current portfolio comprises nine such different projects that are in alignment with EFSA’s organisational priorities and the strategic considerations in science and communications. The level of expenditure, timed deliverables and expected benefits will be clearly identifiable in EFSA’s operational and financial planning and in the MAP.

8.1 Current organisational development portfolio

Project title	Brief description	Delivery timeline
Data warehouse	Consolidated scientific database designed to facilitate data access	2018
Virtual library	Single point of access to bibliographic tools and scientific documents for EFSA staff/experts	2017
Talent management	Move from traditional HR to talent management approach	2017
Quality management	Development of an ISO 9001 compliant Quality Management System	2016

mb 24 10 13 item 6 doc 3 – Strategic considerations and multiannual planning

Document management	Delivery of an effective document management system	2015
Project & Resource Management (PaRMa)	Introduction of a project & resource management approach to all EFSA operations	2016
Leaning	Streamlined working practices & processes	2016
Electronic application management	Development of an electronic application management system to facilitate the application process and enhance efficiency	2018
Redesign of EFSA website	Restructuring and relaunch of EFSA website	2015

9. Next steps

The Board is asked to discuss the above orientations, in particular their alignment with the Board recommendations. This will enable the EFSA to, on the one hand, move forward with the updating of the MAP 2014-2016 in time for resubmission to the December meeting for adoption, and, on the other hand, to pursue its preparatory work with a view to developing the new EFSA Strategy.