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ENGAGEMENT AND COOPERATION UNIT

# Stakeholder Engagement

## 2020 Roundtable with NGOs

**Virtual Meeting, 26 May 2020**

## 1. Introduction

As a part of EFSA [Stakeholder Engagement Approach](#) (SEA), the Roundtable meeting is a targeted engagement tool designed to provide specific stakeholder groups with an opportunity to engage with EFSA on issues of mutual relevance. There are currently two Roundtable initiatives, one for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and one for the business and food industry category.

The objective of the NGO Roundtable is to exchange views, provide the latest updates on EFSA's scientific work of interest to NGOs, and to seek feedback and suggestions to allow a continuous improvement of the way EFSA engages with this stakeholder category.

The agenda of the 2020 Roundtable with NGOs was co-designed with registered NGO stakeholder organisations and took into consideration EFSA priority topics for 2020 as well as the input received by NGOs.

The meeting was chaired and introduced by Guilhem de Sèze, Head of EFSA's Scientific Evaluation of Regulated Products Department and welcomed by both Bernhard Url, the Executive Director of EFSA and Martin Dermine, PAN Europe, member of the Stakeholder Bureau.

After a short tour de table where participants expressed their expectations for the meeting, the progress with the implementation of the Transparency Regulation was presented by Anastasia Alvizou, Deputy Head of Food Chain Science and Stakeholder Relations Unit at DG SANTE, the European Commission. In addition, both EFSA and NGO representatives presented their work and exchanged views on topics such as risk assessment of chemical mixtures, the review of bee guidance, the environment risk assessment of pesticides, animal welfare and sustainability of food systems in general.

In total fifteen out of twenty registered NGO organisations attended the meeting. In addition, two consumer organisations, BEUC and SAFE Food Advocacy also attended the Roundtable.

The NGO Roundtable was initially planned on 3 March 2020 as a physical meeting in Brussels but due to the COVID19 situation it was rescheduled and converted into a half-a-day virtual meeting.

## 2. Opening addresses

Guilhem de Sèze, Head of EFSA's Scientific Evaluation of Regulated Products Department, welcomed the participants in his capacity as the Chair of the meeting and stressed the importance of the engagement with NGOs and consumer organisation for EFSA. The Chair recalled that EFSA has in total twenty NGO organisations registered under the Stakeholders Engagement Approach, representing a wide range of interest such as environment protection, food allergens, chemical mixtures, alternative to animal testing, and animal health and welfare.

In his opening address, Martin Dermine, PAN Europe, Member of the Stakeholder Bureau representing the NGO category acknowledged the high interest in EFSA work and stakeholder engagement as indicated by a constant increase of the number of EFSA registered NGO stakeholder organisations. Martin Dermine shared his views on the future role of EFSA in the context of the Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy as well as on the implementation of the Transparency Regulation and recalled that the NGO stakeholder are ready to engage and contribute to EFSA's work in the challenging times ahead.

Bernhard Url, the Executive Director of EFSA welcomed the participants and started his opening address with sharing his views on the impact of COVID19 on EFSA operations and continued by framing EFSA's work on the Strategy 2027, EFSA's possible role in the context of the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy, the implementation of the Transparency Regulation and the trust in science and stakeholder engagement.

Considering the potential impact of the Coronavirus outbreak on factors such as the Multiannual Financial Framework, the European Commission's Health and Food Safety policy goals, and the availability of key partners in contributing to the continued discussions, EFSA's Management Board decided to freeze the draft 2027 Strategy at this current stage. As a checkpoint, the Management Board will discuss the Strategy 2027 at the June 2020 meeting, following with a concrete plan to finalize EFSA's Strategy 2027.

Bernhard Url shared his views on EFSA's possible contribution to the Green Deal. EFSA could provide scientific support on topics such as environmental risk assessment of pesticides, antimicrobial resistance, climate change, and impact of new technologies on food safety.

Provisions of the Transparency Regulation will strengthen EFSA in terms of transparency and sustainability of governance, the quality and reliability of studies and more coherent risk communication. Transparency is an objective in itself, but also a means that allows us to demonstrate our accountability to EU citizens and build and maintain trust in the EU food safety system. Bernhard Url recalled that EFSA engages with civil society and all our stakeholders to inform them and to seek input towards an even better and more fit-for-purpose risk assessment process.

### **3. Update on the implementation of the Transparency Regulation**

Anastasia Alvizou, Deputy Head of Food Chain Science and Stakeholder Relations Unit, at DG SANTE informed participants on the progress with the implementation of the Transparency Regulation, adoption of implementing acts and presented a timeline of upcoming stakeholder events where regular updates will be provided. The Commission and EFSA are closely cooperating to ensure the proper implementation of the new Regulation. DG SANTE will engage with stakeholders through the SANTE Advisory Group on the food chain and animal and plant health.

EFSA engages with stakeholders on the implementation of the Transparency Regulation through two main channels - the Sounding Board and technical groups. The Sounding Board facilitates an open dialogue between EFSA and its stakeholders and ensure an appropriate level of stakeholder involvement in line with the objectives and ambitions of EFSA's Stakeholder Engagement Approach (SEA). To date, two technical groups have been established, one focusing on usage of ECHA's IUCLID cloud for pesticide dossiers and the second on the Notification of Studies Database.

More information on the Transparency Regulation implementation and stakeholder engagement including the calendar of meetings is available at [EFSA webpage](#).

The second part of the meeting allowed for a more in-depth technical discussion on a number of topics of interest to the participants.

### **4. Risk Assessment of multiple chemicals**

Costanza Rovida from ECOPA presented ECOPA's position on risk assessment methodologies and possible improvements in this area that may arrive from in depth knowledge of the Adverse Outcome Pathway of chemicals and the possibility of testing mixtures with reliable and fast methods (New Approach Methodologies). They find that the support of computational assessment is fundamental to simulate and quantify the effects of the different combinations and concentrations of chemicals.

Luc Mohimont, Scientific Officer in the Pesticides Residues Unit of EFSA presented the outline of the two Scientific Reports published in April 2020: one on the cumulative dietary risk characterisation of pesticides that have acute effects on the nervous system and one on the cumulative dietary risk characterisation of pesticides that have chronic effects on the thyroid. The assessments consider chronic effects on the thyroid system and acute effects on the nervous system. The documents were finalised following a two-month consultation period during which EFSA received feedback from a variety of stakeholders, including national institutions, academia, NGOs and food industry associations.

### **5. Environment risk assessment for pesticides**

In his presentation Martin Dermine, PAN Europe focused on the political and legal background as well as on what could be improved in the current environmental risk assessment (ERA). Mr Dermine pointed out that major upgrade is needed in the current ERA including a review of guidance documents on terrestrial and aquatic risk assessment and development of new guidance documents on amphibians and reptiles. Finally, Martin Dermine expressed concerns related to possible cases of conflict of interest that may have an impact on the process.

Christopher Lythgo, Scientific Officer in the Pesticides Peer Review Unit of EFSA, recalled that the future ERAs of pesticides requires a more relevant, transparent, inclusive, collaborative and integrated approach that integrate ERAs across policies and regulatory frames, and across regional, national and EU agencies, including different types of evidence from multiple disciplines (including social science). This new approach also needs to offer opportunities for citizens to engage with regulatory bodies, in order to rebuild citizen trust in the regulatory process.

As an overarching goal in the area of ERA of regulated agri-food/feed products (including pesticides), EFSA proposes the creation of an EU partnership to improve the collaboration between relevant regulatory actors (e.g. the European Commission including JRC, ECHA, EEA, EFSA and EU Member States) and stakeholders. To further advance ERA under the existing regulatory requirements, this partnership may also facilitate the co-development of new and complementary tools and methods for ERA, the sharing of relevant (harmonised) data, and the exchange of expertise.

## **6. Bee risk assessment – legislative and legal aspect of the review**

Barbara Berardi Tadié from Pollinis presented an overview of the potential opportunities and concerns that the process of the EFSA Bee Guidance Document revision entails from the point of view of civil society. The presentation addressed the reasons for the revision, recent articles on risk assessment and pesticide regulation and the way towards a more “holistic risk assessment approach”. Pollinis addressed a main concern arising from the revision process, namely the potential modification of the levels of protection, as established in the current Bee Guidance Document.

Domenica Auteri, Scientific Officer in the Pesticides Peer Review Unit presented the ongoing work with the revising of the guidance. The review process includes consultation with the stakeholder Consultative Group on Bee Guidance, pesticide experts from the EU Member States - Pesticides Steering Network, a public consultation and a stakeholder workshop. In addition, EFSA liaises with ECHA to align the risk assessment methodologies between the legal framework of plant protection products and biocides.

## **7. Animal welfare**

Olga Kikou from the Compassion in World Farming presented the organisation’s work and priorities including the revision of animal welfare legislation on live animal transport and slaughter, prohibition of factory farming, and phasing out of cages. In addition, the Compassion in World Farming advocates for extending the method of production label to all meat and dairy products, reduction in production and consumption of animal products, and promoting plant-rich diets. Olga Kikou shared the organisation’s views on the Farm to Fork strategy by the European Commission and the importance of animal welfare.

Nikolaus Kriz, Head of Animal and Plant Health Unit recalled that animal welfare represents an increasingly important part of EFSA’s remit. Good animal welfare practices not only reduce unnecessary suffering but also lower the risk of diseases that can lead to food-borne infections such as salmonella. To support legislators, EFSA’s scientists assess many factors that include housing, transport and slaughter of animals such as pigs, fish, hens and dairy cows. Our stakeholders play a central role in issuing recommendations and guidelines, identifying issues of concern and providing feedback on EFSA activities and its scientific approach.

In January, EFSA published opinions on rabbit stunning, slaughter and cages. Findings are part of a comprehensive comparison of the different rabbit housing systems used in the EU. Currently, EFSA is preparing a series of scientific opinions on the welfare of animals at slaughter including pigs, cattle and other species. The findings will be used by the European Commission in discussions with the World Organisation on Animal Health (OIE) aimed at aligning approaches to animal welfare at slaughter.

The Farm to Fork Strategy of the European Commission published on 20 May 2020 contains a strong push for new animal welfare legislation. EFSA is expected to deliver a number of scientific outputs on animal welfare during transport in all domestic species as well as animal welfare in animals currently kept in cages (the end of the cage age) including environmental aspects.

## **8. Closing Remarks and Next Steps**

The Roundtable provides an opportunity for NGO representatives to engage with EFSA and exchange views on ongoing work and upcoming stakeholder initiatives.

Co-creation of the agenda for the NGO Roundtable has been recognised as a good practice that allows for an open discussion on topics of mutual interest.

EFSA is committed to seek feedback and suggestions from NGOs to continuously improve the way of working together and looking ahead and will keep NGO stakeholders informed on the outcome of ongoing initiatives, engagement possibilities and upcoming mandates.

Participants appreciated the virtual meeting format and called for such to be further exploited in the future – in the context of reduction of travelling – lowering of carbon footprint. However, physical meetings are a good opportunity for networking and should still be considered EFSA will further explore both options in order to continue to organise the NGO roundtable meeting in the best possible conditions.

EFSA will continue to engage with NGOs along the implementation of the Transparency Regulation to achieve the ambition of a continuous improvement of the way it interacts with its stakeholders and the society.

## List of Participants

### NGOs and consumer organisations

Name of organisation	Contact person
<b>NGOs</b>	
Association for Natural Medicine in Europe (ANME)	Ricarda Dill
Chem Trust	Sidsel Dyekjaer
ClientEarth	Apolline Roger
Compassion in World Farming EU	Olga Kikou
Bee Life	Noa Simon
Ecopa - European consensus-platform for alternatives	Costanza Rovida
Euro Coop - European Community of Consumer Co-operatives	Giulia Tarsitano
Eurogroup for Animals	Francesca Porta
European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations	Erna Botjes
Federation of Veterinarians of Europe	Sean O'Laoide
Greenpeace European Unit	Franziska Achterberg
Humane Society International/Europe	Marina Pereira
IFOAM	Silvia Schmidt
Pesticide Action Network Europe	Martin Dermine
POLLINIS	Barbara Berardi Tadié
<b>Consumer Organisations</b>	
BEUC	Camille Perrin
SAFE	Floriana Cimmarusti

### EFSA's Representatives

Name and Surname	Function
Bernhard Url	EFSA's Executive Director
Christopher Lythgo	Scientific Officer, Pesticides Peer Review Unit
Domenica Auteri	Scientific Officer, Pesticides Peer Review Unit
Edward Bray	Media Relations, COM
Elena Marani	Institutional and Stakeholder Relations Assistant, ENCO
Goran Kumric	Engagement & External Relations Officer, ENCO
Guilhem de Seze	Head of Scientific Evaluation of Regulated Products Department
Luc Mohimont	Scientific Officer, Pesticides Residues Unit
Manuela Tiramani	Head of Pesticide Peer Review Unit
Marta Hugas	EFSA's Chief Scientist
Matthew Ramon	Team Leader External Engagement, ENCO
Nikolas Kriz	Head of Animal and Plant Health Unit
Victoria Villamar	Head of Unit Engagement and Cooperation
Yann Devos	Scientific Officer, GMO Unit

### European Commission, DG SANTE Representatives, observers

Name and Surname	Function
Peter Bokor	Head of Unit Food Chain Science and Stakeholder Relations
Anastasia Alvizou	Deputy Head of Unit, Food Chain Science and Stakeholder Relations
Marina Marini	Policy Officer, Food Chain Science and Stakeholder Relations
Fatima Darago	Administrative Assistant, Food Chain Science and Stakeholder Relations
Sofie Hofkens	Policy Officer, Pesticide unit
Zsuzsanna Koenig	Policy Officer, Pesticide unit