



Communication, Engagement and Cooperation Department

Stakeholder Engagement

Frist meeting of the digital event series on the evolution of EFSA's engagement framework

Virtual Meeting, 06 October 2020

Introduction

In the 2019 edition of the [Stakeholder Forum](#), participants were invited to reflect and provide input on how EFSA could update its engagement mechanisms to support the implementation of the [Transparency Regulation](#) and ensure their effectiveness in the new operating model introduced by the law.

The recommendations gathered at the Stakeholder Forum 2019 - together with the [review of the Stakeholder Engagement Approach \(SEA\) 2016-2019](#) - informed a series of follow-up activities to evolve EFSA's engagement framework and effectively meet the requirements stemming from the Transparency Regulation as well as the recommendations made by the Stakeholders.

To feed back to stakeholders on the impact of their input, EFSA has launched a series of digital events to report back on how the recommendations made at the Forum 2019 and within the review of the SEA were taken on board by EFSA. This approach will allow EFSA to gradually introduce the elements of the new engagement framework, to fulfil the requirements of the Transparency Regulation and meet the ambitions of the Strategy 2027 in the area of public engagement.

The digital series started with a kick-off event to set the scene, report back on how EFSA has taken onboard stakeholders' input and to introduce the series of thematic events focusing on specific aspects of the evolved engagement framework EFSA is designing. The series will continue with three thematic workshops to focus on single aspects of the three engagement streams of the evolved framework (quality of science, preparedness, stakeholder dialogue) and gather stakeholder input to fine-tune them as appropriate.

The last event of the series will be followed by a final survey to seek feedback from stakeholders who took part in the events and collect insights that will inform the recommendations on the way forward, which will be discussed at the Stakeholder Bureau meeting of September 2021. Based on the input by the Bureau, the finetuning of the way forward will continue at the Stakeholder Forum 2021, which will be considered as the concluding appointment of the series.

Objectives and main outcomes of the meeting

The aim of this first event of the series was to present the blueprint of evolved engagement framework and consult stakeholders on its main features. The stakeholders were presented with a new and more agile engagement format complementing the existing mechanisms of the SEA to ensure a more regular interaction with the stakeholder community.

Feedback from the Forum 2019 and the SEA review

In the SEA review and during the Stakeholder Forum 2019 many recommendations have been put forward by Stakeholders. Those recommendations can be grouped in thematic clusters as follows:

- Enhance the transparency of EFSA's Risk Assessment process and facilitate public access to relevant information,
- Establish new and more agile engagement formats,
- Prioritise topic-based engagement,
- Establish a feedback loop to inform stakeholders on how their input has been taken on board in the elaboration of a scientific output.

These recommendations informed EFSA's reflections on the evolution of its engagement framework. For each of class of recommendations EFSA has considered several solutions leading to an organic evolution of its tools and processes; setting up of a digital community and a dissemination portal, revising the way the public consultations are carried out, introducing a customer relationship management tool and developing an inventory of new engagements formats, just to name a few.

Towards an evolved engagement approach: several streams, one framework

EFSA's reflections on the way the stakeholder engagement should evolve, be it in the domain of the quality of scientific outputs, to enhance the transparency of the processes, or to look at the emerging issues ahead, have been informed by the Transparency Regulation requirements, the desk research on new engagement models, and – as highlighted above – by a careful analysis of stakeholder recommendations.

The evolved engagement approach is an organic framework based on three engagement streams linked to different processes and having different purposes. The first stream, the 'Quality of science', is related to the engagement opportunities during the lifecycle of a scientific mandate or an application. In this stream, specific windows for engagement have been identified throughout the risk assessment process. For each of these windows, EFSA will identify the appropriate methods for public engagement. These will be decided upfront, when a mandate is negotiated with our customers (the European Commission, the European Parliament or the Member States) and will be publicly communicated as a mandate is accepted by EFSA through, what is called a 'dissemination portal'. Therefore, stakeholders will be in the position to plan their participation well ahead by receiving timely access to the activity plan of that mandate.

The second stream, 'Preparedness', relates to stakeholder involvement in EFSA's forward-looking reflections to identify and characterize emerging issues brought by new technologies or by societal concerns. The nature of this interaction is cross-cutting and will benefit from dedicated methods that EFSA is about to test in coming period.

The third and last stream is linked to the permanent mechanisms of the SEA and is closely related to the management of 'Stakeholder dialogue'. The existing models will be refreshed to ensure a feedback loop to update the stakeholders on the way their input has informed or influenced EFSA activities and processes.

EFSA will gradually move towards the desired framework by progressively introducing new features and by keeping an open dialogue with stakeholders during this process. In order to gain direct experience with the new methods EFSA will run a pilot phase.

The purpose of the pilot phase, which will be articulated over a period of approximately two years from now, is twofold; it would allow EFSA to gain direct experience with some new engagement models by testing them in practice; it would allow keeping an open dialogue with stakeholders to collectively learn from this experience and refine the framework with stakeholder input as part of a continuous improvement process.

For the 'Preparedness' stream, EFSA will focus on topics such as new food and feed production technologies, to get insights into the innovations and trends in this domain. EFSA will pilot a new method mainly targeting the organisations that are most active in this field and would expand the outreach to start-ups and other entities with relevant expertise.

In the 'Quality of science' stream, a first milestone will be the launch of the dissemination portal, which will address the recommendation to enhance the accessibility of information related to specific mandates. This will happen in conjunction with the entry into application of the Transparency Regulation.

For the 'Stakeholder dialogue' stream, EFSA will mainly focus its efforts on gradually rescoping the permanent mechanisms of the SEA and in complementing them with additional ones that can make engagement in this domain more effective. For example, piloting a new digital community, which will be co-design with stakeholders. Other pilots may be added as the work progresses. The Stakeholder Bureau and the Forum will be involved in the evaluation of the pilot phase to take stock of the lessons learned and identify room for improvement.

Exchange of views

During the exchange of views session participants raised several questions related to engagement opportunities along the risk assessment process, balanced representation of views, new ways to explore communications channels and engagement models, and how to further improve the dialogue with stakeholders.

In addition, the "preparedness" stream was named as an area of interest for several stakeholder organisations (e.g. Eurocommerce, CEFIC). In that context, the Stakeholder Discussion Group on Emerging Risk was mentioned as an example of constructive collaboration. EFSA is considering renewing the composition of this Discussion Group to allow a broader range of stakeholder organisations to contribute to the work on emerging risks. The next meeting of the Discussion Group on Emerging Risk will take place on 9-10 December 2020. Meeting will be open for all registered stakeholders.

When it comes to equal opportunities and balanced representations, within the existing frame of the Stakeholder Engagement Approach EFSA engages with different stakeholder categories based on their specific interest and expertise. The evolved engagement framework would allow a creation of additional models to support the principles of SEA and the ambition for more agile and meaningful engagement with stakeholders.

The upcoming event of the series

The series of digital events will continue with one follow-up event for each of the three engagement streams. The next event will be a workshop (January 2021) on the “preparedness” stream, to allow discussion on how to identify the right topics and methods to ensure a timely involvement of stakeholders in forward-looking reflections.

This event will be followed by a workshop related to “stakeholder dialogue” stream, to collectively elaborate the features of a digital community aiming to ensure quick and direct exchange on matters of common interest to all stakeholders.

The third event will reflect on the “Quality of Science” stream with an objective to review and enhance the tools and processes in place to effectively engage stakeholders during the lifecycle of a generic mandate or an application and timely disseminate information on public engagement opportunities in this domain.

The outcome of the three events will be presented to the Stakeholder Bureau at the September 2021 meeting. Based on the input by the Bureau, the finetuning of the way forward will continue at the Stakeholder Forum 2021, which will be considered as the concluding appointment of the series.

Outcome of the participants survey

The response rate (23%) was low despite the reminders, but the overall satisfaction of respondents (93%) is high. Most respondents declared that the event fulfilled their expectations (79%) and are inclined to attend the future events of the series (86%).

The meeting was successful in increasing the awareness of stakeholders on what EFSA is doing with their inputs and how EFSA intends to move forward based on those. Most respondents (79%) declared that their understanding of the topics increased to good or excellent after the meeting. Almost all respondents (86%) believe that EFSA is evolving its engagement framework in the right direction.

Regarding the format of event, based on inputs provided by participants this aspect should be given adequate consideration in the organisation of future events, especially when the COVID 19 pandemic ends and physical meetings may be organised again. Finding a good balance between the accessibility/agility of digital events and the need to facilitate networking and direct interaction among participants may present a challenge.