

SCIENTIFIC PANEL ON BIOLOGICAL HAZARDS

MINUTES OF THE 143rd PLENARY MEETING

**Held on 25-26 January 2021, web-conference
(Agreed on 8 February 2021)**

Participants

■ **Panel Members:**

Ana Allende, Avelino Alvarez-Ordóñez, Declan Bolton, Sara Bover-Cid, Marianne Chemaly, Robert Davies, Alessandra De Cesare, Lieve Herman, Friederike Hilbert, Konstantinos Koutsoumanis, Roland Lindqvist, Maarten Nauta, Giuseppe Ru, Luisa Peixe, Marion Simmons, Panagiotis Skandamis, Elisabetta Suffredini

■ **Hearing Experts¹:**

Not applicable

■ **European Commission (EC) and/or Member States representatives:**

Luis Vivas-Alegre (EC, DG Health and Food Safety, Unit D1)

Olga Goulaki (EC, DG Health and Food Safety, Unit E1; for item 6.3)

Anna Mlynarczyk (EC, DG Health and Food Safety, Unit G5; for item 6.4)

Jean-Baptiste Perrin (EC, DG Health and Food Safety, Unit G4; for item 6.7)

Martial Plantady (EC, DG Health and Food Safety, Unit G4; for item 8.3)

■ **EFSA:**

■ **BIOCONTAM Unit:**

Katrin Bote, Maria Teresa Da Silva Felicio, Beatriz Guerra, Michaela Hempen, Maria Francesca Iulietto, Ernesto Liébana, Winy Messens, Angel Ortiz-Peláez, Valentina Rizzi, Pietro Stella

■ **SCER Unit:**

Georgia Gkritsali (for item 9.2)

■ **TS Unit:**

Ingrida Miliute, Claudia Paoletti (for item 9.3)

■ **Observers:**

Not applicable

¹ As defined in Article 17 of the Decision of the Executive Director concerning the selection of members of the Scientific Committee, the Scientific Panels, and the selection of external experts to assist EFSA with its scientific work:
<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/keydocs/docs/expertselection.pdf>.

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

No apologies were received.

2. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

3. Declarations of Interest

In accordance with EFSA's Policy on Independence and the Decision of the Executive Director on Competing Interest Management, EFSA screened the Annual Declarations of Interest filled out by the Panel members invited to the present meeting. No Conflicts of Interest related to the issues discussed in this meeting have been identified during the screening process.

Certain interests were declared orally by the members before the beginning of the meeting. For further details on the outcome of the screening of the Oral Declaration of Interest made at the beginning of the meeting, please refer to the Annex.

4. Agreement of the minutes of the 142nd Plenary meeting held on 9-10 December 2020, web-conference

The minutes of the 142nd Plenary meeting were agreed by written procedure on 8 January 2021.

5. Scientific outputs submitted for possible adoption or endorsement

6. Scientific outputs submitted for discussion²

6.1. Statement on the update of the list of QPS-recommended biological agents intentionally added to food or feed as notified to EFSA. 14: Suitability of taxonomic units notified to EFSA until March 2021

The WG Chair informed the panel about the notifications received since October 2020: 35 taxonomic units (TUs) were notified, most of them already have QPS status or have been excluded from QPS assessment. The following TUs are included in Statement 14: *Enterobacter hormaechei* and *Eremothecium ashbyi*. During the last WG meeting on January 19, 2021, the strategy for the extended literature search was discussed, which required only the addition of one TU which was added to the QPS list in the last Statement. The next meeting is 14 April 2021 and the deadline for adoption of this Panel Statement 14 is June 2021.

6.2. Scientific opinion on the update of the list of QPS-recommended biological agents intentionally added to food or feed as notified to EFSA

The WG Chair informed the panel that the draft opinion includes a discussion on opportunistic infections by TUs with QPS status and the suitability of bacteriophages for QPS assessment. The draft opinion summarises the conclusions from statements adopted during that mandate

² Please be aware that EFSA's Register of Questions is unavailable from 21 January until mid-February. The temporary suspension of the tool is necessary to allow us to implement the launch of our new OpenEFSA portal. We apologise for the inconvenience. Further information is available [here](#)

with references to the statements for detailed review. The deadline for this QPS opinion is December 2022.

6.3. Scientific opinions providing guidance on date marking and related food information – part II

The WG Chair presented the progress of the draft opinion since the WG meeting that took place on 17 December 2020. The decision tree and the relevant sections were modified based on the discussion during the last BIOHAZ Panel meeting. The panel did not have major comments on the draft opinion, and made minor suggestions, e.g. on the choice of examples, which will be discussed during the next WG meeting 9 February 2021. The deadline for adoption of this part II opinion (ToRs 3 and 4) is March 2021.

6.4. Scientific opinion on the role played by the environment in the emergence and spread of antimicrobial resistance through the food chain

The WG Chair updated the Panel about the outcome of the last WG meeting held on 12 January by web-conference. The draft scientific opinion had been shared with the experts of the BIOHAZ Panel. Only the sections addressing the *Bacteria and genes*, *Mitigation options* and *Data gaps/research needs* were presented for first reading and comments from the Panel were discussed. Major changes in the section *Methodology* in relation to the approach followed to determine their public health importance were also presented. The scientific opinion will be presented for thorough reading at the next BIOHAZ Panel. The next meeting of the WG will take place on 12 February 2020. The deadline for the adoption of this scientific opinion is 30 April 2021.

6.5. Scientific opinion on specific maximum levels of cross-contamination for 24 antimicrobial active substances in non-target feed

The WG Chair updated the Panel on how the comments received after the public consultation of the methodology (proposed to address the ToR1 of the mandate on antimicrobial resistance development) were answered, and how the scientific opinion was updated accordingly. The technical report containing the comments received and the actions taken by EFSA produced by the WG experts (met on 17 December and 14 January) was shared with the BIOHAZ Panel and feedback from the Panel experts was requested. This report will be also shared with the EMA CVMP experts. The deadline for adoption of the scientific opinion(s) is 30 September 2021. The technical report will be published together with the opinion.

6.6. Scientific opinion on the capacity of certain specific processing transformation methods of animal by-products used in the production of organic fertilisers and soil improvers in view of determining the endpoints in the manufacturing chain of certain derived products

The WG Chair reminded the Panel the background and terms of reference of this mandate and the deadline for adoption (31 October 2021). The third WG meeting took place on 17 December. The Chair informed of the latest developments in the discussions with the EC to clarify the ToR. As a result of clarifications between EFSA and the EC, the EC confirmed on 25 January 2021 the acceptance of interpretation of the ToR as proposed by EFSA. The final clarification to the ToRs, presented to the plenary by the chair, reads as following: '*EFSA is requested to assess the requirements for alternative transformation parameters for biogas and composting plants in terms of the validation of the intended process, referred to in point 1 of Section 2 of Chapter III of Annex V to Regulation (EC) No 142/2011, when applied to other derived products. In particular, the scientific opinion should comprise an assessment of the following Category 2 and 3 materials and derived products processed or obtained in accordance with Regulation (EU) No 1069/2009 and Regulation (EU) No 142/2011 for the declaration of the end points in the manufacturing chain and the standard or alternative methods approved for this purpose: (1) ash derived from incineration, co-incineration and combustion; (2) glycerine derived from the production of biodiesel and renewable fuels; (3) other materials derived from the production of biodiesel and renewable fuels; (4) hides and skins; (5) wool and hair; (6) feather and down; (7) pig bristles; (8) horns, horn products, hoofs and hoof*

products'. The Chair also informed of the ongoing activities between meetings, which is mainly the second phase of the pilot study of the extensive literature search for the hazard identification. The 4th WG meeting will take place on 17 February 2021.

6.7. Scientific opinion on the efficacy and safety of high pressure processing of food

The last WG meeting was held on 14-15 December 2021 (related to BIOHAZ issues). The WG Chair presented the draft protocol, including the problem formulation (step 1) and the planning of the methods to conduct the assessment (step 2). The protocol was simplified and considered final. The WG Chair informed that one expert resigned from the WG and that a replacement will be sought. Feedback was given on the outcome of the last WG meeting using a presentation. Replies to the questionnaire on the commercial use of high pressure processing (HPP) are being received and the deadline has been extended until the end of the month. The panel suggested to use a narrative for answering ToR1b, based on a literature review, including the review of existing meta-analysis. For ToR3, confirmation was received from the EC to concentrate on the foods known to cause human listeriosis and therefore the food categories that will be considered are cooked RTE meat, smoked and gravid fish and soft and semi-soft cheese. The other relevant pathogens in these foods were suggested but would need to be justified. The next WG meetings will be held on 3 February 2021 (ToR1c - chemical food safety risks due to contaminants) and on 3-4 February 2021 (on ToR1c - chemical food safety risks through food contact materials) and on will be held on 17-18 February 2021 (on all ToRs apart from ToR1c - chemical food safety risks). The deadline for adoption is 31 January 2022.

6.8. Scientific opinion on the microbiological safety of aged meat

The BIOHAZ Panel Chair nominated Declan Bolton as Chair of the ad hoc WG which will be established for this mandate (conditional to screening and approval of his declaration of interests). The WG composition will be discussed in the coming months. The deadline for adoption of this opinion is 31 December 2022.

6.9. New alternative biodiesel process for rendered fat of Category 1 (BDI-RepCat Process, AT)

The last working group (WG) meeting was held on 12 January 2021. The draft opinion was presented for thorough reading to the BIOHAZ Panel. The WG Chair reminded the Panel of the background of the mandate, the content of the application, and the approach followed by the WG. Afterward, the WG Chair provided an overview of the sections of the draft opinion. Selected comments from the BIOHAZ Panel were further discussed with the Panel members. In particular, the Panel suggested clarifying some aspects in the sections on 'level of risk reduction', together with other comments which will be subjected to further discussion by the WG. The conclusions proposed by the WG were presented and discussed. The WG will address the comments raised by the Panel during the next WG meeting (22 February 2021, web-conference) and present the updated draft opinion for possible adoption at the next BIOHAZ Panel meeting in March. The deadline for adoption is 7 April 2021.

7. New Mandates

7.1. Request for a scientific opinion on the evaluation of safety and efficacy of lactic acid to reduce microbiological contamination on carcasses from wild game and small stock

A new request for a scientific opinion on the evaluation of the safety and efficacy of lactic acid to reduce microbiological surface contamination on carcasses from wild game and small stock was received in EFSA from the European Commission on 30 July 2020. The request is based on the receipt of a dossier from the Australian Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment under Article 3(2) of Regulation (EC) No 853/2004. The application was

considered valid on 10 December 2020. The WG from the CEP Panel on the evaluation of substances used to reduce microbial contamination from products of animal origin will deal with this request and will meet on 15 February 2021. The BIOHAZ Panel is to endorse the sections related to the Terms of Reference 2 (efficacy) and 3 (potential emergence of reduced susceptibility to biocides and/or resistance to therapeutic antimicrobials) and then the scientific opinion will be proposed for adoption by the CEP Panel. The current deadline to deliver the Scientific Opinion is 10 December 2021.

8. Feedback from the Scientific Committee/Scientific Panels, EFSA, the European Commission

8.1. Scientific Committee

No new meeting of the Scientific Committee (SC) took place after the last BIOHAZ plenary meeting.

8.2. European Commission

No specific items were raised under this agenda item. The Chair thanked EC colleagues for their active participation to the plenary meeting.

8.3. Update on Scientific and technical assistance on the use of alkaline phosphatase and possible alternative testing to verify pasteurisation of raw milk, colostrum, dairy and colostrum-based products

The last WG meeting took place on 14 January 2021. The deadline for approval of the scientific report has now been officially extended to end of April 2021. The draft report has been shared for information with the panel members and for first review until 3 February 2021. The next WG meeting has been scheduled on 11 February 2021.

8.4. Request for scientific and technical assistance to examine the data collected by the Member States in the framework of the 2-years compulsory intensified surveillance in case of atypical scrapie

The Chair of the WG reminded the Panel of the ToRs and deadline for delivery of the scientific report (30 June 2021). The first meeting of the WG took place on Friday 11 December. The actions agreed in that meeting were reported by the chair, as follows: design analytical strategy including the comparison of the prevalence of atypical scrapie between general and enhanced surveillance and a simulation model, prepare the template of the scientific opinion, draft possible assessment questions for the protocol, update scientific literature on the topic and prepare datasets to implement analytical strategies. The second meeting of the WG will take place on Thursday 28 January 2021.

9. Other scientific topics for information and/or discussion

9.1. Implementation of the guidance on uncertainty analysis in scientific assessments

The Panel Chair reported feedback from the discussion of the SCER cross-cutting WG on uncertainty, in particular about possibilities for improving expression of uncertainty for conclusions on qualitative assessments. This specific point will be further discussed in the next Plenary, with invitation of an expert from the SCER WG to deliver a presentation.

9.2. Topics of scientific concern in the area of biological hazards and BIOHAZ self-tasks, including update from SCER Unit (Emerging risks)

A draft self-task mandate on the microbiological hazards related to the use of water in processing and handling of fruits and vegetables and related control options was presented to the panel and the terms of reference were discussed. The Panel agreed to focus only on the assessment of microbiological hazards, routes of cross-contamination and the efficacy of possible water treatments. The Panel recommended not to expand the remit of the mandate to the assessment of chemical contaminants nor the risk-benefit analysis of the assessed water treatments. The current draft and ToRs will be reviewed accordingly and presented for discussion at the next plenary meeting.

EFSA Secretariat from SCER Unit presented to the Panel an overview of the topics discussed during the recent Emerging Risks Exchange Network (EREN) meeting of 23-24 November 2020³ and EFSA Stakeholder Discussion group on Emerging Risks (StaDG-ER) meeting of 9-10 December 2020⁴. The presentation focused on the following topics: first cluster of human cases of tick-borne encephalitis (TBE) transmitted by raw goat milk cheese in France in 2020; the use of bacteriophages in food products; Sars-CoV-2 in food; food Safety Risks linked to the trend of consumption of minimally processed food.

9.3. Update on the implementation of the Transparency Regulation

EFSA Secretariat from TS Unit provided an update on the implementation of the Transparency Regulation. This update addressed the EFSA's documents drafted/updated in a view of the Transparency Regulation (practical arrangements and guidance documents), the process on dossier submission as well as engagement, training and communication.

10. Any other business

To follow up a request from the Panel, EFSA Secretariat reminded the Panel of the past agreements related to drafting and publication of papers based on scientific opinions of the BIOHAZ Panel. Further discussions will follow internally in EFSA, the Panel will be kept informed on this.

³ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/it/events/event/24th-emerging-risks-exchange-network-meeting>

⁴ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/events/event/24th-meeting-efsa-stakeholder-discussion-group-emerging-risks-stadg-er>

Annex

Interests and actions resulting from the Oral Declaration of Interest done at the beginning of the meeting

With regard to this meeting, Prof. Friederike Hilbert declared the following interest: *funding of a project titled "Conference on Environmental health and food security", which consists on a research project on these topics, followed by the organisation of a final conference; the research project is funded by OeAD-GmbH (Austrian Agency for International Cooperation and Education in Research), public body funded by the Federal Ministry of the Republic of Austria.* In accordance with EFSA's Policy on Independence⁵ and the Decision of the Executive Director on Competing Interest Management⁶, and taking into account the specific matters discussed at the meeting in question, the interest above was not deemed to represent a Conflict of Interest for the expert concerned.

⁵ http://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/policy_independence.pdf

⁶ http://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/competing_interest_management_17.pdf