



European Food Safety Authority

Draft Minutes

ADVISORY FORUM WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNICATIONS

07 October 2004

AUSTRIAN AGENCY FOR HEALTH AND FOOD SAFETY (AGES), Vienna, Austria

Members of the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications

Chair: Anne-Laure Gassin, Communications Director, EFSA

Present: Oskar Wawschinek, Austria
Pascal Houbaert, Belgium
Kamila Grulichova, Czech Republic
Charlotte Bender, Denmark
Marie-Paule Benassi, European Commission
Marja Pohjanpalo, Finland
Burckhard Viell, Germany
Georgia Grintzali, Greece
Eszter Forgacs, Hungary
Edel Conway, Ireland
Massimo Aquili, Italy
Patrick Hau, Luxembourg
Sylwia Osmak, Poland
Irene Van Geest, The Netherlands
Knut Albert Solem, Norway
Martin Chudy, Slovak Republic
Jerker Sörenson, Sweden
Neil Martinson, UK

European Food Safety Authority: Executive Director and Staff

Thierry Beniflah, EFSA	Lucia de Luca, EFSA
Helen Kinghan, EFSA	Ingela Söderlung, EFSA
Caterina Pala, EFSA	Carola Sondermann, EFSA

Invited: Roland Grossgut; AGES, Austria
Renate Pauw, The Netherlands

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Observers: Erherd Höbaus, Austrian Agriculture Ministry

Apologies: Beate Gminder, European Commission
Juliette Chevalier, France
Wayne Anderson, Ireland
Luis Salino, Portugal
Dr Héctor Alonso Martin, Spain

1. Introduction by Anne-Laure Gassin and adoption of agenda (Doc AF Comm WG 07.10.04 - 1)

1.1 The meeting was opened by Anne-Laure Gassin, EFSA Director of Communications, who welcomed members to the fifth meeting of the group held in Vienna, and introduced the new members to the group. She also introduced the representative of the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture, responsible for risk communications who attended the meeting as an observer, and the guest speaker, Renate Pauw, who would be presenting the result of her research on risk communications on SEM under point n°7 of the agenda.

In order to have an updated list with precise contact details of the members of the group, Anne-Laure Gassin invited the members to make sure that the coordinates on the Group's list which would be circulated during the day were correct.

1.2 Anne-Laure Gassin asked for comments on the draft agenda. Due to the fact that the United Kingdom deferred its presentation to next meeting, only Austria would be presenting under point 7. Buckhard Viell, Germany, asked to add communication on fish consumption, while Marie-Paule Benassi also wanted to add a point regarding methylmercury in fish. Both points were added under point 7 of the agenda. Following these amendments, the agenda was adopted.

2. Minutes of the meeting 15 June 2004 and matters arising (Doc AF Comm WG 07.10.04 – 2)

2.1 No further remarks from members. The minutes of the previous meeting were adopted and will be published on the web.

3. Update on progress at EFSA and key points arising from the Advisory Forum meeting (30.09.04/01.10.04).

Anne-Laure Gassin updated the group on the discussions at the last Advisory Forum meeting which took place in Rome on 30 September and 1 October. The subjects discussed included:

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- Performance indicators. Following a request from EFSA's Management Board, the group decided that monitoring would be put in place and that indicators would be provided on a regular basis. Such indicators can be found on EFSA's website under the Management Board section.
- Draft terms of reference for the evaluation of the Authority's work (as required by its founding regulation). Discussions on this document are ongoing and a call for tender will be launched.
- Developments on science. The register of questions will be made more user-friendly and in the future the documents submitted with regards to specific questions will be also available. Over 100 opinions have been published. Recent opinions with public announcements/press releases include an opinion on TFAs, the publication of 7 country reports on Geographical BSE Risk Assessment and an opinion on Parabens). A publication of the scientific report concerning the first scientific colloquium on methodologies for setting tolerable intake levels of PCBs will be available in December.
- Staff and move to Parma. 13 new members have been appointed. With regard to Parma, the first staff will be working from the Parma office as of October, while the first Panel will be moving in November. The move will be completed by autumn 2005. Geoffrey Podger will be moving in January, while Hermann Koeter will be staying in Brussels until the very end. EFSA will be moving to a temporary office location, but possibilities for a permanent office location are being taken into consideration.
- Communications: the EFSA newsletter registered 3,000 subscribers and press activities continue.
- Italy has set up a national food safety committee, linked to the Health Ministry and with a structure similar to EFSA's. Information will be available on the extranet as soon as it is communicated.

The Advisory Forum meeting was preceded by a half day session on crises scenarios during which exercises on some possible crisis situations were carried out.

Other issues discussed during the meeting in Rome were:

- Discussion paper of the Scientific Committee on botanicals and botanical preparations widely used as food supplements and related products;
- Draft work programme for EFSA for 2005: a first exchange took place and members were invited to identify priority areas by end of October and make suggestions for additional work and for changes for approaches of the work;
- Preliminary discussion on the composition of the Panels and the profile of the experts required
- Update and exchange of information on the setting up of an EFSA extranet and the video conference project.

4. Update by Ingela Söderlund regarding the Advisory Forum and stakeholder event

4.1 Ingela Söderlund updated the members on the progress in the organization of the Advisory Forum and the stakeholder events. Updates on participants as well as organizational details were given. Further to some comments from the members regarding the selection criteria followed for the invitation of participants to the stakeholders' event, Ingela Söderlund explained EFSA's policy to this regard. Further questions about the rationale behind EFSA's policy were raised and some of the members asked to be informed with regards to the invitees, as questions had also been raised on this point at national level, in particular in Germany where the event will be held. It was decided to address these comments to Victoria Villamar, in charge of stakeholder relations at EFSA who would come back to the group with any clarification required.

5. Update by Anne-Laure Gassin on EFSA communications activities, including media relations for Advisory Forum event

5.1 Anne-Laure Gassin updated the group on EFSA's communications activities including the organization of a press briefing on the opinion issued by EFSA's NDA Panel on trans fatty acids held 1 September 2004. Anne-Laure also informed members that EFSA's Annual Report was now available in French, German and Italian (in addition to the original English version) should this be of interest to members.

5.2 Lucia de Luca, EFSA's Press Officer, outlined the communications approach followed to raise media attention around the Advisory Forum event. In order to reach a wider spectrum of journalists, Lucia de Luca asked the members to distribute the announcement created for the event via their own website as well as to distribute it to relevant media in each country. It would also be very helpful if the members could highlight the event to the attention of specific journalists. Members were also invited to send EFSA a list of selected media which could be particularly interested in the event. An update on the possibility to be present at the event with a stand and some information material was also given with practical information on the exhibit area and on how to proceed to register.

6. Presentation by Renate Pauw on the analysis of communications on semicarbazide in Europe

6.1 Ms Renate Pauw, presented her study on the analysis of communications on semicarbazide in Europe. This study was carried out on the basis of: desk research on risk perception; interviews regarding actions undertaken by members of the group with regards to SEM communications (EFSA, AFSSA/France, BfR/Germany, UK FSA, FSAI and VWA/Netherlands) ; and questionnaires completed by Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, Norway and Austria.

6.2 The presentation was followed by some comments and considerations:

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- The scope of this working group is to exchange views. Semicarbazide is particularly relevant to this working group since it was the first case that members dealt with together and from which lessons could be learned.
- Risk awareness, perception and reaction to emerging risk and food crisis situations differ from country to country. Communications strategies on SEM differed in order to take into account specific country contexts; there was not one unique model for communications on this issue.
- Due to lack of data, fluctuation in sales was not analysed as part of this project. Although it is difficult to gather such data, it could be important to assess it in the future.
- Recommendations for the future included: continuing to improve transparency of the communications process (EFSA/Member States); monitoring of media activity and analysis of actions undertaken at national level (EFSA/Member States); better co-ordination and communications among national authorities; conducting consumer research, for instance as input to message development.
- Follow-up research could include: relation between media reporting and risk perception; evaluating the impact both of communications and risk culture on public perception and response; how the organization of food authorities and their respective roles influence risk communications.

7. Communications: information exchange and forward planning

- **Country presentations: Austria**

7.1 Roland Grossgut, Head of risk assessment of the Austrian agency for health and food safety (AGES), presented the Agency's structure and way of working.

7.2 Questions from the members followed, which highlighted the fact that strong coordination of risk communications exists between risk assessors and risk managers in Austria. Risk assessments are not published on the website for the moment but the Agency is envisaging this opportunity for the future. EFSA's opinions are taken into account but national risk assessment remains completely detached and independent from EFSA's. In risk communications, AGES and the press secretaries from each Ministry work closely together before issuing a message. An exercise on risk communication in co-ordination with the two responsible ministries started last autumn.

- **Science work programmes: EFSA and AF members**

7.3 Carola Sondermann, EFSA's Senior Press Officer, presented an overview of the upcoming scientific opinions to be published on the EFSA website as well as the communications projects planned (*the presentation was published on the Extranet.*)

Some remarks/comments followed the presentation:

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- Some members would find it useful to have an indication of the “headlines” or principal outcomes concerning future opinions in order to prepare themselves in advance. This is particularly relevant where subjects are also on the agenda of national authorities (eg microbiological risks of infant formulae). Carola Sondermann explained that it was of course not possible to anticipate on panel decisions and reminded members that EFSA precirculates public announcements regarding EFSA opinions prior to their publication.
- The question was raised to EFSA as to whether there was any intention to pursue discussions on the harmonization of risk assessment terms. Members will be kept informed about this subject following further discussion with EFSA Science.
- Members requested further explanation as to the differences between dates of formal adoption of opinions and their publication on the EFSA website. It was explained that time was required following formal adoption by panels for finalization of the text (ie minor editorial changes co-ordinated with the Panel Chair and members) as well as the drafting and translation of the summaries of the scientific opinions.

7.4. Key country issues regarding risk communications (Doc AF Comm WG 07.10.04 – 3) .

- Country templates were posted on the Extranet, circulated and discussed during the meeting. Norway asked for more specific information about the various issues discussed at national level by the members of the group. Several members expressed interest in sharing more information relative to diet, health and nutrition issues. In particular, the UK suggested that it would be useful to share information between members with regards to salt reduction initiatives.
- Anne-Laure Gassin invited the ones who did not manage to post their template on the Extranet to share it with the rest of the group. The quarterly basis for update will continue; the deadline will therefore be the next meeting.
- Marie-Paule Benassi, European Commission, announced that DG SANCO had recently conducted focus groups in Greece, Spain, Poland, and the United Kingdom to test the perception of consumers with regards to contaminants in fish and methylmercury in particular. She explained that such groups do not intend to be representative surveys but rather to give insights regarding consumer perception and understanding. Consumers will also be asked about their opinion regarding the type of communication that they consider to be the most trustworthy. Feedback should be available at the end of 2004, and will be presented on the occasion of the next working group. She indicated that the goal of such an exercise is to better understand consumers’ needs and gain a different approach on communications disseminated through the networks in the various

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Member States (consumer groups, regulatory committee, public health networks etc...). Moreover, she informed members that DG SANCO intends to carry out a Eurobarometer survey on risk perception in 2005 in all Member States.

- Burkhard Viell proposed to provide the group with an overview of the different advice given in Member States with regards to fish consumption (risks and benefits).

8. Crisis management scenario planning: overview and key outputs from the AF meeting

8.1 The crisis management scenario exercise which took place at the Advisory Forum's meeting on 30 September in Rome, will be published on the extranet. These were preliminary desk exercises carried out between EFSA, Member States and the European Commission in order to better understand the role, tasks and communications interfaces between the institutions. A report which will list the main follow up and actions points from the Advisory Forum's September exercise is planned. Anne-Laure Gassin suggested adding additional time to a forthcoming meeting in order to go through the scenario exercises from a communications point of view. The objective would be to see more specifically what and how would need to be communicated and how to utilise IT and other tools to facilitate the dialogue.

8.2 Members requested further information regarding the European Commission's crisis management plan as well as the names of the contact points at national level. Marie-Paule Benassi, European Commission, will check and possibly publish the plan on the extranet. She also offered to provide further information at a subsequent meeting of the Advisory Forum Communications Working Group.

9. Update by Thierry Beniflah on the EFSA Extranet projects

9.1 Thierry Beniflah, Head of IT at EFSA, gave an update of the extranet project (*the presentation was published on the Extranet.*) A brief tour of the Communications portal followed. A member suggested to consider restricting access to the Communications section of the extranet to members of the working group. In any event, the need to clearly identify what information should go where (eg Advisory Forum vs working groups) will need to be clearly defined.

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10. Any other business

10.1 Meeting dates for 2005. Proposals for date were posted on the Extranet while venues still need to be decided. Anne-Laure Gassin invited the members to put forward official invitations for hosting future meetings of the Communications Working Group in their home Country. (Doc **AF Comm WG 07.10.04 - 4**).

Suggested dates for 2005 are as follows:

- 16 February with half-day session on 17/02 for crisis scenario workshop (to be confirmed)
- 21 April
- 14 June
- 7 October