



European Food Safety Authority

Draft Minutes

ADVISORY FORUM WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNICATIONS

EFSA, PARMA, ITALY

26 APRIL 2006

Members of the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications:

Chair: *GASSIN Anne-Laure*, Communications Director, EFSA

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Belgium	<i>HOUBAERT Pascal</i>
Cyprus	<i>ELEFThERIADOU Mary</i>
Czech Republic	<i>VICENOVÀ Milena</i>
Germany	<i>SCHAUZU Marianna</i>
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Ireland	<i>CONWAY Edel</i>
Latvia	<i>SANTARE Dace</i>
Luxembourg	<i>HAU Patrick</i>
Portugal	<i>MIRANDA Ana</i>
Portugal, observer	<i>POTES Filomena</i>
Roberto Andrès	<i>RODRIGUEZ</i>
The Netherlands	<i>MENTEN Charlotte</i>
United Kingdom	<i>TALBOT Karen</i>

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Observers and Invitees of the Communications Director:

Bulgaria	<i>PCHELKINSKA Mariela</i>
Denmark	<i>BENDER Charlotte</i>
ECDC	<i>DUNCAN BEN</i>
European Commission	<i>GAUTRAIS Bruno</i>
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Portugal	<i>POTES Filomena</i>
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Finland	<i>POHJANPALO Marja</i>
France	<i>LEYDET Valérie</i>
Hungary	<i>SZEGEDI Eva</i>
Italy	<i>AQUILI Massimo</i>
Poland	<i>OSMAK Sylwia</i>
Slovak Republic	<i>CHUDY Martin</i>
Sweden	<i>SÖRENSON Jerker</i>

1. Welcome and adoption of agenda by Anne-Laure Gassin (Doc AF Comm WG 02 02 06 – 1)

- 1.2 Anne-Laure Gassin welcomed the participants and introduced the new members Vassilios Krestos from Greece and Roberto Rodríguez Andrés from Spain. She also thanked for their presence Bruno Gautrais, Charlotte Menten, and Milena Vicenová representing respectively the European Commission, the Netherlands and Czech Republic for this meeting. The following participants were also introduced: Filomena Potes, joining Ana

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Miranda (Portugal) for this meeting; Ben Duncan, presenting the work of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC); and Claudia Heppner, Scientific Co-ordinator of the EFSA CONTAM Panel.

1.3 The agenda was accepted.

2. Minutes of the meeting 02 02 06 and matters arising

(Doc AF Comm WG 02 02 06 – 2)

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were adopted and will be published on the web.

3. Update on EFSA and Communications Activities by Anne-Laure Gassin

3.1 EFSA's future Executive Director, Ms Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle will take up her post on 1st July.

3.2 Following the discussions on the EFSA Evaluation Report held by the Management Board in London on 27-28 March, the Board will propose recommendations to be discussed at its meeting on 20 June. The enhancement of collaboration with the Advisory Forum and the European Commission in the field of communications was also discussed at the Management Board's Away Day.

3.3 Progress has been made on the definition of competent organisations operating in the fields within EFSA's mission. A compiled list is about to be finalized by EFSA and will be proposed to the Management Board for adoption by end May or beginning of June.

3.4 On 11 May the Management Board will consider the list of experts nominated for the reestablishment of EFSA's Scientific Committee and Panels in view of their appointment for a three-year term. The final decision will be announced via a press release and the lists will be published on the EFSA website.

3.5 Since last February EFSA Communications department issued 16 press releases and other public announcements. The Annual Report 2005 is expected to be ready by mid-June.

4. Key points arising from the Advisory Forum meeting in Prague by Jan Bloemendal (03.03.06)

4.1 Jan Bloemendal, International and Institutional Affairs, EFSA, updated the participants on the discussion held in Prague on the state of play in the field of nanosciences and nanotechnology. It was agreed that further exchange of information and knowledge is needed and that the Advisory Forum will serve as a platform for sharing such information. EFSA was also asked to consider the organisation of an open meeting to address future risk assessments on food and feed produced by the use of nanotechnologies.

4.2 In order to seek greater involvement of the Forum in EFSA's risk assessments and scientific activities, it was decided to dedicate time in the meetings of the Forum for more in-depth scientific discussions on certain topics.

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5. Communication on Avian Flu and Food Safety: Sharing experiences

- 5.1 This point on the agenda follows the request of the Advisory Forum to discuss the subject of communications on Avian Flu in greater detail with the members of the working group.
- 5.2 Alun Jones, Press Officer, EFSA, updated on the meeting of 6 March on Pandemic Influenza preparedness. This EU Coordination Meeting brought together press officers of the national competent health authorities and was organised by the European Commission (DG SANCO) with the participation of EFSA and International organisations such as OIE, WHO, HPA and UNICEF. A second similar meeting will be organised in Sweden in the upcoming months. The group agreed to establish itself as a permanent network of media contacts in order to share knowledge, improve EU preparedness plans, and co-ordinate messages where possible. It agreed to address the communication challenges regarding the health aspects of avian influenza and improve EU preparedness plans on communication for a possible flu pandemic.
- 5.3 The representative of DG SANCO informed that a new document outlining Key Facts on Avian Influenza was published on their website and this has been shared in Member States.
- 5.5 Ben Duncan, ECDC, informed that on 30 May a meeting will be organised in Stockholm to discuss future communications on Avian Flu.
- 5.4 Oscar Wawschinek, Austria presented the approach of AGES (Österreichische Agentur für Gesundheit und Ernährungssicherheit) in Communications on Avian Flu. He outlined the evolution of the Avian Influenza story in Austria, the crucial points and working processes put in place to meet demand. He illustrated the timeline of the activities planned by the Austrian Agency to face the growing requests from journalists and the public and the communications of updates via the Agency's website aimed at various target groups.
- 5.5 Roberto Rodríguez, Spain, explained the joint collaboration of the Spanish Health Ministry and of the National Food Safety Agency in communications on Avian Flu. Common communications were always supported by the recommendations issued by WHO, the European Commission and EFSA. This is believed to have helped in reassuring consumers. He also described the difficulties encountered in coordinating communications at national level.
- 5.6 From the discussions it appeared that messages communicated by Member States are consistent and broadly in line with those of EFSA, the European Commission, and WHO advice. Members also stressed that Avian Flu is first and foremost an animal health issue and should be presented as such. Clear and co-ordinated communications from all relevant authorities was considered important. Public authorities should seek to inform in a timely manner, and providing regular updates as soon information becomes available. Members underlined the need for a high level of transparency, notably regarding areas of uncertainties, is key to building trust. National food safety authorities have a unique role to play given their proximity with consumers. The outputs of the discussion will be reported back to the Advisory Forum at its next meeting on 19 May.

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5.7 The group agreed to update on a regular basis the **overview of food safety issues and avian flu**. This recapitulates all national communications with regard to avian flu, and is considered to be useful in preparing for future communications on the subject.

6. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), presentation by Ben Duncan

6.1 Ben Duncan, Spokesperson, ECDC, explained the role, the mission and the structure of the ECDC based in Stockholm. He also gave examples of the progress in external communications from ECDC's early days (March 2005) until today. He highlighted the activities planned and carried out on Avian Flu.

7. Update on aspartame by Carola Sondermann

7.1 Carola Sondermann, Senior Press Officer, EFSA presented the background to the risk assessment on aspartame carried out by the AFC Panel and gave information on its progress and timeline. Although the EFSA risk assessment is currently on-going and the outcome not yet known, members discussed the possible implications from a communications point of view and the sensitivity of this subject in the various Member States.

8. The work of the EFSA Panel on Contaminants in the food chain (CONTAM), by Dr. Claudia Heppner, Scientific Co-ordinator

8.1 Dr. Claudia Heppner, Scientific Co-ordinator of the EFSA CONTAM Panel, explained the mandate of the Panel and its way of working. She gave an overview of the work programme of the Panel for the period 2003-2006 with examples of adopted opinions. An outlook for the period 2006-2009 and the terms of reference of some upcoming opinions were also shared with the members.

8.2 A discussion followed and members shared their experiences on the issue of contaminants and its topicality in some Member States. Feedback on media interest in some countries was also given.

9. EFSA Risk Communication Strategy by Anne-Laure Gassin

(Doc AF Comm WG 02 02 06 – 3)

9.1 Anne-Laure Gassin introduced the subject highlighting the overall purpose of EFSA's Risk Communications Strategy as well as its primary targets and plans. Ms Gassin stressed the importance for EFSA to communicate and collaborate with intermediaries in order to ultimately reach the public with targeted and effective messages. Such strategy of "influencing the influencers" requires close collaboration with key actors involved in risk communications and notably the national food safety authorities in Member States.

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10. Influencing the influencers: discussions in break-out groups on EFSA's Communications Strategy

10.1 Members were divided into three groups and invited to brainstorm on how EFSA's outreach and collaboration with "influencers" could be achieved with the help of the national authorities. The groups were asked to report back to the working group with ideas for enhancing risk communications, and with ways to improve collaboration amongst members.

10.2 Members encouraged EFSA to strive for great simplicity of messages both on- and offline. Current communications is more suited to a technical audience and requires adaptation by national food safety authorities. Members could support EFSA in building its image and public profile at national level, possibly through joint communications (e.g. press releases) and/or joint collaboration (e.g. Eurobarometer). National food safety authorities have a multiplicity of partners at national level which could help further disseminate core messages from EFSA.

11. Communications: information exchange and forward planning

a. Key country issues regarding risk communications (country templates to be pre-circulated by members)

(Doc AF Comm WG 02 02 06 – 4)

11.a.1 Members of the group were asked to present the key issues on their national agendas; an exchange of views on some of the topics mentioned followed.

11.a.2 Marianne Schauzu, Germany, informed the group that a summary of the member's replies to the "fish consumption" questionnaire is about to be finalised. This dossier will be discussed in detail at the next meeting in June following further input from members.

b. EFSA: overview of upcoming scientific issues and related communication activities by Carola Sondermann and Alun Jones

11.b.1 EFSA's scientific press officers presented an overview of some of the opinions to be finalized by EFSA's scientific panels in the coming months and for which specific communications activities are under consideration. In particular members were asked questions with regard to an upcoming meeting with Member States on GMO risk assessment (Brussels, May 15) and the related press conference. Members were also advised of opinions to be published on bisphenol A, ochratoxin A, further work related to BSE and the publication of a report on the EFSA/WHO International Conference on Risk Assessment of Compounds that are both Genotoxic and Carcinogenic, which is expected in September/October 2006.

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12. Any other business

12.1. The afternoon before the meeting of 29 June will be dedicated to a training with members on the Extranet. A workshop on crisis communications will be planned in October; feedback of members with regard to points to be addressed in the workshop and/or names of speakers is welcome.

12.2 No other points were raised and the Chair closed the meeting at 15.00.