

AF Comm WG 25.10.06 – 2 _EN
Minutes of meeting



European Food Safety Authority

Draft Minutes

ADVISORY FORUM WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNICATIONS

EFSA, PARMA, ITALY

29 JUNE 2006

Members of the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications:

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

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Sweden	<i>SÖRENSON Jerker</i>
The Netherlands	<i>PAUL Leo</i>
United Kingdom	<i>TALBOT Karen</i>

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Observers and Invitees of the Communications Director:

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Denmark	<i>BENDER Charlotte</i>
Norway	<i>SOLEM Knut Albert</i>
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1. Welcome and adoption of agenda by Anne-Laure Gassin

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1.2 Anne-Laure Gassin, Director of Communications, EFSA, opened the meeting by welcoming the participants. She introduced the new members, Monika Zagrajek (Poland), Erika Viktoria Szabó (Hungary), and Josef Balga (Czech Republic). Manuel Barreto Dias, joining Ana Miranda (Portugal) for this meeting, and Leo PAUL representing The Netherlands were also introduced. She also thanked Claudia Roncancio Pena, Scientific Co-ordinator of the EFSA FEEDAP Panel, who presented the work of the Panel in the course of the meeting.

1.3 The agenda was accepted.

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2. **Minutes of the meeting 26 04 06 and matters arising**
(Doc AF Comm WG 29 06 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 In June 2006 the EFSA Management Board was renewed with the nomination of seven members, and EFSA's new Scientific Panels and Committee were reconstituted with the appointment of 191 scientific experts. The key outcome of the Management Board recommendations following EFSA's evaluation were formalized on 30 June and made public by EFSA's new Executive Director, Ms Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, who took up her post on 1st July. These recommendations outline the Authority's future work plan and will guide the new Executive Director's work.
- 3.2 One of the future priorities is enhancing the impact and effectiveness of EFSA communications. Within this field, EFSA will seek to (i) build visibility for EFSA's corporate mission and scientific expertise, (ii) enhance the clarity and relevance of EFSA risk communications for key target audiences and the public at large, and (iii) promote collaboration and coherence in communications on food and feed safety across the Community. To achieve this goal, the EFSA communications department will explore new ways to increase the already existing collaboration with National Food Safety agencies. This working group will broadly discuss this topic in forthcoming meetings.
- 3.3 The list of competent organisations operating in the fields within EFSA's mission (cf. Article 36 network) was discussed at the last Management Board meeting and will be approved in the future. The group was informed that some of the organisations or institutions on the list have also competence in Risk Communications. Their services could therefore be potentially used in the field of communications.
- 3.4 Following the last meeting of the working group, a Task Force on "Cooperation in Communications" (CiC) was set up. The outcome of the discussions which took place after the meeting of this Working Group will be reported back to the group.
- 3.5 Since the previous meeting in April, the Communications department organised a Press Conference on the results of EFSA's risk assessment on a new study on the safety of Aspartame. The conference was broadcasted on the Authority's website and was watched with interest by more than 2200 viewers. Moreover, EFSA issued seven press releases, two Frequently Asked Questions documents and other supporting information material on scientific issues. Two new web pages focusing respectively on Aspartame and GMOs have also been created.
4. **Key points arising from the Advisory Forum meeting in Vienna by Jan Bloemendal (19.05.06)**
- 4.1 Referring to the last meeting of the Advisory Forum (AF) held in Vienna, Jan Bloemendal, EFSA International and Institutional Affairs, reported that EFSA's Working programme 2007 was shared with Member States and their feedback was sought.

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- 4.2 The Advisory Forum was updated on the progress made by EFSA's Scientific Committee concerning the assessment of botanicals. The previous feedback of the AF members on a questionnaire on botanicals was taken into account by the working group of the Scientific Committee working on this issue. AF Members showed also interest in the issue of marine biotoxins. They were informed on the development of a mandate for a working group of the CONTAM Panel to be set up in order to assess alternatives for testing the toxins.
- 4.3 The *ad hoc* Working group of the AF on the Input of National Authorities into the work of EFSA's Scientific Committee, Panels and other Expert Groups (AFWG-INA) presented a document outlining proposals for the exchange of scientific information between EFSA and the Member States and among Member States themselves. The document stresses that the AF is the right arena for exchange of information. The AF members could act as the "focal points" for collection and circulation of scientific information to be shared. The final version of the document will be approved in the near future.
- 4.2 Jan Bloemendal also referred to the discussions on a policy paper on the AF Extranet, describing progress on its development, ideas for possible users, and possible future applications. Collaboration of AF members is essential for the further development of this important tool for timely information exchange.

5. Communication on food safety issues related to GMOs: Sharing experiences

- 5.1 Anne Laure Gassin gave an overview of EFSA communication activities on GMOs since the Environment Council in March 2006, underlining what had been achieved in terms of media impact. In March, EFSA was drawn into the political debate on GMOs and was criticised by several high profile speakers, which subsequently reflected negatively in media coverage. EFSA has taken a series of actions to address member states concerns. In particular EFSA held a forum with national experts in May to discuss concerns with regard to GM risk assessment. Subsequent discussion at the Environmental Council in June 2006 on GM risk assessment and EFSA's role resulted in more neutral media coverage.
- 5.2 Daniel Glanville, EFSA Communications, added that while EFSA should not become involved in the political debate surrounding GMOs, EFSA cannot work in isolation from the ongoing scientific debate. It has to show itself open to exchange views with scientists and other stakeholders who do not agree with its positions.

6. The work of the EFSA Panel on Additives and products or substances used in animal feed (FEEDAP), by Dr. Claudia Roncancio Pena, Scientific Co-ordinator

- 6.1 Dr. Claudia Roncancio Pena, Scientific Co-ordinator of the EFSA FEEDAP Panel, presented the group the mandate of the Panel and the authorisation process of Feed Additives in Europe, explaining EFSA's scientific contribution to this process. She also gave general information on current categories of feed additives. She informed about Panel members and working procedures, as well as on the future work programme of the Panel.

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7. Fish Consumption Questionnaire: Update by Marianna Schauzu

7.1 Marianna Schauzu, BfR Germany, presented the main results of an exercise carried out by the Institute which compared data on fish consumption in the various Member States. She pointed out how important differences in fish consumption exist amongst Member States and, within a Member State amongst different groups of people. She also highlighted the differences in fish consumption recommendations given to the public by the Member States.

7.2 Given the existing differences it was clear that each National Food Safety Agency has a key role in communicating advice regarding fish consumption to consumers. Moreover, advice on the risks/benefits of fish consumption should be mainly dealt with on a country-by-country basis (given factors such as diversity of the food supply, different levels of contamination, differences in eating habits, etc. have to be taken into account).

8. Scientific communication on food safety: discussions in break-out groups regarding tools and practices

8.1 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 brainstorm and try to answer the main question: "How can communicators react to misinformation or unsound science on food safety risk?" The session was organised around three sub-questions: (i) "in which cases should you react to misinformation or unsound science?", (ii) "in which cases might it be best not to react to such misinformation or unsound science?", and (iii) "how can we communicate effectively in these situations and through which channels or tools is communications most effective?"

8.2 Each break-out group reported the outcome of its discussions to the main working group. Members stressed the importance of assessing the credibility of the source and most importantly the possible negative impact of such messages on vulnerable consumer groups. The tools chosen to react very much depend on the extent of the inaccuracy and the possible impact of the inaccurate message in the public domain. In any case, competent authorities and independent scientists were identified as the most appropriate channels for communicating to the public. The role of experts in gathering sound scientific evidence in order to inform consumers was defined as essential. Finally, the group emphasized that the level of reaction should be proportionate to the risk engendered by miscommunication. The decision to respond, as well as the level and nature of response, also depends on the nature of the risk, e.g. possible health risk, corporate reputation, and/or political impact.

8.3 The group agreed to develop guidance on how to address this information in the media for the benefit of members. EFSA to coordinate this task.

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9 Communications: information exchange and forward planning

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

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- 9.a.1 Group members presented the key issues on their national agendas. The presentation was followed by an exchange of views on some of the topics mentioned.
- 9.a.2 The Czech Republic Authorities organise yearly a comprehensive staff training on risk management and communications.
- 9.a.2 The UK informed the group about the communications approach followed to keep the British public informed on the occasion of a recall of a food product contaminated by Salmonella. While it was mainly an issue linked to food controls, this case highlighted the responsibility that food operators have in informing public authorities at an early stage regarding possible risks in the food supply.

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

- 9.b.1 EFSA's scientific press officer gave an overview of a selection of the opinions to be adopted by EFSA's scientific panels in the coming months. The opinions, for which specific communications activities are under consideration, were chosen on the basis of their interest from a communications point of view. Members were updated on the upcoming opinions on *Noni Juice*, an authorized novel food ingredient since 2003 for which EFSA's scientific panel is reviewing its safety following three cases of food intoxication.

10. Any other business

- 10.1 The next meeting is scheduled on 25 October in Den Haag. It will be preceded by a workshop on crisis communications (24 October), involving various EU experts in this area. Members of the working group are invited, registration will be possible in the coming months.
- 10.2 Some members mentioned the interest of covering the issues of Nanoscience and Nanotechnology, currently under discussion within the Advisory Forum, in one of the next meetings in order to discuss the communications implications.
- 8.4 Meeting dates for 2007 will be tabled on the occasion of the October meeting.
- 8.5 No other points were raised and the Chair closed the meeting at 15.00.