European Food Safety Authority

Minutes

ADVISORY FORUM WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNICATIONS

FAVV-AFSCA, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

01 MARCH 2007

MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY FORUM WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNICATIONS:

Chair: GASSIN Anne-Laure, Communications Director, EFSA

Austria	**WAWSCHINEK Oskar**
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The Netherlands	**GELINCK Coen**
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Portugal	**LAGE Manuel**
Romania	**MURESAN Lucia**
Slovak Republic	**CHUDY Martin**
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Belgium	**CRÉMER Charles**
Belgium	**DIRICKS Herman**
Belgium	**JOORIS Inge**
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1. Adoption of the agenda by Anne-Laure Gassin

(Doc **AF Comm WG 01 03 07 – 1**)

1.1 Anne-Laure Gassin, Director of Communications, EFSA, opened the meeting by thanking Pascal Houbaert, Director for Transformation and Distribution of Foodstuffs in the Control Policy Department at the FAVV-AFSCA, for hosting the event and welcomed the participants.
After her introduction, Anne-Laure Gassin gave the floor to Herman Diricks, Director of General Control Policy at FAVV-AFSCA.

2. Welcome and introductory presentation by Herman Dirick, Director General Control Policy FAVV-AFSCA

2.1 After welcoming the participants and thanking Pascal Houbaert for his work, Herman Dirick gave a presentation on surveillance of food safety in Belgium, starting from the creation of the federal agency, describing its organization and giving some details on the control process of risk assessment.

After the presentation, Herman Dirick answered a series of questions on the structure and the work of the Belgian agency.

3. Minutes of the meeting 25 10 06 and matters arising

(Doc **AF Comm WG 01 03 07 – 2)**

3.1 Considering the presence of new members and observers, a tour-de-table was proposed by Anne-Laure Gassin in order to give new people the possibility to introduce themselves and become familiar with the rest of the group.

3.2 The agenda was introduced by Anne-Laure Gassin and adopted as proposed. Gelinck Coen proposed to show a corporate video at the end of the meeting if time permitted.

3.3 The minutes of the meeting held on 25 10 2006 in The Hague were approved without any changes. They will be translated and published on EFSA's website.

3.4 Anne-Laure referred to item 4.1 of the minutes and informed that the task force for developing guidance on how to address so-called misinformation in the media had met the day before and that this would be discussed under item 9.

3.5 She also underlined that three more items from the previous meeting, nanotechnology (item 4.2), building visibility for the Advisory Forum and EFSA in Member States(item 7.2) and EFSA's 5th Anniversary would be discussed respectively under item 4, item 5. and item 8. of the present meeting.

4. Update on progress at EFSA by Anne-Laure Gassin

4.1 Recruitment is a key priority for EFSA's Executive Director, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, who aims to reach a number of 335 staff by end 2008. Anne-Laure stressed that EFSA's HR team has been strengthened to support this recruitment drive and that the Communications Team is growing as well. Among others, two relevant posts have been published: Head of Press Office and Head of Publications and Events. In the aim of co-operation, EFSA's Executive Director also intends to continue to hire staff from new Member States and to encourage experts with relevant experience from national administrations to take up positions as seconded national experts in the Authority. To this purpose a letter was sent to the Members of the Advisory Forum, including for posts in the Communications Directorate.
Additional offices in building nearby to EFSA's current headquarter have been rented in Parma and a number of staff will move in June 2007.

4.2 Anne-Laure Gassin informed the group of several speaking engagements of EFSA's Executive Director, such as the speech held at the International Conference on Food Safety that took place at the beginning of February in Munich and the one at the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (European Parliament) held the day before the meeting and which was very well received. On that occasion, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle stressed the importance of EFSA's strategy on cooperation with Member States and the importance of EFSA's providing independent scientific advice. Anne-Laure Gassin informed the group that the Strategy on Co-operation with Member States had been endorsed by the Management Board in December 2006 and confirmed that EFSA is still working to strengthen the procedures in place to ensure independence which is a founding principle of EFSA.

4.3 As far as the communications activities are concerned, the group was informed that the new logo of EFSA will be launched at the Management Board meeting taking place on 27th March in Berlin and that on the same occasion the activities planned to celebrate EFSA's 5th Anniversary will be officially announced. Anne-Laure Gassin confirmed that the web redesign is proceeding according to schedule and thanked the group members who attended the workshop organised by CIMEX company in London last January and which was aimed to understand how external users access and use the site.

New publications were also mentioned and it was announced that the Annual Report 2006 will be made available at the Management Board meeting in Berlin. Anne-Laure Gassin also referred to Bisphenol-A and nutrition and health claims as recent key issues in the media and mentioned the conference on this subject held in November 2006 in Bologna which was web streamed, recording more than 4 000 viewers.

4.4 Finally, Anne-Laure Gassin explained that in order to better prioritize and co-ordinate communications at EFSA, in the course of this year, handling plans on subjects whose communications should be carefully evaluated will be developed. These will also be shared in future with group members.

Some questions and answers on the launch of the logo and on the process foreseen for the development of handling plans followed.

5. Nanotechnology

5.a Nanotechnology in food production: a challenge? by Anne Theobald, AFC Panel EFSA

5.a.1 After introducing herself and EFSA's AFC Panel, Anne Theobald, Scientific Officer, gave a presentation on nanotechnology in food production. She gave a definition of "nanoparticle" and after listing the several application areas of nanotechnology, she concentrated attention on applications in the food field, giving examples of products and doing a comparison with biotechnology in the 90s. Nanotechnology is a key issue for EFSA: four of the nine scientific panels at EFSA have already been identified as possibly concerned in dealing with scientific questions concerning this new technology. Establishing trust among consumers on this topic and avoiding wrong information were identified by the members as some of the existing challenges which need to be tackled.

5.a.2 At the end of the discussion some actions as sharing information on this issue, creating a dedicated section in the Extranet, developing a handling plan to be shared among members were agreed. The topic will also be discussed again at the next meeting of the AGRC.

5.b Nanotechnology and consumer safety by Gaby Fleur-Böel, Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung

Gaby-Fleur Böl, Head of the Department Risk Communication at the BfR, gave a presentation on nanotechnology and consumer safety describing the activities which are being undertaken in Germany among experts, consumers and government, e.g. a consumer conference about nanotechnology in food, textiles and cosmetics and a Delphi survey on the same subject.

5.b.1 Anne-Laure Gassin thanked Anne Theobald and Gaby-Fleur Böl for their exhaustive presentations and gave the floor to the group members who raised several questions. The discussion was particularly focused on consumer perception of new technologies and on how an open dialogue with the public can be established.

5.b.2 After an interesting exchange of opinions, some actions were defined in order to continue the work on nanotechnology. Information on the issue will be shared among Members States, a section on nanotechnology may be created in the Extranet and EFSA will develop a handling plan to be shared with group members whose contribution will be sought. Moreover, Anne-Laure Gassin underlined that the topic will be added again as an item for discussion at the next meeting of the Advisory Group on Risk Communication.

6 Update on Advisory Forum meetings by Jan Bloemendal

6.1 Jan Bloemendal gave an update on the activities of the Advisory Forum and provided the group with details on the status of the three working areas: exchange of scientific information, Strategy on Cooperation and Networking and Article 36.

6.2 Some questions were raised concerning the list of the selected organisations operating in the fields within EFSA's mission (Article 36). It was confirmed that the list is public and available for consultation on the EFSA website and that it will be handled as a "living" list, meaning that new organisations can be added in the future.

7 Co-operation and networking strategy

7.a Update on scientific co-operation and projects by Jan Bloemendal

(Doc **AF 8&9.02.2007-3, -4, 8a, 8b, 8c, 8d, 8e)**

7.a.1 Jan Bloemendal gave an overview of the front-runner projects undertaken by EFSA in order to implement the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking with Member States. These projects will be the first carried out as an implementation of the strategy. The six projects concern: the establishment of a database of experts from EU Member States; the fortification of food with folic acid; identification of emerging food safety risks; the harmonization of data collection; the establishment of an EU network of food consumption database managers; and marine biotoxins.

7.a.2 For each project a leader has been identified. Advisory Forum members have been invited to express their interest and to contribute to such projects.

7.b Co-operation in communications by Anne-Laure Gassin

(Doc **AF Comm WG 01 03 07 – 3)**

7.b.1 Anne-Laure Gassin presented the initiatives in progress and/or under consideration within the overall project of co-operation in communications. She listed the activities that could be developed, such as joint events in Member States, media events, web actions, and joint publications.

7.b.2 A good example for a joint activity is the workshop organised by the Food Safety Agency in the UK in collaboration with EFSA. The workshop focused on emerging risks and is taking place at the beginning of March in London.

7.b.3 The EFSA's 5th Anniversary project was identified as the initial step to strengthen co-operation, together with other joint events and initiatives such as analyzing requirements/ outputs for online cooperation and creating terms of reference for possible joint publications (newsletter and brochure projects).

7.c Joint events in Member States by Lucia de Luca

7.c.1 More details on joint events in Member States were given by Lucia de Luca, Press Officer at EFSA, who mentioned initiatives and activities to be developed in collaboration with Member States on the occasion of Management Board and Advisory Forum meetings or of other events. Written web stories, joint web texts, and joint media activities were indicated by Lucia de Luca as possible collaboration opportunities.

7.d Web initiatives

7.d.1 Sarah Weatherley, Web Manager, EFSA, presented some slides showing how EFSA's visibility and profile can be raised online and how the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking can be implemented through the website. Cross-linking, cross-promoting of the Advisory Forum, information sharing are some of the ideas Sarah Weatherley proposed within the project of online co-operation whilst a logo tailored for the Advisory Forum and a brochure explaining its activities could be considered as relevant offline actions.

7.d.2. The group agreed to constitute a task force to develop terms of reference for these projects which could then be taken for information and endorsement by the Advisory Forum. Members from Norway, Ireland, United Kingdom and Netherlands expressed interest in this work and will communicate names of individuals from their respective teams to participate in the task force. Sarah Weatherley will follow-up with members in advance of the next meeting.

8 EFSA's 5th Anniversary: an update and co-ordination of activities by Alun Jones

8.1 Alun Jones presented the EFSA's 5th Anniversary starting from the consideration that the whole project is a platform to start implementation of EFSA's Strategy on Co-operation and Networking. Alun Jones mentioned key messages, gave a programme update and explained to the group that Member States can support EFSA through web linking, by publishing the new EFSA logo/banner, announcing the programme of the anniversary and contributing to joint activities.

8.2 The group was informed that Alun Jones will be the contact for all general inquiries related to the 5th Anniversary, whilst Sarah Weatherley will respond to all web-related questions. More details on timing for linking and announcements on websites will be sent to the members of the group.

9 Communications: information exchange and forward planning

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

(Doc **AF Comm WG 01 03 07 – 4)**

9.a.1 Before starting the discussion on the key issues, Carola Sondermann gave outcome from the first meeting of the AFCWG Task Force (TF) on how to best react to misinformation in the media.

The question on how the Task Force can best meet members' needs and work in the right direction was raised. Some proposals were made such as creating a new section in the Extranet and sharing information related to issues which have occurred in the different countries. A check-list was not considered an appropriate tool by some of the members.

At the end of the discussion, it was agreed to circulate that the presentation given by Carola Sondermann would be circulated to the members together with the break-out groups' slides of the meeting held in June 2006. Anne-Laure Gassin invited members to send their input on the basis of the above mentioned documents and to provide news, examples, scenarios, needs and wishes to the Task Force.

A document for further discussion will be prepared according to the information received from members and the topic will be an agenda item for the meeting in April.

9.a.2 Key issues were received by Austria, Germany, Ireland and Norway . The members gave details on the information sent and a session of questions and comments followed.

9.a.3 David Payne explained how the Food Standards Agency UK handled the Avian Influenza H5N1 outbreak which occurred at the Bernard Matthews factory in Holton, Suffolk, between the end of January and the beginning of February 2007. The Agency's involvement was from a food safety point of view and its website was continually updated as new information came to light. This followed talks with the company, animal health officials at the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and public health experts at the Health Protection Agency. Media coverage died down after a report discounted a link between the UK outbreak and a Bernard Matthews factory in Hungary.

9.a.4 The floor was given to Coen Gelinck who updated the group on a research carried out at the Maastricht University on acrylamide with a publication in a scientific journal expected in the coming months. The group agreed to monitor closely this issue and to co-ordinate with respect to any communications developments required.

9.b EFSA: overview of upcoming scientific/communications issues by Carola Sondermann and Alun Jones

(Doc **AF Comm WG 01 03 07 – 5)**

9. b.1 EFSA's scientific press officers gave an overview of upcoming scientific issues for which further communication support is being considered.

10. Any other business

10.1 The corporate video proposed by Gelinck Coen at the beginning of the meeting could not be shown due to lack of time. The file will be posted on the Extranet.

10.2 No other points were raised and the Chair closed the meeting at 15.15 by thanking members for their contributions as well as Pascal Houbaert and EFSA team for the organization of the meeting.

10.3 The next meeting is scheduled on 24 April and will take place in Larnaca (Cyprus).