

Minutes

ADVISORY FORUM WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNICATIONS

LARNACA, CYPRUS

24 APRIL 2007

MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY FORUM WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNICATIONS:

Chair: TALBOT Karen, Communications Advisor, replacing GASSIN Anne-Laure, Communications Director

Belgium	JOORIS Inge
Cyprus	ELEFThERIADOU Mary
Czech Republic	BALGA Josef
Germany	BÖL Gaby-Fleur
Greece	KRESTOS Vasilios
Hungary	CSEH Júlia
Ireland	FIZSIMMONS Ruth
Portugal	LAGE Manuel
Sweden	GUSTAFSSON Karin
The Netherlands	GELINCK Coen
United Kingdom	GABRIELLE Owtram

Observers and Invitees of the Communications Director:

Croatia	HEROLD Diana
Norway	SOLEM KNUT Albert

European Food Safety Authority Staff:

DE LUCA Lucia	SÖDERLUND Ingela
FANTINI Alessandra	SONDERMANN Carola
POZZATTI Piera	TALBOT Karen

Apologies:

Austria	WAWSCHINEK Oskar
Belgium	HOUBAERT Pascal
Bulgaria	PCHELKINSKA Mariela
Denmark	KORNHOLT Heidi
European Commission	BENASSI Marie-Paule
Finland	LAESLEHTO Marja
France	LEYDET Valérie
Latvia	SANTARE Dace
Luxembourg	HAU Patrick
Poland	ZAGRAJEK Monika
Romania	MONEA Alina - Ioana
Slovak Republic	CHUDY Martin
Spain	RODRIGUEZ ANDRES Roberto
Turkey	BUDAK Nurseren

1. Adoption of the agenda by Karen Talbot

(Doc AF Comm WG 24.04.07 – 1)

- 1.1 Karen Talbot, Communications Advisor at EFSA, chaired the meeting in place of Anne-Laure Gassin, absent on sick leave. She thanked the attendees to the meeting and introduced Costas Michael, Director of the Cyprus State General Laboratory and member of EFSA's Advisory Forum. She also thanked him and his staff for hosting the meeting.
- 1.2 The agenda was presented to the members and adopted as proposed.
- 1.3 Karen Talbot proposed the members to briefly introduce themselves through a tour-de-table and mentioned the apologies.

2. Welcome and presentation on “Food Safety Control in Cyprus” by Dr. Costas Michael, Director, Cyprus State General Laboratory (Ministry of Health)

- 2.1 After giving a warm welcome to the participants and wishing a successful meeting, Costas Michael, Director of the Cyprus State General Laboratory and representing Cyprus in the Advisory Forum, gave a presentation on the structure and functions of the State General Laboratory explaining the food and feed control process in Cyprus.
- 2.2 Costas Michael concluded his intervention thanking the participants and informed that he would be pleased to answer questions during the coffee break.

3. Minutes of the meeting 01 03 07 and matters arising

(Doc AF Comm WG 24.04.07 – 2)

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 1st March in Brussels were approved with an amendment in item 5.b. proposed by Gaby-Fleur Böl. The minutes will be published on the EFSA's website.

4. Update on progress at EFSA by Karen Talbot

- 4.1 Karen Talbot informed the group of the most relevant activities carried out by EFSA's Communications Directorate giving special attention to the development of the new website, which will be launched on 15th July and is foreseen to be a more accessible tool for the users. She took the occasion to thank again the members of the group who participated in the workshop organised in London in January underlining the importance of their contribution to the work.

- 4.2 Karen Talbot updated the members on EFSA's new publications, most of them related to the 5th Anniversary's project. Press releases were published on proposed EU MRLs for pesticides and an EU-wide survey on Salmonella levels in broiler meat flocks, and web stories, another mean to communicate on interesting topics, such as Aflatoxins and cloning, were also made available.
- 4.3 Ingela Söderlund, Policy Officer at EFSA, update members on the Management Board Meeting which was held on 27th March in Berlin, hosted by the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR). She informed members about the adoption of three documents for 2008, the draft Management Plan, the Work Plan and the Budget. The Annual Report 2006 was also adopted, while the 2008 draft Management Plan has been circulated for consultation to Member States and the final document will be adopted by the Board at the end of the year. Key topics discussed at the Away Day meeting, which took place the day before, were: improving working conditions of EFSA's scientists and the public consultation launched by the European Commission on the feasibility of EFSA levying fees for its scientific work.

5. AF Meeting Berlin

- 5.1 Karen Talbot, supported by Costas Michael, gave a report back from the meeting of the Advisory Forum which took place on 19th April in Berlin, hosted by the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR). The Forum further discussed also on the front runner projects proposed by the Steering Group on Cooperation (SGC), which were presented to the members of the working group in the previous March meeting.
- 5.2 Karen Talbot explained that the establishment of a focal point in the Member States for a close cooperation with EFSA was also discussed. It was clarified to the members that the term "focal point" does not refer only to one person but to a group of people with the task of acting as a connecting channel between EFSA and the Member States. Development in this area will certainly have an impact for the members of the working group and it will be important that there is cooperation between WG member and their focal points.

6. Co-operation and networking strategy by Lucia de Luca

(Doc AF Comm WG 24 04 07 – 3)

- 6.1 Karen Talbot introduced the concept paper on communications projects related to the Advisory Forum strategy for cooperation. Members were asked to give their feedback on the ideas mentioned in the document.
- 6.2 Lucia de Luca presented the paper in detail, explaining the various proposals and gathering comments of group's members. The group highlighted the importance of focussing on enhancing communication exchange on scientific subjects, and supported the idea of developing an occasional A-4 supplement to the EFSAnews, to be used in other agencies'

newsletters. Norway, Belgium, Greece and the Netherlands volunteered to take part to the editorial board and support EFSA in taking the project forward. The Irish member will come back with a confirmation at a later stage. Members also stressed the importance of better explaining to their national audiences the role of EFSA and the one of Member States in the EU food safety system. To this end a clear text could be posted in the web pages of the national agencies. The text, to be drafted by EFSA and shared with members, will explain the way such system works, the relationships between EFSA, the Commission and the national food safety agencies and the role of the national agencies as well as of EFSA. Members thought that ideas like the developing of a leaflet or of a logo related to the Advisory Forum should be addressed at a later stage. The outcome of the discussions on the concept paper will be presented at the next meeting of the Advisory Forum on 28-29 June.

- 6.3 Karen Talbot concluded the discussion referring to the Terms of Reference for the working group and the appropriateness to revise them after nearly four years. Members found this proposal appropriate and she confirmed that EFSA will work on a draft document coming back on further steps at the next meeting.

7. Dealing with inaccurate information on food safety: Carola Sondermann

- 7.1 Carola Sondermann referred to the discussion held during the last meeting in Brussels. Following her request to provide information, practical examples and documents on the issue, several members of the group provided input. One concrete case was chosen to be further discussed in two break-out groups.

- 7.2 Inge Jooris, Press Officer at the Belgian agency (FAVV-AFSCA), explained the case which happened in December 2006 in Belgium when a Belgian consumer organisation warned against a product because low residues of semicarbazide (SEM) have been found interpreted as proof for of residues of nitrofurantoin. A few days later, when the results of the test carried out by the Belgian agency were available, this proved to be wrong: no nitrofurantoin had been used and no health risk could be identified deriving from a residue.

- 7.3. Members were divided into two groups, invited to brainstorm on the kind of information given in the case and asked to: (i) define the key elements to be taken into account as regards communications; (ii) express their approach to answer to; (iii) define the most appropriate communications tools to be used; (iv) describe which data and information regarding communications are needed.

Group A stressed the source of information (e.g. media, an organisation or a NGO) and the analysis of the source itself as a key element as well as the importance of identifying the right spokesperson and appropriate communications tools. To be honest, transparent and trustworthy was also considered to be key. Differences across Member States should be taken into account.

Group B concluded that it is important to be pro-active. First Question to be answered is “Is a reaction necessary?”. A list of questions to help take this decision was put together. The group also mentioned the importance of considering the impact of the inaccurate information across the Member States. To this end, information exchange on media requests/activities was considered by all the members as a very important tool.

- 7.4 A mailing list grouping the most relevant person in each Member States dealing with media will be created and communicated to the group members. This will enhance timely communications and intelligence sharing on subjects triggering possible media interest.
- 7.5 At the end of the discussion Karen Talbot stressed the importance of learning by others’ experiences and made the proposal of having a presentation of a case history at each meeting presented by a member. Members agreed to have a new standing item on the agenda and Norway volunteered to do the first one at the next meeting.

8. EFSA’s 5th Anniversary by Lucia de Luca

Lucia de Luca presented a brief update on the EFSA’s 5th Anniversary project, highlighting the joint events with Member States and informing the group that a scientific forum will be organised on 21-22 November in Brussels. Members were asked to provide names of speakers for the session on risk communications, planned for the second day. Members were invited to participate to the forum, and in particular to this last session.

9. Issues raised for EFSA and Member States when communicating on data that highlight country differences such as variable prevalence levels across Member States: salmonella

- 9.1 Karen Talbot introduced the subject by presenting the results of the media coverage gathered by EFSA following the publication of an EU-wide survey on Salmonella levels in broiler meat flocks and the related Press Release. Members were asked to exchange views on similar communications which could pose to the members and what would the best way be of dealing with this kind of communications in the future.
- 9.2 The majority of members acknowledged that receiving the information more in advance of the time of publication would allow for a better preparation of the work with national media. Similar topics needs to be put into a national context and also might have impact on measures in place at national level regarding risk management’s implications. It is therefore understandable for media to seek answers from their national authorities. More time to prepare the work at national level would definitely allow for enhanced coherence in answering the requests of national media on the domestic aspect of similar surveys. It was agreed that EFSA will try to keep the members posted more in advance in these circumstances.

- 9.3 It was also acknowledged that whilst such figures may cause difficulties for some countries as regards the figures, it was important for EFSA to be transparent. Individual MSs had a responsibility to look at their position and explain the situation for themselves.

10. 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 24 04 07 – 4)

Key issues were received by Ireland and Germany. The members gave details on the information.

More issues such as folic acid and acrylamide were discussed. Karen Gustaffson said that a Q&A document is being developed in Sweden and that a decision will soon be made public. Information on folic acid will be shared on the Extranet.

Coen Gelinck gave an update on acrylamide highlighting no major changes since the last meeting.

It was agreed that a section with information on acrylamide also from Germany will also be created on the Extranet.

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

(Doc AF Comm WG 24 04 07 – 5)

Carola Sondermann gave an overview of upcoming scientific issues for which further communication support is being considered. Among other items, she mentioned the mandates that EFSA has recently received on cloning and on killing and stunning seals. She also reported on the SRM back calculation, GMO issues such as MON863 and the progress made in the area of Nutrition and Health Claims.

11. Any other business

- 11.1 The corporate video proposed by Coen Gelinck at the previous meeting was shown and appreciated by the attendees. The proposal of showing more videos related to the various agencies was made and accepted.

- 11.2 Following a question raised by Gaby-Fleur Bøl on the usefulness of the key country issues, it was recognised that they are a good and interesting tool to exchange information between members. Karen Talbot said that the issue might be considered in the revision of the Terms of Reference.

Gaby Fleur Bøl also asked whether a presentation/report could be prepared by each country and finally, whether the minutes of the meeting could be circulated to members earlier. Both requests were accepted and EFSA will do its best to prepare a meeting report as soon as possible. Action points will be circulated to members right after the meeting. .

- 11.3 No other points were raised and the Chair closed the meeting at 15.00 by thanking members for their contributions, Mary Eleftheriadou and EFSA team for the organisation of the meeting.
- 11.4 The next meeting is scheduled on 5 July and will take place in Helsinki (Finland).