Minutes

ADVISORY FORUM WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNICATIONS

PARMA, ITALY

21 FEBRUARY 2008

MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY FORUM WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNICATIONS:

Chair: GASSIN Anne-Laure, Communications Director

Austria	**WAWSCHINEK Oskar**
Belgium	**CASSART Pierre**
Czech Republic	**BALGA Josef**
Denmark	**KORNHOLT Heidi**
Finland	**LAESLEHTO Marja**
Hungary	**CSEH Júlia**
Ireland	**CONWAY Edel**
Ireland	**RYDER Jane**
Latvia	**KAZOCINA Aija**
Norway	**SOLEM Albert**
Portugal	**LAGE Manuel**
Romania	**SIMIONESCU Raluca**
Slovak Republic	**DANČO Patrik**
The Netherlands	**MEIJER Jan**
United Kingdom	**BENNIE Jaz**

Observers and Invitees of the Communications Director:

European Commission	**GAUTRAIS Bruno**
Norway	**SOLEM Albert**

European Food Safety Authority Staff:

ADAMOVA Monika	GLANVILLE Daniel
BERGER Bernhard	GAMMING Yenny
BONDURI Gian Luca	JONES Alun
BULLER Christoph	KUMRIC Goran
CARLANDER David	NILSSON Torben
DE LUCA Lucia	PAGANI Stephen
FANTINI Alessandra	SONDERMANN Carola
GAUDOUT Claire	TALBOT Karen

Apologies:

Bulgaria	**PCHELKINSKA Mariela**
Cyprus	**ELEFTHERIADOU Mary**
France	**LEYDET Valérie**
Germany	**BÖL Gaby-Fleur**
Greece	**KRESTOS Vassilios**
Italy	**TARANTO Mirella**
Luxembourg	**HAU Patrick**
Poland	**ZAGRAJEK Monika**
Spain	**ALONSO MARTIN Hector**
Sweden	**CORP Eva**
Turkey	**BUDAK Nurseren**

1. Adoption of the agenda by Anne-Laure Gassin

(Doc **AF Comm WG 21.02.08 – 1**)

1.1 Anne-Laure Gassin, Director of Communications at EFSA, opened the meeting thanking the participants for their attendance. She introduced the new members and the new EFSA staff joining the meeting and thanked Lucia de Luca for running of the AFCWG secretariat that will be now responsibility of Monika Adamova. She informed the members that Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle was not able to attend the meeting and was sending her apologies.

1.2 She also reminded members that all of them need to submit the DoIs at their earliest convenience and pointed out the importance of designating one permanent member that will be regularly attending the AFCWG meetings. DoIs will be published on the EFSA website.

1.3 Anne-Laure Gassin also highlighted, that at times when the permanent member will not be able to attend the meeting, the Member States are advised to designate an alternate member that will be the permanent member's replacement. Lastly, she mentioned that both permanent and alternate members need to submit their DoIs.

1.4 As no additional items were indicated by the group members, the agenda was adopted as proposed.

2. Minutes of the meeting 24 10 07 and matters arising

(Doc **AF Comm WG 21.02.08 – 2)**

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 24 October in Parma were approved without changes and will be published on the EFSA website and extranet.

2.2 Anne-Laure Gassin reiterated that the minutes of the meeting will always in future be approved by written procedure, thus following the procedure that EFSA proposed to the MB for the future adoption of AF's minutes. . It was decided that the minutes will be circulated to the group members for approval as quickly as possible after the meeting and giving the members 2 weeks to send their comments.

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

3.1. Anne-Laure Gassin updated the members on the latest developments at EFSA and provided highlights of 2007 in relation to EFSA's work programme, organisation and communications activities. She also highlighted new challenges such as workload (increasing requests for risk assessments) and the increased role of EFSA in new areas such as nutrition.

3.2. Key objectives for 2008 include continuing to deliver the best scientific advice in a timely manner, to build on the quality of EFSA's scientific outputs; and be at the forefront of RA methodologies in Europe. She outlined how structural changes and staff recruitment are strengthening both quality and delivery.

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

4.1 Anne-Laure Gassin further updated the group also on the key issues EFSA communicated on between Q4 2007 and Jan 2008. These included cloning, colours and hyperactivity in children; health claims and nutrient profiles; animal welfare aspects of killing and skinning of seals; and the EFSA-ECDC annual report on zoonoses.

4.2 Anne-Laure Gassin informed the group about an audit of standard operational procedures in communications from the European Commission and a discussion took place on the procedures for validation and pre-notification in relation to communication outputs. At the end of the discussion it has been agreed that EFSA will create a specific section on extranet to publish / share working processes of both EFSA and the members.

5. Key points arising from the Advisory Forum meetings in The Hague on 6-7 December and in Parma on 31 January – 1 February and update on ESCO status by Torben Nilsson

5.1 Torben Nilsson summarised the outcome of the Advisory Forum (AF) meetings in The Hague on 6-7 December 2007 and in Parma on 31 January – 1 February 2008. He mentioned that the AF endorsed the document for a partial revision of its operational rules (i.e. written procedure for adoption of minutes), which has been submitted for the approval of EFSA's Management Board. Furthermore, he mentioned that the focal point network, whose responsibility will be to support the AF, has been established.

5.2 In addition, he informed the group that the extranet re-structuring will be discussed at the next AF meeting on 10-11 April in Rome. The AFCWG will be updated at the next meeting in Dublin. He also mentioned that different scientific cooperation working groups will be regularly updated on the extranet.

5.3 Torben Nilsson informed the members about scientific meetings that have been held and are planned, including 2 special AF meetings in 2008 on Animal Health and Plant Health. Torben Nilsson also updated the group on ESCO status – he stated that both the steering group on cooperation (SGC) and ESCOs are established and functioning

5.4 There were no questions raised by members

6. Animal cloning by Karen Talbot and David Carlander

6.1 Karen Talbot and David Carlander updated the group on EFSA's work done so far on animal cloning. The different phases of EFSA's work done so far and planned were presented: consultation phase (Publication of draft opinion 11th January with commenting deadline February 25th), stakeholders' meeting on 7th February in Brussels and a final opinion scheduled for May 2008. A report, drafted by social science experts, including members of EFSA's Advisory Group on Risk Communication, on consumer perceptions of food products from animal clones has been published on the EFSA website. The outline of the draft opinion was presented by David Carlander.

6.2 Anne-Laure Gassin then opened the floor for discussion. The Hungarian member said that the Scientific Committee for Animal Health and Animal Welfare of the Hungarian Food Safety Office is preparing an opinion on Food Safety Aspects of Products Obtained from Cloned Animals (cattle, pigs). The opinion is very similar to EFSA's draft opinion. UK member informed the group that FSA has carried out qualitative research among UK consumers and will keep the group informed.

7. Terms of Reference (ToR) of the AF Comm WG by Karen Talbot

7.1 Karen Talbot introduced this agenda item and informed the group that the new ToR were endorsed by the AF. She explained that the aim of the session was to generate a constructive discussion focused on solid topics on how do we make "strengthen cooperation through identifying specific issues where MS and EFSA have a mutual interest to network, share intelligence and prepare communications" a reality. The working group then split into 3 break-out groups that brainstormed on the following issues:
1. Strengthening cooperation on key food safety issues
2. Building communities of interest within the group and wider communications teams
3. Building awareness in Member States about EFSA, AF, EU food safety system

7.2 After the brainstorming session, each group presented the outcome of their discussion.
Group 1 identified topics of common interest such as GMO, cloning, nano-technology, avian flu, animal welfare, nutrient profiles and labelling. They proposed to create a user friendly communications such as yahoo/internet group that would enable the users to exchange information in a rapid and informal way.
Group 2 suggested creating 2 pilot projects focused on building communities of interest within the group and wider communications teams – one aimed at web and the other one at press community.
Group 3 proposed sharing information on tools used by MS on the extranet and/or sending out a questionnaire with the next Newsletter. They also suggested creating a section on MS and cooperation in EFSA's Newsletter and vice versa, i.e. EFSA providing input to existing Newsletters of MS.

7.3 Anne-Laure Gassin thanked everyone for very useful exchange of information and interesting debate. It has been agreed that EFSA will prepare a more detailed proposal for moving forward outcomes of the discussion and circulate it to the members for comments.

8. Sharing learning experiences – a case study – by Marja Laeslehto, Finnish Food Safety Authority - EVIRA, Finland

8.1 Marja Laeslehto from the Finnish Food Safety Authority (Evira) presented a case study, which occurred in Finland last November. Finnish TV broadcast video material on broiler, pig and egg-packing farms in a popular factual television show A-Studio, on 28 November 2007, produced by "Justice for Animals", a group of activists. Video material filmed during their "investigation" in 2006-07 on 101 farms in Finland in secrecy showed bad living conditions of farmed animal.

The issue was reported on by all major media in Finland. Evira requested the group of activists to provide a list with contact details of all farms filmed with the aim of sending veterinarians from the State Provincial Offices to assess the situation on the farms facing accusations. Different animal protection groups began action, criticising the state of

farming in Finland and urging the authorities to provide more volunteer animal welfare inspectors.

Evira published an article by their Director General in *Helsingin Sanomat* (the main Finnish newspaper). In addition, Evira held a press conference with all TV stations and national media on results of the farm inspections that showed the situation was not at all as reported by the activists – only some breaches of regulations were found on 17% of the farms. Over 60 farmers sued the group of activists. Some media admitted that they made a mistake by accepting the material without checking the reliability of the source the transport of living horses.

8.2 The case shows that animal rights and animal welfare is a topic of discussion in society at large. Ethics is a growing value in society. Moreover, it demonstrates that active individuals and small groups use the media as a way to get their message on the national agenda. The discussion that followed emphasised the importance of media training.

8.3 Anne-Laure Gassin thanked Marja Laeslehto for the very topical presentation and once again underlined the importance of sharing experiences. She called for a volunteer for the next sessions in 2008.

9. Presentation of SCO Unit work by Bernhard Berger

9.1 Bernhard Berger, Head of the Scientific Cooperation Unit (SCO) at EFSA, presented the work of the SCO Unit which was created in 2007 to support scientific information exchange and work programmes.

9.2 He explained that the main tasks of the SCO unit includes networking with Focal Points; managing selected ESCO Working Groups; setting up and maintaining a database of scientific experts; maintaining the Article 36 network; developing a platform to exchange scientific information as well as increasing EFSA's scientific visibility (via referenced EFSA Journal and EFSA Scientific Bulletin) and lastly coordinating EFSA's Scientific Colloquia.

9.3 He further reported on EFSA Scientific Cooperation Working Groups (ESCO Working Groups). He mentioned that there are two ESCO Working groups – 1. Food fortification with folic acid and 2. Expert Database - which are managed by the SCO Unit. He pointed out that the ESCO working groups were established to enhance scientific cooperation between MS and EFSA in areas of food and feed safety that raise the interest/concerns of most MS.

9.4 Then he moved on to the Article 36 network. He explained that it is a "living" list of competent organisations capable of assisting EFSA in its tasks, nominated by the MS and agreed by the EFSA Management Board. He also reported on the Exchange Information Platform, whose objective is to facilitate the exchange of scientific information between

EFSA and MS and informed the group about the planned EFSA Scientific Colloquia for 2008.

9.5 The discussion included questions on the Exchange Information Platform and a Scientific Bulletin. Carola Sondermann from the SCO Unit informed the group that these initiatives are in initial stages but the working group will be kept posted on the developments.

10. Communications: information exchange and forward planning

a. Key country issues regarding risk communications

(Doc AF Comm WG 21 02 08 – 03)

Key issues were received from Austria and Hungary. Austria reported on topics of on-going and expected discussions that include: occurrence of Salmonella and Campylobacter in poultry as well as in animal feed; pesticide residues in food; GMO, Uranium in table water or mineral water labelled for use for infants; cloning, risks and benefits of the HPV-vaccination; tuberculosis, nano-technology and lastly the preparation of crisis communication plan. Hungary provided a list of upcoming scientific opinions and scientific meetings for 2008.

Albert Solem from Norway informed the group that they are preparing a report on food additives effects.

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

(Doc AF Comm WG 05 07 07 – 7)

Alun Jones gave an overview of upcoming scientific issues for which future communications may be foreseen. Among others, he mentioned the flavouring group evaluation; food colours (evaluation of the Southampton study commissioned by FSA UK); evaluation of aluminium from all sources of dietary intake; and nanotechnology. Before concluding, he also informed the group that EFSA was preparing a scientific opinion on the safety-in-use of taurine and d-glucoronolactone in “energy drinks”.

Lucia de Luca updated the group on the communications activities in the field of nutrient profiles and animal welfare. She mentioned that a press briefing on EFSA’s opinion on nutrient profiles would take place in Brussels on 26 February. Regarding animal welfare, Lucia informed the group that a stakeholder meeting on fish welfare will take place in Parma on 4 March. Lastly, she mentioned that a special AF meeting on Animal health will take place in Parma on 27-28 May.

11. Cooperation in communications

11.1 Lucia de Luca updated the group on joint events in 2008, pointing out that the main focus will be on scientific topics. At present there are the following events planned: joint conference EFSA/VWA entitled "Future Challenges to Microbial Food Safety" will take place in the Netherlands on 9-13 June; a joint event at the occasion of AF meeting in Paris in September and Copenhagen in November. The format and topics are for these two events to be discussed. She also pointed out that when EFSA Executive Director visits MS the press office is organising media meetings with the Executive Director, national authorities where possible and a selection of national media. One of these informal meetings with media will take place in Hungary on 21-22 May.

11.2 Christoph Buller then provided an update on the "Moving Together" newsletter which is available in 4 EFSA languages (EN, FR, DE, IT). The electronic version is also available and work is in progress on the next issue. Claire Gaudout pointed out that ideas on topics from MS would be appreciated. Lastly, Christoph Buller highlighted that feedback from MS on the content of the Newsletter is needed. Edel Conway from Ireland said that the FSAI had included a supplement on EFSA in the Nov/Dec 2007 issue of its newsletter

12. Any other business

12.1 Anne-Laure Gassin presented confirmed dates and venues for the working group's meetings in 2008 and thanked members for their invitations and hosting of the meetings.
Future meetings:
Thursday, 17 April 2008 - Dublin
Thursday, 19 June 2008 - Berlin
Thursday, 23 October 2008 - London

12.2 Gian Luca Bonduri mentioned that a crisis exercise will be organised at the next AF meeting in Rome on 10-11 April. The experts are at present working on the specific case scenario. Anne-Laure Gassin asked whether participation of members of the AFCWG was envisaged. Gian Luca Bonduri said he will keep the group informed.

12.3 Anne-Laure Gassin also pointed out that Oscar Wawschinek was interested in updating the group about a crisis plan. He said that Austria has prepared a document on how to handle crisis but it was very specific, designed for the Austrian food safety agency and location in Vienna.

12.4 Oscar Wawschinek reiterated that the Austrian food safety agency will have an internal audit of all communications processes and asked to share the existing SOPs with other MS. It has been suggested to create a specific section on extranet to publish / share working processes (EFSA + Members).

12.5 No other points were raised and the Chair closed the meeting at 15.20 by thanking members for their participation and EFSA staff for the organisation.