Minutes

ADVISORY FORUM WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNICATIONS

BERLIN, GERMANY
19 JUNE 2008

MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY FORUM WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNICATIONS:

Chair: GASSIN Anne-Laure, Communications Director

Austria	**WAWSCHINEK Oskar**
Czech Republic	**BALGA Josef**
Denmark	**KORNHOLT Heidi**
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Luxembourg	**HAU Patrick**
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Slovenia	**VRDELJA Mitja**
Sweden	**GUSTAFSSON Karin**
The Netherlands	**MEIJER Jan**
United Kingdom	**HUMPHREYS Stephen**

Observers and Invitees of the Communications Director:

European Commission	**STYLIANOU George**
Norway	**SOLEM Knut Albert**
Croatia	**MILOŠ Sanja**
United Kingdom	**HITCHEN Timothy**

European Food Safety Authority Staff:

ADAMOVA Monika	**NILSSON Torben**
BULLER Christoph	**PAGANI Steve**
FANTINI Alessandra	**POZZATTI Piera**
GAMMING Yenny	**TALBOT Karen**

Apologies:

Belgium	**CASSART Pierre**
Bulgaria	**PCHELINSKA Mariela**
Cyprus	**ELEFTHERIADOU Mary**
France	**LEYDET Valérie**
Greece	**KRESTOS Vassilios**
Hungary	**CSEH Julia**
Latvia	**KAZOCINA Aija**
Portugal	**SILVA Valdemar**
Romania	**BALOIU Adriana**
Spain	**ALONSO MARTIN Hector**
Turkey	**BUDAK Nurseren**

1. Adoption of the agenda

(Doc **AF Comm WG 19.06.08 – 1**)

1.1 Anne-Laure Gassin, Director of Communications at EFSA, opened the meeting thanking the Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) for hosting the event and gave the floor to Gaby-Fleur Böl, Head of the Risk Communication Department at the BfR. She welcomed the participants to Berlin, also on behalf of the Agency's President and Vice-President.

1.2 Anne-Laure Gassin welcomed the new members and Tim Hitchen from the UK Food Standards Agency present as an observer and responsible for the organisation of the next meeting of the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications in London.

1.3 She also reminded the group that members should check and approve their Declarations of Interests through the new electronic system, briefly explaining the procedure.

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

2. Minutes of the meeting 17 04 2007 and matters arising

(Doc **AF Comm WG 19.06.08 – 2)**

2.1 Anne-Laure Gassin informed that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 April in Dublin were approved by written procedure and published on the Extranet and the EFSA website.

2.2 She outlined that some matters arising from the meeting in Dublin would be discussed with the group during the day, such as the survey on public perception of animal cloning in the UK carried out by the UK FSA and the issue of antibiotic residues in plants raised by Austria.

3. Presentation of the work of BfR – the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment by Gaby-Fleur Böl

3.1 Gaby-Fleur Böl gave a presentation on the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment, mentioning its history, structure, main objectives and future plans.

3.2 As no questions were raised, Anne-Laure Gassin thanked Gaby-Fleur Böl for the comprehensive presentation and went to the following point on the agenda.

4. Update on progress at EFSA and Communications activities

4.1 Anne-Laure Gassin updated the members on the latest EFSA scientific outputs and related communications activities. In particular she mentioned the draft opinion on the use of antimicrobial agents in animals, plants and food production which contributes to a growing range of resistant bacteria that can be passed on to humans through food. A press release was published in April generating significant coverage, mostly in the UK. She also mentioned the issue of bisphenol A that dominated food-safety related news following the announcements from Canada and the United States, which impacted on EFSA. Environment Canada issued a draft screening assessment report on bisphenol A and Health Canada said it would be soon publishing a health risk assessment of bisphenol A from food packaging applications. This coincided with a draft U.S. NTP (National Toxicology Program) brief on bisphenol A, which raised fresh health concerns. At present EFSA is reviewing all relevant information and will further assess its advice on the safety levels if required. A web story was published on this topic and the key topic section on the web was updated.

4.2 Among other activities and events, Anne-Laure Gassin mentioned: the launch of EFSA's experts database, which will be used to source potential experts able to assist the Scientific Committee and Panels in their risk assessment activities as well as the collaboration with the Focal Points in promoting the database; EFSA's participation in the CIBUS international food fair at the beginning of May in Parma; the organisation of the "Festa dell'Europa" at the occasion of the Schuman Day celebrations; the joint conference organised by EFSA and the Dutch Food and Consumer Products Safety Authority (VWA) that took place in Wolfheze on 9-12 June; and the joint conference with the Norwegian Scientific Committee for Food Safety on 12 June in Oslo.

4.3 The floor was then given to Christoph Buller, Head of Public Information & Events at EFSA, who updated the group on the promotion plan for the expert database. The plan aims at promoting and marketing the EFSA expert database to scientific and technical experts, identifying most appropriate channels or media through which the experts can be reached and involving Focal Points in development and implementation of the promotion strategy. Promotion activities already implemented include: a special web feature, an announcement to specialist magazines and media, involvement of Focal Points and members of the AFWG on Communications who were asked to support the promotion campaign. Future activities include: promoting the EFSA expert database during risk assessment seminars in Member States, the preparation of a special information leaflet and targeted promotion letters to key national, European and International organisations involved in the scientific areas covered by EFSA, and advertising in scientific magazines. Christoph Buller encouraged members to support and guide the communication work of the Focal Points with regards to the promotion of the database.

4.4 Anne-Laure Gassin asked members if they had already undertaken any activities to promote the experts' database and encouraged them to inform EFSA on developments in each Member State and report on the communications activities carried out since the launch of the database on 5 June.

4.5 Yenny Gamming, Web Manager at EFSA, encouraged members to cross link between websites and highlighted that cross linking should not only concern home pages but also special pages related to particular topics of interest. Members were invited to send the links to the special pages to Monika Adamova.

4.6 Karen Talbot reminded the members of the work done on the Terms of Reference for the group and invited them again to sign up for relevant communities of interest (web and/or press) and specific issue networks (e.g. cloning, nanotechnologies and health

claims) since only a few members signed up so far. She also confirmed that a kick off e-mail would be sent out shortly after this meeting. Anne-Laure Gassin added that members are free to propose alternative ways of collaboration in addition to or in replacement of the implementation of networks previously suggested by the group.

5. Communications: information exchange and forward planning

5.1 Steve Pagani, Head of Press Office at EFSA, gave an overview of upcoming scientific issues for which future communications may be foreseen. Among others he mentioned the evaluation of aluminium from all sources of dietary intake, PFOS, decontamination of poultry carcasses with chemical substances, nanotechonology, guidance for pesticides risk assessment for birds and mammals, bisphenol A and fish welfare.

5.2 Karen Talbot added that the first draft opinion on nanotechnology will be ready in the coming weeks and proposed that this topic is added to the agenda of the next meeting to be held in October in London.

5.3 No questions were raised on the upcoming scientific issues.

5.4 Key country issues were received from Norway, the Netherlands and Germany. Gaby-Fleur Böl highlighted two events taking place in Berlin: a forum on nanotechnology and consumer protection in November and a symposium on risk communication in December. Both events will be held in German language.

5.5 Anne-Laure Gassin thanked members for providing the key country issues and gave the floor to Stephen Humphreys who updated the group on the results of the UK FSA survey on public perception of animal cloning in the UK.

5.6 He informed the group that the research was conducted from November 2007 to February 2008, aiming at understanding consumer attitudes towards cloning and cloned animals, their offspring and their products entering the food chain. The results were published on 5 June. Generally, the respondents to the survey were concerned about the issue with four main areas highlighted: food safety, consumer benefits, animal welfare and trust in regulations, that all need to be addressed. Traceability, transparency and clear labelling were the main consumer requirements arising from the survey.

5.7 Anne-Laure Gassin said the research was very interesting and comprehensive, thanked Stephen Humphreys for reporting on the results and highlighted that the European Commission would be carrying out shortly a Flash Eurobarometer on cloning.

6. Key points arising from the Advisory Forum meeting (Oslo, 12-13 June 2008) and update on the ESCO status by Torben Nilsson

6.1 Torben Nilsson mentioned the special meeting of the Advisory Forum on Animal Health held in Parma on 27-28 May that aimed at discussing the paper on EFSA's role in contributing to the improvement of animal health in Europe. A session was dedicated to discuss how cooperation in this field can be strengthened and much interest was shown in how information can be shared among Member States.

6.2 He summarised the outcome of the Advisory Forum (AF) meeting held in Oslo on 12-13 June. Among the key topics he informed the group that the draft Work Plan 2009 and the draft Strategic Plan 2009-2013 were presented and that AF members were invited to share their priorities for 2009 and, if possible, for the following years in order to avoid duplication of work. He mentioned that an information exchange platform will be set up for Focal Points in order to facilitate information sharing and that the idea of renewing the Focal Point agreements in order to be able to continue the work in 2009 was expressed.

6.3 Torben Nilsson mentioned that the AF took into consideration the possibility of discussing again the crisis handling issue in a working group and of organising an exercise jointly with the European Commission.

6.4 Regarding further key issues arising from the last AF meeting, Torben Nilsson mentioned: aspartame and the intention of organising a meeting with Member States in order to consider if further research is required following review of the scientific literature ; and nanotechnology to which a complete session will be dedicated during September's meeting.

6.5 In addition, Torben Nilsson updated the group on the Scientific Cooperation (ESCO) projects. He mentioned that the work on the expert database had been completed and that workshops will be organised in Member States to raise awareness of EFSA and to support experts getting involved in its work. Regarding the projects on emerging risks, botanicals and harmonised risk assessment approaches, he said that work is

going ahead; a workshop on folic acid will be organised in 2009 where different fortification practices existing in the different Member States will also be discussed.

6.6 Torben Nilsson highlighted that the ESCO projects will continue in future and that new subjects will be discussed in the coming months. He also invited the members of the AFWG on Communications to propose subjects for future work.

6.7 He concluded announcing that a section identifying the contact details of all extranet users, identified by European flags will be soon posted in the Extranet. Each flag, when clicked on, will display contact details of the AF members, the Focal Points and the members of the AFWG on Communications and IT of each Member State.

7. Finnish Focal Point – presentation by Marja Laeslehto, Evira, Finland

7.1 Marja Laeslehto from Finland gave a presentation that was prepared for the AF Meeting in Oslo outlining the Focal Point activities, starting from the signing of the agreement between EFSA and Finland. Those included the nomination of a Focal Point team at the Finnish Food Safety Authority (Evira), the creation of a Focal Point web page and publication of Focal Point news in parallel with EFSA News.

7.2 Some comments followed on resources dedicated by the national agencies to Focal Point activities. Anne-Laure Gassin concluded reiterating the importance of coherence in risk communication and informed the group that the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking with Member States shall soon undergo a revision. She suggested that the members who are interested in contributing to the review of the strategy, as it relates to co-operation in communications, should inform Monika Adamova. Further discussion on this topic may take place during next meeting in London.

8. GMO debate – Introduction by Steve Pagani followed by a discussion

8.1 Steve Pagani gave a brief overview of EFSA's current work on GMOs mentioning applications already evaluated and under completion and the mandate received from DG Environment to further update the GMO Panel's guidance document for environmental risk assessment. He also updated the group on recent media coverage in the EU highlighting that the GMO debate is alive and it regularly accounts for around 25 percent of EFSA's coverage.

8.3 Steve Pagani gave the floor to the UK and Polish representatives and announced that the group would later split up into two groups to discuss the GMO situation in Europe.

8.2 Stephen Humphreys updated the group on the status of the GMO issue in the UK. Strong public concern started in the 1990s triggered by environmental groups whilst a public debate was initiated by the government in 2002 confirming public opposition to GMO. The media coverage since then was quite low but now, in the context of rising food prices and growing world population the GMO issue is in the spotlight again and the media interest is large. Considerable pressures are reported by food producers in sourcing non-GM animal feed to meet demands of retailers, which has a cost impact as well as being a practical challenge. As far as consumers are concerned, GMOs remain a significant issue, even though results of a consumer attitudes survey shows that in 2007 only 20% of UK population were concerned about GMOs, while in 2001 it was 38% of population. Despite being a declining concern, Stephen Humphreys explained that the GMO issue could easily return and that the risk assessment of GMOs has to take into consideration consumer concerns.

8.3 Iwona Wisniewska from Poland gave a detailed update of the current GMO situation in her country. She underlined the different points of view, ranging from the public opinion, which shows that consumers do not have a deep knowledge of GMOs and the opposition is more emotional than rational, to political opinions, where laws are contradictory to EC directives. She also mentioned the view of the farmers who consider GMOs profitable and competitive, the position of NGOs that campaign against GMOs and the stance of scientists. Iwona Wisniewska highlighted that the Polish Agency for Food Safety is planning to organise conferences and educational trainings on GMOs for public servants, farmers and the general public, in addition to the publication of informative leaflets on GMO risk assessment.

8.3 Participants split into two groups to exchange views on GMO risk assessment and communication in their countries. The main outcomes of the debate were: the need to communicate at all stages and with transparency as well as to organise learning sessions and tutorials.

8.4 Anne-Laure Gassin reiterated the importance of exchanging information on the status of GMO risk assessment in Member States and invited members to continue to share their knowledge. She announced that a FAQ document on this topic will be published soon on the Extranet and asked members to provide their answers to the GMO questionnaire circulated prior to the meeting.

9. Sharing learning experience – a case study "Antibiotic residues on plants" by Oskar Wawschinek from AGES

9.1 Oskar Wawschinek reported on how the Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety (AGES) managed communication on the use of the antibiotic streptomycin against plant epidemic fire blight, a disease caused by a bacterium amongst others in apple and prune trees.

9.2 After explaining the origins of the disease and its cycle, Oskar Wawschinek gave details on the risk assessment carried out by AGES, which involved consultations and working groups, organised not only in Austria but also with Germany and Switzerland. AGES issued a working paper including necessary measures in case of high danger of outbreak and defining rules in case the antibiotic streptomycin had to be used against the epidemic. On the communication level, a press conference for selected specialised journalists was organised to inform them that the use of antibiotic was necessary to fight the disease. The press conference led to good and balanced coverage but the journalists' position changed when some NGOs and bee keepers started campaigning against this decision. AGES, however, did not change its line. AGES representatives attended a second press conference and several round table debates that resulted in media changing their position.

9.3 Oskar Wawschinek concluded his interesting and comprehensive presentation highlighting that science-based and consistent communication, together with availability and openness to media requests are key to success.

10. Co-operation in communications by Christoph Buller

10.1 Christoph Buller updated the group on the ongoing work on EFSA's publications, pointing out that: the *Annual Report* with summary and the *Zoonoses Report* will be published before the end of June and that *EFSANews No.17* will be published in a new corporate identity design in July, as well as the *Moving Together* newsletter No.2. In relation to targeted newsletters, he explained that work on both the design and content is ongoing. He emphasized that future feedback from members on the content of targeted newsletters is very important in order to create relevant and meaningful content for the target audiences.

10.2 Christoph Buller gave then an overview of past and upcoming corporate and scientific events. Among the future ones he mentioned: EFSA's presence at the EuroScience Open Forum (Barcelona) in July and at the 9th International Congress of Plant Pathology (Turin) in August. He also informed that EFSA will be organising the 12th Scientific Colloquium, dedicated to antimicrobial resistance, in December.

10.3 He mentioned the joint events that took place between May and June in Hungary, the Netherlands and Norway and announced that three more will be organised by the end of the year: Slovenia in August, France in September and Denmark in November, in collaboration with Advisory Forum members.

10.4 Christoph Buller concluded inviting members to share ideas and provide suggestions both concerning current and future publications as well as future joint events.

11. Any other business

11.1 Anne-Laure Gassin reminded the group that the next meeting will take place on 23 October in London and will be hosted by the UK Food Standards Agency. On that occasion draft dates for 2009 meetings will be presented.

11.2 She thanked all members, EFSA staff and the interpreters and as no other points were raised, the Chair closed the meeting at 15h00.