Minutes

ADVISORY FORUM WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNICATIONS

LONDON, UK
23RD OCTOBER 2008

MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY FORUM WORKING GROUP ON COMMUNICATIONS:

Chair: GASSIN Anne-Laure, Communications Director

Austria	**WAWSCHINEK Oskar**
Belgium	**CASSART Pierre**
Bulgaria	**PCHELINSKA Mariela**
Cyprus	**PARTASSIDES Dora**
Czech Republic	**BALGA Josef**
Estonia	**PRIISALU Piret**
Finland	**LAESLEHTO Marja**
France	**LEYDET Valérie**
Germany	**BÖL Gaby-Fleur**
Hungary	**CSEH Julia**
Ireland	**RYDER Jane**
Lithuania	**NALIVAIKIENE Elena**
Poland	**WISNIEWSKA Iwona**
Romania	**BALOIU Adriana**
Slovak Republic	**THEISZOVÁ Marica**
Spain	**GARCIA GÓMEZ Juan Julián**
Sweden	**CORP Eva**
The Netherlands	**MEIJER Jan**
United Kingdom	**HUMPHREYS Stephen**

Observers and Invitees of the Communications Director:

Croatia	**MILOŠ Sanja**
European Commission	**MORETTI Barbara**
Norway	**SOLEM Knut Albert**
Turkey	**OZBAG Nergiz**
United Kingdom	**HITCHEN Timothy** **HUTTON Deirdre** **SEYMOUR Jane** **WADGE Andrew** **WOTHERSPOON Alisdair**

European Food Safety Authority Staff:

ADAMOVA Monika	**GAMMING Yenny**
BONDURI Gianluca	**PAGANI Steve**
BULLER Christoph	**SONDERMANN Carola**
FANTINI Alessandra	**TALBOT Karen**

Apologies:

Denmark	**KORNHOLT Heidi**
Greece	**KRESTOS Vassilios**
Italy	**TARANTO Mirella**
Luxembourg	**HAU Patrick**
Portugal	**SILVA Valdemar**
Slovenia	**VRDELJA Mitja**

1. Welcome by Anne-Laure Gassin, Director of Communications at EFSA and Dame Deirdre Hutton, Chair of UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) Presentation of the work of FSA by Dame Deirdre Hutton

1.1 Anne-Laure Gassin opened the meeting thanking the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) for hosting the event and gave the floor to Dame Deirdre Hutton, the Chair of the FSA. After welcoming the participants, Dame Deirdre Hutton gave a presentation about cooperation in communication and the FSA's work. She highlighted the importance of cooperation, especially in times when there are some very complex issues coming up in science. In this regard she also mentioned the growing importance of social sciences. She reiterated that as food science and food safety are constantly changing, bringing new challenges for all of us, it is fundamental we all work together.

1.2 Dame Deirdre Hutton then continued with a presentation of the work of FSA, mentioning its history, structure and mission. She also touched upon the FSA's good relationship with EFSA and expressed appreciation for EFSA's work and co-operation with Member States on issues such as food colours and BSE testing. She stated that the relationship between science and communications is crucial and in this regard highlighted the importance of the Communication Working Group that plays a significant role in keeping public informed. Regarding risk communication, she stressed that in order to achieve public trust we have to communicate in transparent and open way; using the melamine case as a good example of the Commission, EFSA and the Member States all working together effectively. She concluded by mentioning future challenges for both EFSA and FSA, stressing that food sustainability, food scarcity and prices as well as environmental issues are becoming top concerns that will have an impact on the health and welfare of citizens.

1.3 Questions were raised by Anne-Laure Gassin who reiterated the importance of cooperation and information sharing.

1.4 Anne-Laure Gassin thanked Dame Deirdre Hutton for the comprehensive presentation and went to the following point on the agenda.

2. Adoption of the agenda (Doc **AF Comm WG 23.10.08 – 1**)

2.1. Anne-Laure Gassin welcomed the new members from Cyprus, Lithuania, Turkey, Slovakia and Spain.

2.2. She reminded the group that they should complete and approve their electronic Declarations of Interests (DoIs) at their earliest convenience. Anne-Laure Gassin briefly explained the importance of the DoIs and reiterated that they are compulsory to fill in. She also informed the group that EFSA was preparing a report on the implementation of DoI policies that is due at the end of October.

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

3. Minutes of the meeting 19 06 2008 and matters arising

(Doc **AF Comm WG 23.10.08 – 2)**

3.1. Anne-Laure Gassin informed the members that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2008 in Berlin were approved by written procedure and published on the Extranet and the EFSA website.

3.2. She outlined some matters arising from the meeting in Berlin that would be discussed with the group during the day, such as the EFSA newsletters and 2009 joint events, Focal Points web pages and dates for the meetings of the AFCWG in 2009.

3.3. Anne-Laure Gassin also provided the group with a preliminary feedback on the analysis of the questionnaires from the Member States (MS) regarding the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking between EFSA and the MS. She mentioned that more than a half of MS have provided their comments which were in general very positive. EFSA is now evaluating them and the outcome will be discussed at the meeting of the Steering Group on Cooperation in Berlin. The draft review of the "Strategy on Cooperation and Networking" will be then submitted for discussion at the AF meeting in Copenhagen on 20-21 November 2008. The topic will then be further discussed at the Management Board meeting in December.

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 creation of EFSA's two new scientific panels – CEF and ANS – that held their inaugural meeting in July; the adoption of the opinion on animal cloning; as well as the AF recommendation to create a pesticide steering committee and the cooperation between EFSA and ECDC on the 2007 Zoonoses report. She also highlighted that all Focal Point agreements were signed; the Database of Scientific Experts and Information Exchange Platform were launched and the Emerging Risk Unit is fully operational.

4.2. Regarding institutional activities, Anne-Laure Gassin reported on the ongoing dialogue with MEPs, the visit of the Commissioner Vassiliou to Parma in July and the Stakeholders' Platform that has recently elected a new Chair, Andreas Varlamos. She also touched on the relations with Italian authorities and mentioned the meeting of EFSA's Executive Director with Italian government representatives in Rome in September.

4.3. Concerning communications activities, she presented the group with an overview of EFSA media coverage in 2008, highlighted the main reported topics , mentioned coverage volumes and favourability, as well as panel share of voice and coverage volumes in Member States. She also mentioned EFSA's statement on possible risks related to melamine in composite foods from China that was an example of delivering rapid scientific advice. Anne-Laure Gassin concluded mentioning the latest web developments and EFSA's publications & events.

4.4. Question was raised by Gaby-Fleur Böl from Germany, who asked for more detailed information about stakeholders' activities, e.g. the technical meetings, participants and strategy. Anne-Laure Gassin explained the role of the Stakeholders Consultative Platform and added that EFSA holds technical meetings with stakeholders on specific issues, such as draft opinions on nanotechnology and animal cloning or technical guidelines on health claims.

5. Co-operation in communications by Christoph Buller and Yenny Gamming

5.1. Christoph Buller updated the group on EFSA's new publications including thematic newsletters, reported on the past and future events as well as the Database of Scientific Experts and renewal of panel promotion. He informed the group that EFSA has published the new thematic newsletters entitled "EFSA in Focus" covering three topics: Animals, Plants and Food. He touched upon the content of the newsletters and highlighted that feedback from members is very important in order to create relevant and meaningful content for the target audiences. He talked about the distribution of the newsletters via different channels. Lastly, he pointed out that the thematic newsletters are currently available only in the pdf format, however, should the members wish to receive also printed versions these are available on demand.

5.2. He then gave an overview of past and upcoming corporate and scientific events. He invited members to share ideas and provide suggestions both concerning current and future publications as well as future joint events.

5.3. Christoph Buller concluded by updating the group on the promotion plan for the Database of Scientific Expert. He also mentioned the advertising campaign to promote the renewal of EFSA's Scientific Committee and Panels and encouraged the AFCWG members to support and guide the communication work of the Focal Points while promoting the database and the call for panel experts.

5.4. Yenny Gamming updated the group on online communications and provided an overview of EFSA's website strategy. She talked about the strategic direction EFSA is taking with the website, highlighting key new projects such as "Topics" section that will facilitate the navigation in the website. Furthermore, she mentioned that the electronic DoIs have been integrated with EFSA's website and the list of Focal Points is published under the section "Partners and Networks": She took the occasion to remind the AFCWG members to keep EFSA updated on the future creation of webpages by their national Focal Point.

5.5. Questions were received from the Hungarian member, Julia Cseh, who asked whether it would not be complicated to classify all EFSA related issues under the A-Z list of topics. Yenny Gamming explained that it will be an additional feature that will be interlinked with other areas on the website where the relevant topics are mentioned. Knut Albert Solem from Norway asked whether the group could be informed on when and in which dailies the advertisement on the renewal of EFSA's Scientific Committee and Panels will be published. Christoph Buller agreed to send the list to the AFCWG members and asked them to keep EFSA informed on their communications / promotional activities. Lastly, the Polish member, Iwona Wisniewska pointed out that whenever she forwards e-mails originating from EFSA, these messages are detected as spam by the recipients' anti-spam programmes and therefore archived in a spam folder. Yenny Gamming proposed to provide an advice on how to overcome the problem.

6. Communications: information exchange and forward planning

6.1. Karen Talbot provided a review of EFSA activities for animal cloning and lessons learnt. She updated the group on communications approach and gave an overview of media. She also drew attention to the main findings of the flash Eurobarometer study on EU citizens' attitudes towards animal cloning. She concluded by saying that the full coverage report will be uploaded on the extranet.

6.2. Anne-Laure Gassin mentioned that, with some national exceptions, EU consumers appear not to be particularly aware of animal welfare issues and consumer organisations seemed to be trusted more than public authorities with respect to food safety concerns. Barbara Moretti from DG Health and Consumers Protection pointed out that the Eurobarometer results on animal cloning were similar to other surveys with respect to trusted information sources. She highlighted the importance of working together to better inform the public about the EU and national institutions' activities and competencies. She provided the group with information on recent developments concerning animal cloning at EU level.

6.3. Anne-Laure Gassin informed the group that key country issues were received from Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Slovak Republic and Bulgaria. Gaby-Fleur Böl pointed out that BfR has re-published information on EFSA's Database of Scientific Experts on their homepage and launched the website of the German Focal Point. The Slovak member, Marica Theiszová drew attention to an event on GMOs used in agriculture and food industry that will take place in Bratislava in December 2008. Julia Cseh from Hungary updated the group on activities of the Hungarian Food Safety Office (HFSO), in particular highlighting a seminar on 30 October 2008 aimed to stimulate scientific experts from new MS organised to apply for cooperation with EFSA, a conference on food safety throughout the food chain in November and food safety leaflets for consumers prepared by the HFSO for Christmas. Stephen Humphreys from the UK FSA informed the group that following a report published on the British Medical Journal, FSA will publish new advice on caffeine consumption during pregnancy. In this regard, Knut Albert Solem from Norway said that he will share with the AFCWG members a Nordic report on intake of caffeine among teenagers. He also mentioned a risk communication seminar that will take place in Norway in January 2009. Lastly, Mariela Pchelinska from Bulgaria informed the group about a report/study (supported by the EU Commissioner for Consumers, Meglena Kuneva), entitled "Conforming to the EU food quality and safety standards in Bulgaria", which has been recently presented in Sofia.

6.4. Anne-Laure Gassin thanked members for providing the key country issues and gave the floor to Steve Pagani, Head of Press Office at EFSA, who provided an overview of upcoming scientific issues for which future communications may be foreseen. Among others he mentioned the CEF Panel's statement on Bisphenol A study published in JAMA; EFSA's opinion on the safety of taurine and D-glucoronolactone, two constituents of so-called "energy drinks"; the review of MRLs for a further 60 active substances; the yearly report on Zoonoses for 2007; Blue tongue and fish welfare as well as health claims and future

corporate issues such as EFSA-JRC cooperation agreement; and EFSA seminars in Budapest and Warsaw.

6.5. Steve Pagani proposed that in order to keep Member States and EFSA better informed on the latest food safety related issues they are dealing with, EFSA's press office will contact the AFCWG members on a monthly basis to update each other. In addition, he suggested sending to the members a list of media monitored in their countries by EFSA's media monitoring agency. (NB: Given that the EFSA lists of media monitored in each MS are very comprehensive, EFSA would rather share with the members its list of publications that is currently being updated and would be available for the review in January 2009.)

7. Nanotechnology debate – Introduction by Karen Talbot followed by a discussion in break out groups

7.1. Karen Talbot gave a brief introduction, focusing on the nanotechnology communications challenges. She updated the group on EFSA's activities in nanotechnology to date that includes: publication of mandate, key topic section and other information on EFSA website; engagement with stakeholders; and the publication of the draft opinion. She highlighted the results of EFSA's draft opinion and mentioned also other activities carried out by the MS, the EC and the EC's non-food Scientific Committees. She also reported on different studies and surveys on consumer preferences and risk perception of the general public. She highlighted some of the challenges, such as the uncertainty about uses of nanotechnology processes, lack of database providing information on the nanotechnology applications on the market, limited scientific methods available with which to detect the presence of nano-particles, as well as challenge of managing expectations and concerns of public. Among the EFSA planned approaches, Karen Talbot mentioned that communication activities will be similar to those on cloning, i.e. press release on the draft opinion, stakeholders meeting, user friendly information on the EFSA website and public consultation before the final opinion.

7.2. Participants then split into three groups to exchange views on nanotechnologies and communication in their countries. The main outcomes of the debate included: an early communication on the issue highlighting areas of uncertainty where these exist; organising a seminar between industry and scientists on EU level; emphasis on research to provide knowledge and methods to identify the nano-particles; developing information material for consumers; differentiating between the different types of nanotechnology when communicating.

7.3. Anne-Laure Gassin thanked the group for the very interesting and fruitful discussion. She proposed that EFSA will write up the outcomes of the discussion groups and post them on the Extranet.

8. Key points arising from the Advisory Forum meeting (Paris, 18-19 September 2008) and update on the ESCO status and AF Special Meeting on Plant Health (Parma, 8-9 October 2008) by Gian Luca Bonduri

8.1. Gian Luca Bonduri summarised the outcome of the Advisory Forum (AF) meeting in Paris on 18-19 September 2008. Among the key topics he informed the group that the draft Strategic Plan 2009-2013 was presented and that it was published on EFSA's website for public consultation following the inclusion of comments from the Member States. The AF members of the Communications WG were invited to submit possible comments through the online tool on EFSA's website. He also pointed out that the eventual adoption of the Strategic Plan by the Management Board is foreseen in occasion of its meeting in December this year. Mr Alisdair Watherspoon from FSA provided information on SAFEFOODERA: a network of 14 European countries aiming to establish a platform for the coordination of national food safety research; and the DG Research presented their working modalities and priorities for research within areas of relevance for EFSA.

8.2. Regarding further key issues arising from the last AF meeting, Gian Luca Bonduri mentioned that the preparatory group of the national experts' meeting on aspartame is preparing for a national experts' meeting planned to be organised early 2009 [lately, this meeting was rescheduled on 2-3 April 2009]. He mentioned also the special meeting of the Advisory Forum on Plant Health held for the first time in Parma on 8 and 9 October and updated the group on the Scientific Cooperation (ESCO) projects. In the context of the ESCO on Risks and Benefits of the fortification of food with Folic Acid, EFSA and the Swedish Food Administration will organise a scientific workshop on folic acid in January 2009 in Uppsala.

8.3. Gian Luca Bonduri concluded saying that by the end of its meeting (held in Berlin parallel with the AFCWG meeting) the Steering Group on Cooperation could propose the implementation of new ESCO projects.

9. Information Exchange IT facilities – Information Exchange platform - presentation by Carola Sondermann

9.1. Carola Sondermann from the Scientific Cooperation Unit at EFSA presented the Information Exchange Platform (IEP) – an IT tool developed to assist Member States and EFSA in providing adequate and timely 2-way exchange of relevant scientific information. The IEP was previously endorsed by the Advisory Forum; a six-month pilot phase was launched on 8th September 2008. The IEP runs on the Extranet platform and is accessible by the members of the Advisory Forum, Focal Points, the Advisory Forum Communication Working Group, and relevant EFSA staff.

9.2. Carola Sondermann pointed out that no confidential papers should be uploaded on the IEP. The IEP should facilitate access to scientific information that is not easily accessible in the public domain by avoiding, at the same time, duplication of websites or other public

information tools. She mentioned that EFSA and Focal Points are invited to regularly upload documents to the IEP including abstracts/summaries in English of the document. Those who have subscribed to get an email alert will be notified when a document is uploaded in their specific area of interest. Scientific events and meetings can be shared via a calendar. A well-functioning search engine and an archive are considered crucial for the new system. A discussion forum is planned at a later stage.

9.3. Carola Sondermann then encouraged members to provide feedback on the IEP's content, structure and features. She explained that following the pilot phase, during which input and comments are gathered, the IEP will be evaluated and revised by the IEP-Focal Point Working Group, which is composed of representatives from Member States and EFSA staff.

10. New design of AFCWG Extranet – presentation by Monika Adamova

10.1. Monika Adamova presented a new design of the AFCWG Extranet. She explained that the new structure of the Extranet that was endorsed by the AF and launched in September was set up to facilitate the use of the Extranet, make the navigation more user friendly and avoid duplication of work. She presented the new features such as: AFCWG Extranet now accessible from the home page of the AF work space; a new sub-community "Meetings" where all meetings of AF, AFITWG and AFCWG can be found; possibility to search different members by country (flags of each country posted on the Extranet) and per group and the possibility to change the password.

10.2. Furthermore, she highlighted that a new project "pre-notification under embargo" was created. The main objective was to avoid duplication of efforts within EFSA, i.e. from now on all information under embargo is uploaded in one location on the Extranet – in the AFCWG working environment (before it was on both AF and AFCWG workspaces) and both AF and AFCWG members are pre-notified at the same time.

10.3. She encouraged members to use the pre-notification under embargo and keep the group updated on their communications activities. Then she presented the structure of the AFCWG projects and invited members to provide their feedback on the structure and keep using the extranet to upload any information relevant for the group.

10.4. She concluded by informing the members that a training on the use of Extranet will be organised prior to the next AFCWG meeting.

11. Sharing learning experience – the role of social media in Risk Communications. The UK FSA Chief Scientist's blog – presentation by Dr. Andrew Wadge

11.1. Andrew Wadge, the Chief Scientist at the FSA presented the group his blog entitled "Hungry for Science" that was launched in November 2006. He mentioned that since the launch, there have been more than 280,000 visits to the blog and than 400 comments posted. He also

provided some statistics on the visits per month (13,000), site performance and top visitors by country that includes not only the UK but also other countries such as Germany, Japan, USA, Russia and Brazil.

11.2. Andrew Wadge highlighted that the blog is part of overall communications activities carried out by the FSA. It is a way of bringing together science and communications. He also mentioned that in order to run the blog one needs to be committed – "hungry for science and communicating about it" and also devote considerable amount of time - be prepared to post articles regularly. Among the benefits he mentioned the interactivity and platform for debate that the blogs creates, rapid response to science related headlines in the newspapers and the advantage to express views in a more personal manner than through institutional press release.

11.3. Questions followed on the blog's work organisation. Andrew Wadge stated that many colleagues in FSA (both communications team and scientists) are involved in the project or help him when needed, e.g. with specific scientific questions or with the editorial control. He pointed out that to run the blog is not expensive but one needs to have the capacity. The survey on the blog indicates that they are targeting a "reasonably scientifically literate" part of the population, interested in information on food safety, primarily females and older age group.

12. Developing guidelines in Risk Communication

12.1. Anne-Laure Gassin introduced the topic of risk communications guidelines. Following the informal discussions at the meeting in Berlin, where several members showed interest in developing together guidelines in risk communications, as a joint effort across the group, it has been agreed to bring forward this initiative and discuss the next steps. Anne-Laure Gassin pointed out that it would be very useful to learn from practical experiences as well as share existing guidelines prepared either by the members or other organisations. Subsequently, the group can utilise learning and transform sharing of experience into practical evidence-based guidelines.

12.2. It has been agreed that this topic will be put on the agenda of the next meeting to be held in Parma, for which Jan Meijer from the WVA (the Netherlands) volunteered to draft, in cooperation with Karen Talbot, a discussion paper that will be used as a basis for the discussion.

12.3. Anne-Laure Gassin reminded members that a specific section on risk communications guidelines was created on the Extranet and encouraged them to upload both their own guidelines (where these exist) and work of other organisations they may be aware of. She concluded that the EFSA secretariat will, prior to the next meeting, source various reference documents and share them with the group via Extranet.

13. Any other business

13.1. Anne-Laure Gassin presented to the group the proposed dates and venues of the meetings of the AFCWG in 2009. No objections were received from the members. She reminded the group that the next meeting will take place on 23 January in Parma and will be hosted by EFSA [subsequently, the meeting was rescheduled on the 13th of February, 2009].

13.2. She thanked all members, EFSA staff and the interpreters and as no other points were raised, the Chair closed the meeting at 15h30.