



## European Food Safety Authority

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COMMUNICATIONS

### Minutes

#### ADVISORY GROUP ON RISK COMMUNICATIONS (AGRC) OF EFSA

##### 1st PLENARY MEETING

7 March 2005

9:30 – 14:00 h

EFSA , DUS Building

Parma, Italy

#### Members of the Advisory Group on Risk Communications

**Chair:** Geoffrey Podger, Executive Director of EFSA

**Vice-Chair:** Anne-Laure Gassin, Communications Director of EFSA

**Present:** Professor Diána Bánáti, Central Food Research Institute, Budapest  
Professor Jesus Contreras, University of Barcelona  
Professor Claude Fischler, CNRS, Paris  
Professor George Gaskell, London School of Economics  
Professor Ragnar Löfstedt, King's College, London  
Professor Ortwin Renn, University of Stuttgart

#### European Food Safety Authority

Irene van Geest, EFSA

Carola Sondermann, EFSA

Victoria Villamar, EFSA

**Apologies:** Professor Baruch Fischhoff, Carnegie Mellon University

## **Draft Minutes of the Advisory Group on Risk Communications (AGRC)**

### **1. Welcome by the Chair**

The meeting was opened by Geoffrey Podger, EFSA Executive Director. He welcomed the participants to the first meeting of the Advisory Group on Risk Communications, followed by a brief introduction of the members.

### **2. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda was adopted as proposed.

### **3. Declaration of Interest**

The Chair explained the importance of the 'Declarations of Interest'. He asked the members of the AGRC to complete, to sign and to send them back as soon as possible. The 'Guidance on declarations of interests' published on the EFSA website at [http://www.efsa.eu.int/mboard/mb\\_meetings/740/17th\\_mb\\_decla\\_guid\\_int-doc151.pdf](http://www.efsa.eu.int/mboard/mb_meetings/740/17th_mb_decla_guid_int-doc151.pdf) has been provided to the members of the group to give some guidance as to what should be declared and the timing of such declarations. The individual declarations will be published on the EFSA website along with other documents relative to the AGRC meetings.

### **4. Introduction by Geoffrey Podger**

In his presentation Geoffrey Podger gave an overview on EFSA's role, organisation and achievements to date (see attachment 1). In particular he discussed the relations between EFSA and the Commission as well as those of EFSA and national authorities relative to fundamental principles in the implementation of the Authority's mission. Geoffrey Podger also outlined the Authority's scientific work, its collaboration with risk managers in the context of food crises and its role in risk communications. He also pointed out EFSA's dialogue with its stakeholders and notably the good relationships established to date with consumer organisations, academics and industry. He finished his presentation by summarising EFSA's future challenges.

After the presentation the floor was opened to questions. Questions were raised about EFSA's co-operation on a global (e.g. with WHO, FAO) versus a European level and the advantages and disadvantages of the separation of risk assessment (RA) and risk management (RM) were discussed, notably with regard to implications for risk communications.

### **5. Risk Communications and EFSA**

Anne-Laure Gassin gave a presentation on '*Risk Communications in Europe: the role and experience of the European Food Safety Authority*' (see Attachment 2). She explained EFSA's role, objectives and communications approach and underlined that communications is a key part of EFSA's mission to contribute to improving food safety in Europe and building consumer trust. Anne-Laure Gassin

also presented media results of 2003/04 by focusing on the highlights in the first years of EFSA's existence, e.g. public announcements made concerning semicarbazide in baby food, methylmercury in fish, GMOs, BSE etc.

Members noted EFSA's key initiatives in risk communications and with respect to future plans expressed interest in being involved in the organisation of information seminars for media.

After the presentation the discussion in the group focused on: interpretation of press releases and summary opinions by media; communications with consumers; communicating risk/benefit messages as well as on regional and cultural differences and cultural sensitivities.

## **6. Self-Introduction of the members**

The members of the AGRC briefly introduced themselves regarding their respective background, research interests in risk communications and their perspectives on the AGRC. It was suggested that members could provide the Secretariat with further documentation that would be circulated to the group.

Diána Bánáti gave an introduction on risk perception in a new Member State (Hungary) and presented results of research on perception issues.

Ortwin Renn focused on Risk/Benefit Communication and the Risk Management Escalator.

Ragnar Löfstedt pointed out his experience and research in risk communications and management across a broad range of areas from energy policy, environmental issues to food safety, including the evaluation of food scares and crises.

George Gaskell mentioned the fact that from the debate on GMO it is clear that we are not only faced with scientific and technical risks but also the perception of risks linked to moral and societal values as well as concerns of a democratic nature with regard to who in society defines or governs risks.

Claude Fischler pointed out, through presentation of a cross-cultural study concerning attitudes to food and diet, how 'culturally sensitive' perceptions on food are and hence how culture influences perception and attitudes towards risk.

Jesus Contreras explained that the perception of food and food safety in Spain is still influenced by history. With regards to food and food issues, it is important to bridge the knowledge gap between scientists and the public. He highlighted among others the need for consumer education on nutrition and diet.

## **7. Terms of Reference (TOR)**

The draft TOR were discussed. Especially the 6<sup>th</sup> bullet point under paragraph 2 on the impact of risk communications on consumer attitudes and behaviours gave raise for concerns as this was seen as a desirable goal but difficult to achieve. Finally it was agreed to keep the point. However, it needs to be pursued what can be achieved as a matter of fact.

The proposal to developing a research proposal was welcomed by the group and agreed to be added to the agenda.

## **8. Annual review on risk communications**

The project of providing an annual review on risk communications was initially proposed by Ragnar Löfstedt. Such a review could among other subjects cover food scares, e.g. semicarbazide, methylmercury and BSE in goats. It could be drafted by inhouse staff, but has to pass the peer review. Finally it should be launched as an annual risk assessment report but in fact represent an external view. The preparation time was calculated with 4-5 months and the idea was to issue the annual review like the EFSA series on summery reports of EFSA's Scientific Colloquia (see first summery report on dioxins published in December 2004).

The discussion of the group members focused on what should be covered in the review. The following ideas and options were considered:

- Will the review be only a report for EFSA or also for national authorities of Member States?
- Should the report look only at EFSA's actions or also at those of the Commission and Member States?

Finally it was agreed by the group that the Annual Report should at least consider cases in which EFSA was involved, and also the Commission (and some of the national authorities). The interactions between the various actors are also worth while to be evaluated.

Following the EU rules, a call for tender needs to be launched. It will therefore necessarily take some time before the tender award can be granted and work is therefore unlikely to commence before the summer. The organisation of a public conference on risk communications where this report would be presented would therefore not take place before November 2005 at the earliest.

## **9. Meeting dates**

The next meeting of the AGRC will be held in Parma on Monday, 10 October 2005 from 9:00 to 15:00 h. A dinner will be organised the evening before for those members arriving in Parma on 9 October.

## **10. Any other business**

The AGRC members were asked to send their presentations, any other information material, their curriculum vitae and/or biography, and contact details to be circulated within the group.

Geoffrey Podger iterated that it was a great pleasure to welcome the experts in Parma for the first meeting of the AGRC. He thanked the members for their contributions, the open discussion and looked forward to further meetings of the group.

The meeting was closed at 2 p.m. by the Chair.

Parma, 14 March 2005