



## European Food Safety Authority

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### COMMUNICATIONS

Parma, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006

### 4th PLENARY MEETING OF THE EFSA EXPERT ADVISORY GROUP ON RISK COMMUNICATIONS (AGRC)

**Meeting date:** 27<sup>th</sup> November 2006  
**Venue:** EFSA  
Largo N. Palli 5/A - I-43100 Parma – Italy

### MINUTES

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

**Chair:** Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, Executive Director  
**Vice-Chair:** Anne-Laure Gassin, Communications Director, EFSA

**Present:** Professor Jesús 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

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Herman Koëter, Science Director  
Irene van Geest, Communications Advisor  
Karen Talbot, Communications Advisor  
Carola Sondermann, Senior Press Officer  
Claudia Heppner, Head of Unit CONTAM  
Anne Theobald, Scientific Officer AFC Panel

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



### **1. Welcome and apologies for absence**

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, Executive Director, opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. Being her first meeting as Chair of the group, the Director gave a brief overview on the EFSA vision and her priorities. She underlined her ambition to see EFSA become a recognized body for risk assessment on food and feed, nutrition, animal health and welfare, plant protection and plant health both in Europe and on the international stage. She stressed the importance of striving for scientific excellence, of being independent but at the same time co-operating with the Member States and risk managers and, as indicated in EFSA's evaluation report, continuing to enhance the impact and effectiveness of risk communications. She stressed the importance of the Advisory Group on Risk Communications and thanked the members for their views and recommendations which help support the development of EFSA risk communications.

After briefly explaining EFSA's role in relation with nutrition and answering some questions on this issue, the Director outlined the new organisation of the Authority and gave some clarifications related to the new organigramme. In this context, Herman Koëter, Director of Science and Deputy Executive Director, provided clarification to members regarding the Scientific Co-operation & Assistance department and notably the role of the unit on emerging risks.

Finally, apologies from Prof. Baruch Fischhoff were noted.

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

Agenda was adopted as proposed.

### **3. Declarations of interest**

No declarations of interest were made in relation to the items on the agenda.

### **4. Minutes of the meeting of 26<sup>th</sup> June 2006: matters arising**

The minutes of this meeting were adopted.

Under matters arising from the minutes, George Gaskell referred to item 10 of the minutes of 26 June 2006 regarding the Eurobarometer on risk issues. He indicated that his institute had proceeded to further analysis of the open questions included in the Eurobarometer, revealing different attitudes and conceptions concerning food. This analysis could be shared with the group in future in view of seeking expert views and comments on these national differences. George Gaskell highlighted the need to optimise data collection and translation of items included in the Eurobarometer questionnaire. These points could be usefully addressed in light of preparation of future Eurobarometers related to food issues.

The group also noted the absence of Baruch Fischhoff and suggested that the opportunity of his participation via a video conference link could be explored at a future meeting.

No other matters arising were noted beyond the ones already on the agenda.



### **5. Introduction and update of EFSA's activities (Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle)**

As an introduction and update of EFSA's activities had already been given by the Director at the opening of the meeting, the group agreed to move to the following item of the agenda.

### **6. Development of the AGRC (Irene van Geest)**

#### **6.a. Revised Terms of Reference**

In the context of the reestablishment of the AGRC, Irene van Geest undertook to review the terms of reference (TOR) in light of the group's experience. She proposed modifications with respect to the number of members (para 6), the length of the mandate (para 7) and to the working methods of the group (para 8) including the deletion of paragraph 10 relating to conference organisation. The group agreed that whilst the latter could be considered as an EFSA activity, it need not be referred to as such in the TOR of the AGRC itself. The proposal was discussed and accepted by members. Following adoption by the Executive Director, the revised terms of reference will be published on the EFSA website.

#### **6.b. Vacancies**

The curricula of potential candidates for the AGRC, received through the Advisory Forum, were circulated. The discussion was lively and all members expressed their views. All current members confirmed their wish to continue serving on the AGRC. Following the discussion and further proposals to come from members, EFSA Communications will make a final recommendation to the Executive Director regarding the selection of potential candidates. Potential new members will be contacted early 2007 so that they may be invited to the first meeting of the group to be scheduled in the Spring (date to be confirmed).

### **7. Presentation of a framework for the Governance of Food Safety (part of the Integrated project SAFE FOODS) and discussion (Ortwin Renn)**

Ortwin Renn gave a presentation on a new risk analysis government framework under development in the DG RTD FP6 project, SAFE FOODS. This project aims to review the existing institutional structures and procedures, to analyze their compatibility with the requirements of the new food safety governance framework and to propose mechanisms for improving public involvement.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked Ortwin Renn and invited him to present the work to the EFSA Scientific Committee in order to discuss the risk analysis model with its members.



### 8. Draft Annual Review on Risk Communications (Ragnar Löfstedt)

George Gaskell presented his comments on the Annual Review, prepared by King's College following the call for tender issued by EFSA. He described the report positively and defined it as a valuable contribution to institutional learning and as a good linkage between the academic world and communications in practice.

He made some technical remarks on the description of the cases and mentioned that a justification for the selection should be included. He also gave suggestions for improving, in future such evaluations, the reporting of case studies, possible inclusion in future of opinions/feedback from EFSA's customers and stakeholders and definition of evaluation criteria (eg timeliness of advice, content, comprehensibility...). Members intervened with additional comments and suggestions for the future such as including: where crises have been avoided and how; how one subject potentially affects another in terms both of perception and communications; how to consider information and data from stakeholders; the need for more in-depth analysis of communications outputs, including those triggered by EFSA's work (for instance, communications from national food safety authorities) in view of evaluating coherence of communications.

Ragnar Löfstedt thanked members for comments received and indicated that those which could be taken into account in the context of the current terms of reference would be reflected in the final draft.

King's College will produce a revised draft of the annual review by end January 2007.

The Annual Review on Communications will also be shared with EFSA's Management Board, the Advisory Forum and the AF Working Group on Communications, and will be made available to all through publication on the EFSA website.

#### 8.1. Evaluation of risk communications: risk perception indicators

Anne-Laure Gassin tabled a document (give ref) outlining initial thoughts in view of defining Terms of Reference (TOR) for an evaluation programme. Such a programme could be utilised as a management tool to help EFSA measure the effectiveness of its communications activities with respect to both its overall objectives and those determined for specific initiatives.

The group had an initial discussion highlighting the importance of media monitoring and analysis; the need to optimise data collection and address other methodological issues related to pan-European consumer research such as the Eurobarometer; and given EFSA's approach to work with information multipliers, the need to assess specifically amongst that target group, the effectiveness of the communications chain in view of identifying potential gaps. Following this first sharing of views, the group agreed that the subject of evaluation and performance indicators in communications warranted more specific and in-depth review. It was suggested that EFSA set up a working group meeting with interested participants, in order to assist the Authority in identifying meaningful indicators and establish the TOR for this project.



### 9. Update on EFSA' risk communication activities (Anne-Laure Gassin)

The group was informed of the more relevant communication activities which had occurred following the previous meeting such as the Scientific Colloquium No. 7 on risk-benefit analysis of foods, the use of webcasting to expand reach of EFSA communications (such as for the conferences on the aspartame risk assessment and nutrition and health claims) and the Workshop on Crisis Communications organised for the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications and held last October in The Hague.

Anne-Laure Gassin informed the group of the Advisory Forum's strategy on co-operation which includes perspectives for further developing co-operation on communication issues.

The EFSA 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary project was briefly introduced to the group and an update given on the new Communications team structure, reflecting additional responsibility in the area of events organisation. The group was also informed of the web redesign project commencing soon and supported by web user research. In this context Ortwin Renn highlighted the need to understand one's audiences in order to effectively meet user needs.

Discussion ensued regarding the issue of public confidence in scientific opinions and the opportunity in this context to better explain to external audiences including media, the scientific process, the value of peer-review science and the interpretation of scientific findings. Members also stressed the importance of transparency in risk management as the latter also affects how risk assessment itself is perceived. Activities such as webcasting of press conferences and conference wrap-up sessions were seen as excellent opportunities to show what EFSA does and to communicate its findings broadly and in real time.

### 10. Presentation of EFSA's role in Nutrition and discussion (Carola Sondermann)

Due to a tight agenda, members agreed to discuss EFSA's activities in nutrition at a subsequent meeting.

### 11. Nanotechnology

Anne Theobald, Scientific Officer in the EFSA's AFC Panel, gave a brief introduction to nanotechnology, considered to be an important future technology. She stressed that at present no common definition of nanotechnology/particles is in place and many different aspects have to be addressed, e.g. the natural occurrence of substances at nanoscale in the environment and food, different routes of exposure of man-made nanoparticles and analytical methods to measure and characterise them. Activities in all these areas have been started and are on-going both at national and international level. However, for the time being there are no actual applications in the food area officially noted in the EU. EFSA is following the issue closely in order to act and react appropriately for future risk assessments.



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Ortwin Renn informed that his institute was involved in the development of a Risk Communications Model on nanotechnology for the BfR (Federal Institute for Risk Assessment in Germany). The report on this will be sent to the group members.

### **12. Next meeting**

19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> March 2007 were the dates proposed for the next meeting. Members will confirm their availability.