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European Food Safety Authority

COMMUNICATIONS

Parma, 17th May 2007

5th PLENARY MEETING OF THE EFSA EXPERT ADVISORY GROUP ON RISK COMMUNICATIONS (AGRC)

Meeting date: **14 May 2007**

Venue: **EFSA**
Largo N. Palli 5/A - I-43100 Parma – Italy

DRAFT MINUTES

Members of the Advisory Group on Risk Communications

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

Present: Prof. Claude Fischler, CNRS, Paris
Prof. George Gaskell, London School of Economics
Prof. Ragnar Löfstedt, King's College, London
Dr. Armin Spök, IFZ, Graz

European Food Safety Authority
Herman Koëter, Science Director
Karen Talbot, Communications Advisor
Carola Sondermann, Senior Press Officer
Victoria Villamar, Policy Officer
Pilar Rodriguez, Head of NDA Panel
Reinhilde Schoonjans, Scientific Officer GMO Panel

Apologies: Professor Jesús Contreras, University of Barcelona
Professor Baruch Fischhoff, Carnegie Mellon University
Professor Ortwin Renn, University of Stuttgart

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, Executive Director, opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees, in particular the Advisory Group on Risk Communication's (AGRC) new member, Dr. Armin Spök, Senior Researcher and Head of the Biotechnology Research Unit at the IFZ (Inter-University Research Centre for Technology, Work and Culture) in Graz, Austria.
The Chair gave the floor to Dr. Armin Spök who introduced himself to the rest of the group highlighting his experience in risk assessment and on stakeholder and policy issues.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted as proposed.

3. Declarations of interest

Whilst no declarations of interest were made in relation to the items on the agenda, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle reminded the members that they should provide updated and signed declarations of interest for publication on the EFSA website. She took the occasion to highlight the importance of the declarations of interest in the context of EFSA's independence and to inform the group that more comprehensive procedures will be soon introduced following their adoption by the Management Board. These procedures provide further guidance to members of EFSA's Scientific Committee, Panels and their working groups on the content of both annual and specific declaration of interests; the use and screening of these declarations; and the assignment of participation levels based on the screening. In future members of the AGRC will also be asked to follow these new procedures and complete new annual declarations of interest.

The Executive Director suggested these new procedures could be presented by the EFSA Legal Department at a future meeting of the AGRC as a basis for further discussion with members on the communications implications arising from their implementation and how to best present to the public measures taken by EFSA to ensure transparency and independence of its work.

Finally, Anne-Laure Gassin reminded the group that forms concerning declaration of confidentiality and commitment to independence have also been circulated too and that these should be filled in and signed together with the declarations of interest.

4. Minutes of the meeting of 27th November 2006 and matters arising

The minutes of the previous meeting were adopted without any changes and no further matters arising were noted beyond the ones already on the agenda.

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

The Director presented an overview of the activities being undertaken by EFSA, both with respect to science and external relations. She highlighted amongst others work undertaken by EFSA regarding the epidemiology of bluetongue and the work in progress on Maximum Residue Levels for pesticides (MRLs). Members agreed that pesticides represent an issue of common consumer concern across Europe. It was suggested and agreed that a one hour slot should be dedicated to EFSA's work in this area as well as related perception and communications issues at the next meeting of the group.

The Director also underlined work undertaken by EFSA's new panel on Plant Health, and notably a recent opinion of the Panel with respect to citrus canker. Before passing to the external relations activities, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle mentioned the work undertaken by the Scientific Committee in developing a proposal for a review system to assess the quality of EFSA's scientific work. The implementation of a process including both internal and external reviews of EFSA's scientific work will further enhance the quality of the scientific opinions, their usefulness for risk managers and ultimately will also facilitate communications of findings. The Director said that any recommendations by the members of the group on the scientific quality of the opinions and on the way EFSA communicates would be welcome and confirmed that the suggestion made by Armin Spök to ask Member States for input on this topic would be taken into consideration.

The Executive Director also indicated that EFSA had begun to publish on its website the specific mandates received from risk managers. Whilst at present this was being done for key topical issues (eg cloning, claims), in future, all mandates will be integrated in a new Register of Questions currently under development and expected to go online in the Fall.

Members of the AGRC also expressed the need to continue to build visibility for EFSA's work in the Members States. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle underlined that this is one of the key objectives of the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking with the Member States agreed by the Advisory Forum and endorsed by the Management Board last year. In the context of the implementation of this strategy, a "focal point" acting as a connecting channel between EFSA and the Member States will be established. The role of the focal point is to act as a collaborative entity in the Member State with primary responsibility to support the representative of the Advisory Forum in gathering data and transferring information between EFSA and relevant bodies in the Member States (including risk managers, national authorities, stakeholders and research institutes working in EFSA's areas of competence).

Members expressed interest in reading these documents which will be forwarded by the AGRC Secretariat.

Finally Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle informed the group that EFSA will be signing shortly an agreement to facilitate and strengthen scientific co-operation with the US Food and Drug Administration.

6. Development of the AGRC: update regarding Terms of Reference and vacancies

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle introduced the new Executive Director's Decision with respect to the Advisory Group on Risk Communications. This revised document enshrines the changes discussed at the meeting held in November 2006 and replaces the previous Terms of Reference. Main changes are related to the review on risk communications, the frequency of which is no longer predefined, the increased number of members and the possibility of inviting external personalities to the meetings of the group.
An updated list of members is also included in the Decision.

Before giving the floor to Anne-Laure Gassin and highlighting the relevance of the group to EFSA, the Executive Director invited the members to provide their comments on the group's working processes, possible suggestions for topics to be reviewed at general and/or ad hoc meetings during the year, and importantly continued input and feedback regarding EFSA's role in communications and communications outputs.

Anne-Laure Gassin then presented the revised Terms of Reference in further detail. She underlined that the group was still open to new members. In particular, EFSA would be seeking the involvement of an expert in nutrition and/or nutrition communications and that of a communications professional. Members were asked to identify possible names of experts to be contacted by EFSA.

7. Update on EFSA's Communications activities (Anne-Laure Gassin)

Anne-Laure Gassin presented an overview of the activities undertaken in 2006 covering all three areas of work of the department: press, web, publications and events. Particular attention was paid to the media activities and some questions were raised concerning media coverage and analysis. Claude Fischler indicated that it is also useful to take note and analyse issues which are not covered by the media and why. George Gaskell inquired as to whether EFSA was able to follow the media environment/landscape overall in order to determine for instance EFSA's share of voice on key issues. An analysis by key message, for instance that of "independence", would also be useful.

A brief update on the EFSA's 5th Anniversary was also given to the group, focusing in particular on the Scientific Forum and Summit that will take place in Brussels on 21-22 November. On the second day several parallel sessions will be developed, one of which will be dedicated to risk communications. An introductory presentation on consumer perception

and cultural attitudes to food will be given by Claude Fischler. Members of the group suggested that such a theme could perhaps contribute to the introduction to the Forum itself and thereby included rather in an initial plenary session. The Executive Director indicated that this was indeed a useful suggestion and that EFSA would consider amending the programme accordingly. With respect to the round table itself, the discussion will focus both on key learning and challenges in food-related risk communications. In addition to Ragnar Löfstedt, participants will include all actors involved, ie representatives of national food authorities, the European Commission, EFSA, media, consumers and industry. Since names of speakers are still to be finalised, Anne-Laure Gassin asked the members for advice and said that any recommendation arriving from them would be appreciated.

8. EFSA Risk Communications – new and ongoing areas of work:

8.1 New opportunities and challenges in risk assessment, communications and stakeholder dialogue: cloning, nanotechnology

Herman Koëter gave a presentation on animal cloning specifying that the European Commission has requested EFSA to give advice on food safety animal health, animal welfare and environmental implications of live cloned animals, their offspring and products obtained from these animals. Appropriate experts will be selected for a working group on this issue overseen by the Scientific Committee.
Herman Koëter explained that the Commission would like to start its work at the beginning of 2008 and that EFSA's evaluations will provide the scientific basis for regulatory development in this area.

After Herman's presentation the floor was given to Victoria Villamar, Policy Officer at EFSA, who mentioned the steps that EFSA would like to take in order to undertake a new approach in consulting and engaging with stakeholders on sensitive issues (such as cloning, nanotechnology and others) As far as cloning is concerned, Victoria Villamar informed that EFSA's intention is to look at the topic with stakeholders in parallel with the work of the Scientific Committee, keeping close links between the two parties. EFSA would also in this context like to have a broader debate with academics, social scientists, ethicists, experts from national and international organisations in order to seek the views - in particular for issues of high specificity or novelty - of those who might not be represented as such on the Stakeholder Consultative Platform.

After Victoria Villamar's introduction, an interesting discussion on science, consumer perception and ethics arose among members who all agreed that even though public perception and societal aspects of animal cloning are not part of the scientific process per se, they cannot be excluded. Scientists have to focus on science but moral issues also need to be addressed, albeit not by EFSA given its risk assessment mandate.

Finally, the Chair invited the members of the group to provide advice on this sensitive and important issue.

Referring to consumer perception and challenges in risk communication, Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle expressed the idea of organising a meeting with experts on public perception of animal cloning. Members agreed and in light of discussions, EFSA decided to organise a one-day workshop with social science experts to help inform EFSA's future scientific work, stakeholder dialogue and public communications related to animal cloning. Members discussed briefly the issues to be discussed at such a meeting and possible social science experts to be invited. George Gaskell volunteered to assist EFSA in defining the agenda of this meeting and identifying possible participants. EFSA and members agreed to organise such a brainstorming session if possible before Summer.

8.2 Nutrition: presentation of EFSA's role in nutrition and discussion (Carola Sondermann)

Carola Sondermann presented the work EFSA is undertaking in the area of nutrition. Emphasis was placed on the tasks EFSA has been given by the Regulation on nutrition and health claims made on foods. A number of issues and questions linked to claims were raised and AGRC members were asked to give their contributions and comments. Both the Chair and the Communications Director invited the members to express their ideas and provide suggestions to EFSA on the consultation on the guidance document for applicants requesting assessment of claims, on the evaluation of consumer understanding and on how EFSA can profile itself in its new role.

8.3 GMOs – recent developments and implications for communications (Karen Talbot)

Karen Talbot, Communications Advisor, gave a presentation concerning GMO risk assessment and the related communications challenges, referencing in particular recent challenges to EFSA's risk assessment on MON 863 arising from the publication by Séralini et al of a new statistical analysis of the 90-day feeding study in animals with genetically modified MON 863. She more specifically invited members to consider such questions as: how to best communicate where there are divergent scientific views; how to manage the time lag when one cannot communicate immediately given need for further scientific assessment; how to decide when new evidence is worthy of consideration or can be easily dismissed.

Members expressed their views indicating that: the weight of evidence should be considered; that the criteria of "peer review" is not necessarily sufficient as a basis for deciding whether further risk assessment is required as industry data for instance are not peer-reviewed; good laboratory practice is sometimes more important to consider in risk assessment.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle underlined that EFSA was pursuing in co-operation with Member States projects relating to the harmonisation of risk assessment methods; that a specific meeting on GM risk assessment would be organised by EFSA with experts in Member States; that the GMO's working group on statistical analysis would also be further discussing

and identifying what are appropriate and robust methodologies; and stressed the communications challenges raised when different types of analyses deliver different results.

8.4 Zoonoses: communicating country-specific prevalence data (Karen Talbot)

Due to lack of time, this item was not tabled but would be raised at a future meeting.

8.5 Aspartame: update from Ragnar Löfstedt regarding ongoing evaluation of risk assessment and communications initiatives

Ragnar Löfstedt gave a brief update on the evaluation which he is carrying out on communications surrounding the recent study carried out by the Ramazzini Foundation on aspartame and subsequent assessment of the study by EFSA. He informed that some interviews are still missing and that an initial draft will be soon sent first to EFSA and then to the AGRC members. He confirmed that he was seeking to submit an article on this issue to a peer-review journal in the area of risk analysis /risk research by the end of the year.

9. Evaluation and performance indicators in Communications

9.1 Annual Review on Risk Communications: final draft and future developments (Ragnar Löfstedt)

Ragnar Löfstedt informed that a final draft of the Annual Review on Risk Communications is being edited and that it will be posted on the EFSA's website as soon as it has been finalised. Some technical remarks on the document were made by the rapporteur, George Gaskell. He indicated that in future case studies could be documented more carefully with more attention also to structure (differentiating between background and analysis of communications). He gave the example of the GMO case which, according to him, could have been more broadly developed.
Ragnar Löfstedt concluded informing the group that a final version of the review will be ready in the summer.

9.2 Evaluation of EFSA communications: developing terms of reference and performance indicators (Anne-Laure Gassin)

The group agreed to come back to the subject of evaluation at a subsequent meeting, and perhaps to organise a specific ad hoc meeting on this topic in future.

10. Any other business

Ragnar Löfstedt suggested that EFSA might wish to consider taking on a post-Doctoral fellow to assist the Authority in analysing communications activities and outputs, and in view of continuing to enhance its risk communications programme.

11. Date of next meeting

Members will be provided with possible dates for the next meeting by e-mail.