European Food Safety Authority

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTORATE

12th PLENARY MEETING OF THE EFSA EXPERT ADVISORY GROUP ON RISK COMMUNICATIONS (AGRC)

Meeting date: **8 March 2010**

Venue: **EFSA**
Largo N. Palli 5/A – 43121 Parma – Italy

MINUTES

Members of the Advisory Group on Risk Communications

Chairs: Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, EFSA Executive Director

Present: Prof. Massimiano Bucchi, University of Trento
Prof. Claude Fischler, CNRS Paris
Prof. George Gaskell, London School of Economics
Prof. Ragnar Löfstedt, King's College London
Prof. Maria Daniel Vaz de Almeida, University of Porto

<u>European Food Safety Authority:</u>
Anne-Laure Gassin, Director of Communications
Christoph Buller, Head of Public Information and Events
Steve Pagani, Head of Press Office
Karen Talbot, Communications Advisor
Luisa Venier, Legal Officer
Victoria Villamar, Assistant to the Executive Director

1 Welcome and introduction

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle welcomed participants to the meeting and mentioned that apologies had been received from Ortwin Renn and Armin Spök. Newly appointed member, Maria Daniel Vaz de Almeida was particularly welcomed and introduced herself to the group.

2 Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

4 Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

Minutes of the last meeting had been agreed by written procedure and published. Minutes of the recent ad hoc meeting in Brussels are to be agreed by written procedure. All action points from that meeting have already been completed.

3 Declarations of interest

All annual DoIs are complete. Specific DoIs for that meeting still need to be completed.

4 Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

Minutes of the last meeting were agreed. On matters arising, items for further consideration – risk communications conference and review of EFSA communications strategy – were on the agenda.

5 Update on EFSA's activities

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle updated the members on EFSA's latest activities. She gave an overview of activities in 2009, including the increase in volume of scientific outputs and the increased, albeit to a lesser extent, resources to deliver the scientific outputs. In addition to core on-going scientific outputs she referred to urgent requests during 2009 such as in relation to nicotine in mushrooms, the internal and external review (INEX) of EFSA's scientific work and the development of DoI policies and procedures. She also referenced the strategy for cooperation and networking with Member States and progress being made, such as extending grant making and contracts with national institutions. Cooperation with international partners such as WHO and national authorities in Japan, Canada, etc. were also mentioned. Crisis preparedness efforts in 2009 were highlighted; as was progress on practical issues for staff such as HR policies, the European school etc.
Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle then referred to priorities for 2010 such as work on EFSA's risk assessment capacity; an integrated approach to risk assessment; and strengthening communications. She emphasised the developing wider environment, for example the new Commission; new Management Board members later in the year; and the external evaluation of the EU agencies. She stressed the volume of applications in EFSA's workload, their importance to industry; the importance of our independence; the environmental aspect of our mandate; and the challenges these issues bring.

A general discussion followed on the look back over 2009 and look forward to the year ahead. Members in particular commented on the challenges of looking at long term environmental issues as well as core food safety; and the need to be resilient when criticised around independence, eg. on GMO related issues. It was acknowledged that there is an irony around such attacks when EFSA has recently published a large number of opinions on health claims some 98% of which would be consider as negative by industry.

6 Presentation of key target audience research on EFSA image by research consultant, Frederic Paeps

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle introduced this item by stressing that it was important to undertake this work to help inform the review of the EFSA communications strategy. Frederic Paeps then gave a short overview of the work. The objective was to analyse and understand the needs, views and expectation of EFSA's key target audiences to inform EFSA's work. Methodology was 46 in-depth interviews with key representative of EFSA target audience groups, the image of EFSA today was overall positive amongst these groups. None were strongly negative or hostile; the general view was there had been strengthening and improvements, but that more could still be done by EFSA in a number of areas. Opportunities included strengthening networks and cooperation with national agencies, as well as work on openness and transparency and simpler working processes and communications. Challenges of the Parma location for EFSA and its experts were also noted. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle reiterated that the study will help in the context of the communications strategy review. A discussion with members then followed with members on the findings. The issue of possible benchmarking with similar organisations, eg. the US Food and Drugs Administratin, was raised. It was noted that similar organisations also have differing ways of working, eg. as regards approach to openness and transparency, also many are national rather than international. It was suggested that EFSA could look at a sample of opinions and try to distil them to 300 simple words.

8 EFSA risk communications strategy review

Anne-Laure Gassin introduced this item, which followed on from the learnings of the key target audience. She gave an update on EFSA media coverage, web site views and the need for simplicity. She outlined the methodology for the review and the public consultation that would follow the Management Board discussion on March 18th. Karen Talbot then introduced discussion on the approach to the public consultation, and EFSA's intention (subject to practicalities) to use a more focussed questionnaire to help participants provide feedback in addition to the standard consultation format on-line. The idea was generally found good by members, who gave feedback including identifying the categories of respondents and the need to keep the language simple.

9 Reconduction of Eurobarometer on food-related risk

Anne-Laure Gassin introduced this item, emphasising that it was important to re-run the Eurobarometer carried out in 2005. Members' input had and would continue to help ensure good questions and the right methodology. It was important to be able to look at trends and shape a questionnaire to assist that. The group then went through the proposed questions and made comments on how best to structure and word them. Members input would help shape further

discussions with the contractor on finalising wording of questions. Questionnaire to be completed by end March and will be finalised in consultation with AGRC members.

10 International conference on risk communications

Christoph Buller introduced this item. He emphasised that the idea was to bring a global perspective and profile to risk communications, EFSA's second mandate. A two day conference is proposed, with a target audience of top level representatives from key national and international partners in risk assessment, risk management and wider stakeholders. Top level speakers would be needed to attract such an audience, and issues of interest to them as well as networking opportunities. A further element would be more focussed on senior risk communications practitioners and sharing best practice. An audience of 200 would be anticipated, next steps would be to develop the programme and a speaker committee, with the aim of finalising the programme by the end of the year and then holding the event in 2011. Christoph Buller outlined the tentative draft programme.
Members then made suggestions on the programme. The first draft agenda seemed to be too full and it was important to allow time for audience participation, round table discussions and networking allowing the audience to drive the event. It was also pointed out that it was important for EFSA to make sure that the event was one of genuine engagement, not just lectures. Breakout groups could help facilitate discussion and learning. A Davos style event to facilitate networking and sharing amongst key leaders and opinion formers was important. Christoph Buller agreed to refine the agenda and re-circulate.

11 Update on communications activities

Anne-Laure Gassin explained that it has been decided to focus this part of the agenda on one issue, to provide an opportunity for a focussed discussion on an on-going topic and high profile issue: Bisphenol A. Steve Pagani then outlined EFSA's work on Bisphenol A and that of other risk assessors internationally, which have largely supported the safety of Bisphenol A, although some questions have been raised. The high media and stakeholder interest in the issue has been linked to risk management decisions in a number of countries. EFSA is working closely with national food authorities in preparation of a further opinion. An experts meeting with Member States is planned before adoption of the latest opinion that will be accompanied by a press release and other communications activities.
Members then discussed the issue and commented on the sensitivities linked to not just risk management actions but also emotive issues such as possible risk to babies and sexual function. Members commented that risk managers may be adopting the precautionary principle given the sensitivities, EFSA can do the science, and such decisions are for the risk managers, though cooperation is important.

12 Update on risk communications guidelines

Karen Talbot introduced the topic, updating the group on progress that had been made with the initiative. She shared the top-line content of the guidelines and next steps (e.g. refining the guidelines to share at the May meeting of the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications). She invited AGRC members to provide their valuable input on the draft guidelines. In discussion members highlighted that important issues are related to proportionality

and also uncertainty. Members also commented on how chronic/long-term health risks as well as immediate/acute ones can trigger a crisis (e.g. dioxin has long-term risk but triggered crisis due to high levels found in food chain).

13 Any other business

George Gaskell proposed some further ideas in relation to the earlier agenda item on the international risk communications conference which were then discussed by the group. In addition, he pointed our that the conference should be announced 12 months in advance with some highlights, and that some key speakers could be firmed up later.

George Gaskell asked about the timing of the results and launch of the Eurobarometer. Anne-Laure Gassin said that EFSA was considering a September launch given timings of receipt of data etc. Maria Daniel Vaz de Almeida said that the World Public Health Conference was on 23/25 September and could provide a launch opportunity – she will provide further information in this regard.

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 11th October 2010.

Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle thanked members for their contributions and closed the meeting.