European Food Safety Authority

20 February 2008

Report of EFSA technical meeting with its Stakeholder Consultative Platform on the draft opinion on animal cloning

On 7 February 2008 EFSA held a technical meeting in Brussels with its Stakeholder Consultative Platform[1] on its draft Opinion on animal cloning. The meeting gave an opportunity for experts from the EFSA Scientific Committee (SC) and its Working group (WG) on the cloning opinion to brief stakeholders face-to-face on the draft Opinion and to have an exchange of views and feedback, as part of EFSA's ongoing public consultation on the draft Opinion.

The meeting was also attended by representatives of the European Commission (EC) and the European Group on Ethics and New Technologies (EGE). Their presentations and participation helped to place EFSA's scientific work in its wider context. The final opinion of EFSA, together with the already published opinion of the EGE, will be the two key pieces of advice that will help inform consideration of any measures required by the EC and MS in relation to cloned animals, their offspring and products. EFSA's opinion will provide scientific advice on possible risks in relation to food safety, animal health and welfare and the environment; the EGE opinion is complementary in that it provides advice on ethical and societal issues outside of EFSA's remit.

Prof. Vittorio Silano, chair of EFSA's SC, opened the meeting and introduced the draft opinion and background to EFSA's work. Introductory presentations were also given by Rui Cavaleiro Azevedo, the EC representative; Maurizio Salvi, Secretary of the EGE; and George Gaskell, member of EFSA's Advisory group on Risk Communication, addressing consumer perceptions of cloned animals.

Further presentations addressing the more detailed scientific issues related to the draft opinion were also given by Dr Jean-Paul Renard, member of the SC WG (cloning technology); Peter Jinman, member of the SC WG, (health and welfare considerations); and Prof Silano (food safety issues).

The main issue directly related to EFSA's draft opinion was the strength of the evidence base on which to reach conclusions. There were questions about how the SC was able to reach firm conclusions on risks when the evidence base was limited. It was stressed that the opinion needed to be substantiated with reference to the scientific literature in more detail, to help explain how the conclusions were reached. A related point made by a number of participants was the need for on-going research into cloning.

[1] EFSA's Stakeholder Consultative Platform, composed of EU-wide stakeholder organisations working in areas related to the food chain. It meets to assist EFSA in the development of its overall relations and policy with stakeholders.

Communication was also raised by a number of participants. It was stressed that it was important for EFSA to communicate its opinion simply and accessibly for wider, non scientific audiences. Public perception and understanding were also highlighted as important issues, with the EC's Eurobarometer scheduled for later in 2008 regarded as providing an opportunity for building understanding of consumer concerns and views in this area.

There was discussion at the meeting on areas relating both to the draft EFSA opinion and to wider issues concerning risk management beyond EFSA's remit. In particular, participants raised points regarding the regulatory context and possible consideration of any future EU measures in relation to cloned animals, their offspring and their products such as meat and milk.

Traceability was another major concern raised, not related to EFSA's risk assessment per se but rather to possible future risk management measures. It was acknowledged that, should traceability be required in future, there are large challenges to develop any such system to facilitate labelling of foods from cloned animals. Another point of concern, also raised in the recommendations of the draft opinion, was the need to prevent any reduction of genetic diversity.

Next steps

Participants were reminded that the consultation on the draft opinion is open until 25 February 2008 with comments to be submitted via the EFSA website. A number of stakeholders have already submitted feedback, for others the meeting helped inform further input. One of the main priorities for EFSA in launching this public consultation is to identify scientific data which may not have been available before in order to ensure that the final opinion takes into account all available information.

Once EFSA has studied the consultation feedback, the final opinion will be prepared. Publication of the final opinion is anticipated in May 2008. The EC will then have the two expert opinions, from EFSA and the EGE, to help inform its consideration of possible risk management measures.