Stakeholder Activities Evaluation

Presentation of Highlights to Stakeholder Forum

-

Parma 25 April

FPA
Market and Management Advice

Background and Objectives

- Background
  - EFSA is organizing a wide range of activities with stakeholders
  - EFSA wants to ensure that these initiatives are in synch with the evolving needs of the Authority and the stakeholders
  - An outside assessment was seen as the recommended way forward
- Objectives
  - From a stakeholder perspective:
    - Evaluate current EFSA stakeholder activities (added value, organization, content…)
    - Discuss needs, expectations and suggestions for improvement
  - Recommend improvements for future strategies and initiatives

Methodology

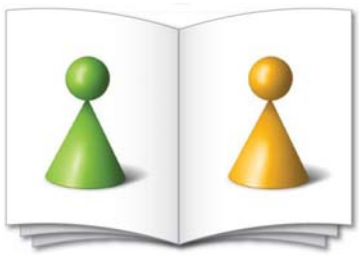
- Qualitative research
  - In-depth interviews
    - Target 25 interviews (effective 26 interviews)
    - Key EFSA stakeholders, with priority to members of the EFSA Consultative Platform
- Field
  - November- December 2007
- Report
  - December 2007

Interviewed Stakeholders (26)

CEFIC	Marc Vermeulen		**ILSI Europe**	Nico Van Belzen
CIAA	Beate Kettliz		**Friends of the Earth**	Helen Holder
Copa-Cogeca	Roxane Feller		**Chair**	Sue Davies
ECPA	Peter Day		**Vice Chair**	Geof Thompson
ELC	Maryse Hervé		**Danish Agriculture Council**	Susanne Kofoed
EFFAT	Eric Dresin		**BEUC**	Jim Murray
EuroCommerce	Noëlle Vonthron		**CELCAA**	Bernd Gruner
EuropaBio	Johan Vanhemelrijck		**ESA**	Garlich v. Essen
FEFANA	Didier Jans		**EUFIC**	Laura Smillie
Freshfel Europe	Raquel Izquierdo de Santiago		**Euro Coop**	Laura Street
Greenpeace	Christoph Then		**UEAPME**	Ludger Fischer
FEFAC	Alexander Döring		**EFFA**	Dan Dils
EMRA	Roland Higgins		**Eurogroup for Animals**	Sonja Van Tichelen

Preliminary Remarks

- *"They want to be perfect"*
  - EFSA is doing all in all **an very good job with its stakeholder activities**.
  - There are **few major criticisms nor obvious areas for dramatic improvement**
  - **Performance of EFSA staff** is considered highly **professional and reflecting a true commitment**
- *"It takes two to tango"*
  - Several Stakeholders agree that for being fully successful, both sides have to play an active role and that stakeholders have also their challenges (resources, prioritizing) in fully playing the part.

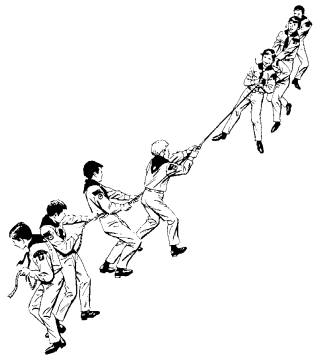


Solutions are not to be sought exclusively at the EFSA side but rather in process optimizations on both sides

Preliminary Remarks

- *"We're all different"*

  - **There are diverging interests and consensus is often difficult or impossible**.



- *"Why are they so scared talking to us?"*

  - Many **stakeholders do not make a clear distinction between "stakeholder activities" and the actual projects EFSA is dealing with**. Respondents are easily diverted into raising the problems they have with the process for evaluation of products and substances or the (lack of) interaction with the scientific panels: they feel EFSA isn't willing to change in this respect and does not want to discuss this in-depth during the activities or outside of them.

  - ***While, as such, out of scope for the survey, this aspect did drive a lot of the more negative comments about the "EFSA activities".***

Positive views on EFSA activities

- First reactions on EFSA's **stakeholder activities are mainly positive**.
- This mainly thanks to the **variety of initiatives and** a perception of EFSA's real **commitment to share with all stakeholders** in a transparent way.
- The activities are mostly perceived as **well-organized and prepared**, with very appropriate content and EFSA-interface.
- There is a positive trend; a feeling of **a maturing organization and team.**



"Great effort. They are trying hard and I hope that they keep it up."
"They try to do their very best."
"They try hard to treat everybody equal but not everybody has the same expertise."
" EFSA is tackling it correctly"
"They keep us well-informed on the most important things"
"You feel they are not a bunch of bureaucrats, the way they try to involve stakeholders is fabulous"

…but not the preferred solution to all

- Some stakeholders perceive the activities as **window-dressing**. Interesting for general exchange of information but **EFSA does not really want in-depth discussion or use them for making any specific progress** about opinions and approval processes.

"One can't dialogue with EFSA on the opinions."
"EFSA is open to certain interested parties only."
"The approval process is a black box with no timelines."
"They do it to tick the box."
"More specific meetings, even though it is difficult to attend them all."

- Mostly there is agreement that **the activities are well-worth the heavy investments in time and effort**, others (few) feel they give very **little added value or new information** and **would prefer one-on-one sessions** instead of big, costly plenary sessions.

"Going through a whole day meeting."
"In the beginning I had a lot of expectations and I wonder Is it really worthwhile?"
"It is the same topics over and over again"

The consultative Platform Meeting

An essential forum for general exchange of information

but still searching for the right format

“It’s hard to be all things to all people”

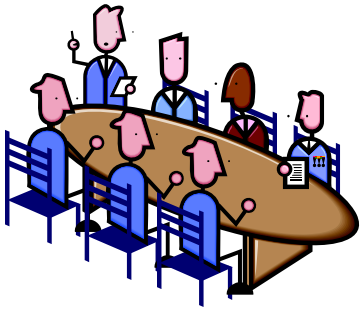
Platform Meetings

Generally a positive experience

- **THE** place of interaction with EFSA. The reactions upfront are, almost without exceptions, **extremely positive**

"Helps to break down the walls"
"Great networking initiative"
"We are keen to give our input there"
"People are interested"

- EFSA gets **full marks when it comes to the practical organization** aspects (logistics, venue etc.). The **views on Parma are mixed**, and the pressure on resources is a heavy burden for many stakeholders.



"EFSA are professional meeting managers"
"Europe is big. Not everything should in Brussels"
"It's a social event"



Generally a positive experience

- The meeting **format is seen as mostly positive**. Stakeholders appreciate the strong **EFSA management commitment and participation** to the meetings, as well as the **quality of the speakers** and presentations

"EFSA seems to make it a priority"
"They do their best"
"Open, constructive"

- The Content is **relevant and well-balanced**

- All the **relevant topics find their way to the agenda** and it is not purely EFSA driven:

  - General update by the executive director
  - New items (e.g. recent update on nanotechnology)
  - Detailed update on progress re processes and panel topics
  - Opportunity for everyone to provide input and ask questions



Yet some limitations…

- **Diverging interests and audiences sometimes get in the way** of an open dialogue.

"The discussion is totally biased."
"I cannot express my problems in front of those who attack EFSA."
"Difficult to get really into the depths of topics"



- Some see the EFSA interventions more as **"show and tell"** rather than a real invitation to dialogue. The fact that the **meeting papers are not circulated ahead** and that **the panel chairs are not present** are seen as making a meaningful dialogue very difficult.

"It's Showtime for everybody"
"The chairs of the panels should be there"
"The papers should come earlier"

- **Attempts to raise the quality and the discussion have not been very successful so far**: the "working groups" set up earlier in 2007 have not managed to solve these issues, but the wish is clearly there

"Make stakeholders more active"
"Short breakout sessions."

Platform Meetings

Mixed feelings about the process

- Two key issues:

  1. How to **build a constructive debate** with such a diverse group?

  2. How to make the **interaction with the scientific panels** more result-orientated ? (NB Polarizing subject! - In fact, the comments express **a general wish for a "closer relationship" with the panels**, i.e. not a purely activity-related comment)



Welcome to our panel !

- As a consequence, the platform meeting is seen as having become **a pure information exchange tool,** still positive, but **too much a one way information** exercise without sufficient results.

"A lot of EFSA talking to people"
"Difficult to get really into the depths of topics"
"We talk but what is the result, what was the conclusion?"



Mixed comments on feed-back

- Meeting minutes are **OK for timeliness and accuracy,** but **not sufficiently action-oriented**

"They should better flag items for action"

- Stakeholders are **less pleased with the feedback and follow-up**
  - **Reporting on the outcome** is seen as rather vague and without a clear time perspective
  - Apart from the minutes, there is **no specific follow-up communication** or general update **in-between meetings**

"There should be a regular feeding of the animals"

- Specific comments or questions relating to the workings of the panels (progress, handling of the input etc.) are **seen as not really taken on board**

The Technical Meetings

"There should be more of these"



Technical Meetings: The ideal complement?

- "Technical meetings" as such is **not always understood in the same way**. But **Any opportunity to input** on technical topics is **extremely welcome** (regardless of the name)

- The Technical Meetings are where many stakeholders feel that **they can make better contribution** than in the Platform.

"Much better than the Platform."
"More technical and to the point."
"Less political."

- Meetings on **health claims** and on **GMOs** were mostly seen as very constructive

- **Not all stakeholders are interested** (too technical, no direct relevance), but **to most these were essential** and there is **a clear demand for more**.

- Logistics and meeting organization get **full marks**.



But missing some follow-up

- **Key positives** are the **focus, a more direct interaction with the panels, and the expert audience** enabling a higher-quality discussion.

"There is a better interaction with the panel"
"It's good to invite experts from outside the EU."
"We were missing that in the past"

- There are only **few negatives**:
  - **No clear conclusions** at the end of the meeting; **no draft report** for comments or perspectives about **why comments are accepted or refused**
  - Some stakeholders wonder why **recognized experts could not get a seat** while at the same time there were **a lot of people who were not sufficiently technical** (health claims meeting).

Food Summit

Other Meetings

"Sometimes it is good to get the broader view"
"It is important that EFSA show they exist and show why they are so important"

- An **opportunity to put things in the broader perspective**
- Some stakeholders feel it **diverted resources** that ought to be invested in EFSA's core mission, but the **vast majority considered this a very positive experience**. (NB some of the interviews took place before the event).
- **EFSA visibility is seen as important** to enhance the authority, credibility and impact of EFSA on the European and global scene; to most, **a strong EFSA is essential to ensure their interests are properly addressed.**
- Some would like EFSA activities to **more visibly reflect a true partnership and exchange of insights** between global food safety organizations.

Online Stakeholder Consultation

There is understanding and appreciation for an open-to-all consultation tool but stakeholders also see some serious limitations and a strong need to clarify the process



Not used (or known) by all

- Used by **few of the interviewed stakeholders**
  - Most prefer meetings to **an impersonal web-format**
  - Those who **had participated were quite pleased** with them as a complement to other consultation forms
- **Some serious reservations**:
  - Too complicated (technical + topics)

    "Just the terms of reference is like a 50 page or so, a highly technical document. I didn't understand it"
  - "Openness" is a mixed blessing -> how reliable is the input?

    "You bring in non scientific elements."
- **A lot of questions:**
  - Why certain **topics** and not others?
  - How is **the input** taken into consideration?
  - How are decisions made on **frequency**?
  - What is the **feedback mechanism?**
- One stakeholder mentioned the **FDA online tool** as a better protocol

Stakeholder Communication

For stakeholders, communication is first and foremost being informed about their own dossiers, and then other relevant topics.

EFSA is generally seen as a good communicator to the stakeholders.



Great marks, some issues as well

- EFSA clearly provides **high-quality and sufficient information** in a timely manner (in most cases).

  "They are perfectionists, all the material is high standard, in look and feel"
  "I rely on the EFSA highlights"
  "They have good press people"

- Much of the information is **further shared** within stakeholder organizations

  "We share it with our members in the working groups"
  "I make a weekly electronic update that I send out to our members, I always include the relevant EFSA-links"

- Some state that EFSA "over-communicates", sending out **massive amounts of information**, or making it **too technical**

  "They are just ticking boxes. Everyone is informed about everything. So no complaints afterwards"
  "It is too technical. A part of their job is to translate the science back into human language"

- And a few stakeholders are under the impression that the timing of certain publications is "politically motivated" (NB more project related than "activity-related -> out of scope!) **or that material** is **not always up-to-date**



Stakeholder Communication

A helpful website and…mail showers

- A good site, very complete, a key **bookmark**
- **Web streaming** is seen as quite useful

"The Ramazzini web conference, 1200 people looking at it gave it the right level of attention"

- Some **important issues** (not activity related)
  - Things "suddenly appear" – stakeholders feel they are entitled to an early warning
  - A general regret is that the opinions are never corrected**.**

"They stay there "forever" even if rectifications are publicized"
"You have to continuously check when things are publicized, they could send an early warning around

The EFSA email Highlights are seen as a mixed blessing

- Mostly fine, **EFSA informs…thoroughly**, fully in line with mandate
- But way **too much** for many, everyone is informed about everything
- Risk of **missing the important things**
- Lack of **personalization & early warning**



"I count almost one thousand EFSA emails since end 2005, of which 198 unread"
"Limit of getting too much in the last months I believe all the stuff is available but I have no time to look at it."
"Tick boxer. Many stay unread. I feel guilty, I put them in a folder, I do keep them"



For many stakeholders, EFSA is the benchmark

- Stakeholders consider that **EFSA is actually a benchmark for other institutions** in terms of **organizing activities**

"EFSA is the model others should follow."
"EFSA is much better than SANCO. We can influence the agenda and discuss what we want to discuss."
"UK FSA too media active. EFSA communication is more balanced."

Some issues and opportunities…

- EFSA comes across as **more scared of an open dialogue** than other institutions. One-on-one meetings are always possible but EFSA is then often seen as **"politely listening"**

"EFSA questions itself more than SANCO."

- **EMEA was cited as a benchmark for stakeholder relations**, with an effective "front desk" for information requests and input

"The system of a front desk office like in EMEA is strongly recommended."
"EMEA better understands that industry involvement is necessary to come to a solution."
"Simplification routine involvement direct consultation of stakeholder."
"EMEA has a system of quality insurance."

Going forward

- **<u>No major issues</u> with the EFSA's overall approach to stakeholder activities**

- **It is a delicate process** to find the right balance between the interests of iverging interests and the integrity of EFSA's output.

- Stakeholders identified a lot of **opportunities to clarify and improve** the activities.



And there is a **lot of enthusiasm out there among the stakeholders**!

"They are certainly willing to listen. Also this study, it is a good idea to try and organize things for the better, we will certainly support that process"

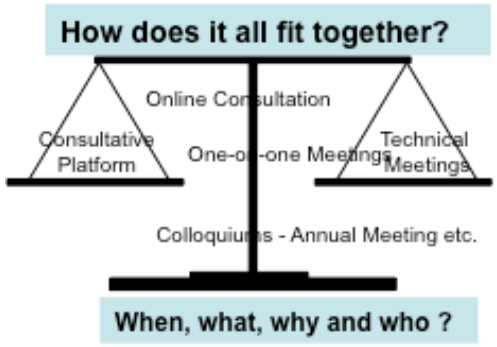
Adjustment and optimization

- The key insights from the research offer a solid basis for adjustment and optimization

Summary of key items

	Overall	Positive	Key items to be improved
The stakeholder platform meetings	++	•The basis •Well-organized •EFSA-interface, commitment and quality of presentations •Open, transparent exchange	•In-depth discussion •Absence of panel chairs •The working groups •Updates between meetings •Actionability and follow-up •Travel to Parma
The online consultations	+/-	•Open access to all	•Unwieldy tool •Potential bias - relevance? •Feedback
The Technical Meetings	+++	•In-depth focus •Access to/exchange with panels •Quality of organization	•Attendance •Conclusions and Feedback •Practical implementation of outcome •Frequency
Stakeholder Communication	+	•Overall quality •Everything is available •The website •Mails	•Actionability •Quantity of information

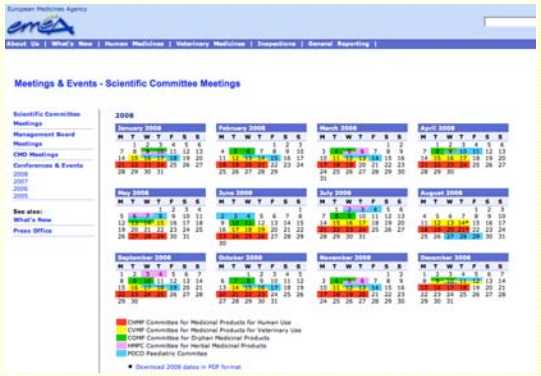
1. Clarify activities process & calendar



- **Task working groups with activities review**
  - **Existing programs and assessment as basis**
  - **Evolution and optimization** rather than revolution (results, sort out online…)
  - Clear **"fact-sheets"** for each activity type
  - Build **reference annual consultation program**
- **"Welcome program" for new participants**

Clear activity calendars (web based)

- Clear **visualization of "rolling 12-24 month calendars** indicating **topics**
- **Sufficient time to prepare, align attendance and post questions** upfront
- **Agenda topic** at platform meeting



The EMEA web-calendar can serve as inspiration

2. Build true dialogue

Enable improved dialogue and debate

- Availability of **information ahead**
- Not only plenary sessions
  - **More parallel sessions**
  - **More technical meetings**
- Presence of **key players** (panel chairs)
- Task working groups with **specific, workable goals**, provide **assistance**
- Aim for **obtaining tangible results**

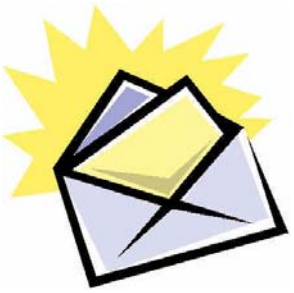


Be more open

- "Stakeholders like the menu but they would also love a visit to the kitchen" - more openness ("like in UK") on how opinions are formed and how things are getting through the pipeline
- Consider front-desk (re. EMEA) for updates and discussion of specific issues

…and for meeting comfort's sake, organized travel to Parma would also be welcomed

3. More effective communication



Special delivery
Important
For you

Small steps that can make big differences:

1. **More tailor-made communication** for stakeholders:
   - **Possibility to opt in/out** of highlights mails
   - **In-between meetings update** on progress
   - Clear rules for **early warning**

2 **More actionable** meeting minutes:
   - **Flagging** important points and **helping to "force" decisions** on hanging issues
   - **A review of the minutes of the previous session** as standing agenda item of platform meetings

3 **Updating on results or feedback** from all consultation channels
   - Include a review of online consultation items and results/usage of input, in the platform meeting

4. More Technical Meetings

- **A clear request from many stakeholders!**
  - **The ideal complement** to the Platform Meetings
  - Providing **better opportunities for in-depth discussion**
  - Giving stakeholders **better access to and interaction with the scientific Panels**
- **Current format of Technical Meetings can be kept**
  - Overall, stakeholders are very positive about the TM's so far
  - Need to **re-assess attendance criteria** to ensure no key players get "locked out"
  - Need to **provide better feedback** mechanisms and clarity on what happens with the input
  - **Frequency and choice of topics** can be managed via the Platform Meetings

And finally…

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