

SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION UNIT

Parma, 13 May 2009
EFSA/FP/M/2009/040/PUB/FIN

Minutes

**FOURTH MEETING BETWEEN FOCAL POINTS AND EFSA
PARMA (ITALY), 3-4 FEBRUARY 2009**

Participants

Chair: Bernhard Berger

Austria	<i>Johann Steinwider</i>	Italy	<i>Ivana Purificato</i>
Belgium	<i>Maxime Didat</i>	Latvia	<i>Zane Kampenus</i>
Bulgaria	<i>Teri Vrabcheva</i>	Lithuania	<i>Albertas Barzda</i>
Cyprus	<i>Eleni Kakouri</i>	Luxembourg	<i>Nathalie Welschbillig</i>
Czech Republic	<i>Miroslav Elckner</i>	Malta	<i>Ingrid Busuttil</i>
Denmark	<i>Arne Büchert</i>	Netherlands	<i>Jacqueline Castenmiller</i>
Estonia	<i>Piret Priisalu</i>	Poland	<i>Piotr Holownia</i>
Finland	<i>Kirsti Savela</i>	Portugal	<i>Manuel Barreto Dias</i>
France	<i>Philippe Prigent</i>	Slovakia	<i>Katarina Janekova</i>
Germany	<i>Michaela Nürnberg</i>	Slovenia	<i>Blaza Nahtigal</i>
Greece	<i>Stamatina Louka</i>	Spain	<i>Cristina Alonso-Andicoberry</i>
Hungary	<i>Judit Sali</i>	Sweden	<i>Anita Strömberg</i>
Ireland	<i>Anne-Marie Boland</i>	United Kingdom	<i>Alisdair Wotherspoon</i>
Italy	<i>Agostino Macri</i>		

Observers and Invitees of the Executive Director

Norway	<i>Danica Grahek-Ogden</i>	Switzerland	<i>Judith Beck</i>
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Staff of the European Food Safety Authority

<i>Bernhard Berger</i>	<i>Jeffrey Moon</i>
<i>Stef Bronzwear</i>	<i>Torben Nilsson</i>
<i>Christoph Buller</i>	<i>Saadia Noorani</i>
<i>David Carlander</i>	<i>Ilias Papatryfon</i>
<i>Hubert Deluyker</i>	<i>Sérgio Potier Rodeia</i>
<i>Paul Dragan</i>	<i>Carola Sondermann</i>
<i>Kerstin Gross-Helmert</i>	<i>Andras Szoradi</i>

1 WELCOME AND OPENING OF THE MEETING

Bernhard Berger from EFSA's Scientific Cooperation Unit (SCO) opened the 4th Meeting between Focal Points (FPs) and EFSA. He expressed his appreciation that representatives from the 26 Member States (MS) as well as from Norway and Switzerland participated at the meeting, and particularly welcomed those participants who attend a Focal Point meeting for the first time. Apologies for this meeting were received from the Romanian Focal Point. The Chair also introduced the new staff of SCO.

2 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The agenda was adopted without comments from participants.

The draft minutes of the 3rd FP Meeting were distributed to FPs in October 2008. The minutes were approved without comments from participants and would be placed on EFSA's website. Participants were reminded that EFSA needs to receive approval of the draft minutes of the 4th FP Meeting in writing by at least two thirds of participants to allow the minutes to be placed on the web before the following meeting.

The Chair stressed the importance of filling in the Declarations of Interest (DoI). SCO screened the Annual DoI (ADoI) filled in by the FPs invited to this meeting, in accordance with EFSA's Policy on Declarations of Interests. The Chair invited participants to orally declare any further conflicts of interest. With regard to the ADoI and this meeting, no other interests than those already declared in the ADoI and screened by EFSA in accordance with its Policy on Declarations of Interests and implementing documents thereof were declared by experts.

No items from FPs were included under Any Other Business (AOB). Three items were raised by EFSA, namely: 1) sharing of Work Programmes, 2) filling in the table

“Structure and Organisation of Focal Points in MS” placed on Extranet, and 3) sharing of e-mail addresses.

3 THE FIRST YEAR OF FOCAL POINTS

3.1 FP summary report to Advisory Forum

Kerstin Gross-Helmert from SCO gave an overview of the FP activities carried out in 2008 and of the summary report presented to the Advisory Forum (AF) at its meeting on 20-21 November 2008 in Copenhagen. The activities covered all 4 areas of FP activities, namely: 1) exchange of scientific information, mainly via e-mail requests and the Information Exchange Platform, 2) support to ensure the Article 36 List was up-to-date and functional, 3) support the testing and promotion of EFSA’s Expert Database at national level, and 4) strengthen networking and increase EFSA’s scientific visibility at national level. Finally, the overall very positive feedback and comments from AF members were presented, which had been expressed in the answers to the questionnaire on the review of the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking. A clear example of the AF’s satisfaction with the FPs’ work was the AF’s approval of EFSA’s proposal to sign new FP Agreements in 2009.

3.2 Exchange of experiences of practical FP work: successes and challenges of FPs’ daily work

Danica Grahek-Ogden, representing the Norwegian FP, gave a presentation on the FP activities carried out in Norway. She described the challenges they overcame, particularly as Norway is in a special position, not being an EU MS, therefore not having signed a FP Agreement and not being able join Article 36 activities. In addition, she informed participants of, both, past successful and planned future activities.

The following discussion gave FPs the opportunity to exchange experience on the practical work of FPs, including the challenges faced and successes achieved in their countries. The main challenges encountered by a number of FPs included:

- identifying appropriate contact persons after receiving a request for information (e.g. questionnaire) from EFSA or other MS;
- handling requests (e.g. questionnaires) with short deadlines, particularly if experts from outside the FP’s institution needed to be identified/consulted; and
- motivating experts to undertake additional work, especially if they were from outside the FP’s institution.

The latter was discussed in more detail and the following recommendations were given: 1) make experts and other partners more aware of funding possibilities, such as Article 36 calls or calls for procurement, 2) increase the feedback to experts on the use of the information previously provided by them, and 3) offer possibilities to young experts to receive wider recognition and reputation by providing input.

To avoid duplication of work, it was stressed that the FP network would not interfere with existing specific networks connected to EFSA. The list of existing networks, provided after the 1st FP Meeting and available on the Extranet, would be updated and distributed to FPs. Some FPs thought it useful to receive information about requests sent to specific networks. However, a consensus was reached that FPs would not be informed, since it would result in receiving a large number of e-mail messages.

It was noted that if EFSA addresses a request via the Permanent Representations, the replies need to be sent through the Permanent Representations back to EFSA in order to be officially accepted. This is a legal requirement, as the Permanent Representations are considered to formally represent the MS.

FPs shared a variety of success stories of their work, including:

- organisation of kick-off FP meetings and similar events at national level, providing a platform for people to meet and exchange information, and to be informed about FP activities and EFSA's work;
- motivation of potential Article 36 organisations to be added to the List of Competent Organisations and to participate in Article 36 calls;
- identification of contact persons to be part of the national network; and
- increased awareness of EFSA and its work within the country.

Action 1: SCO to update the list of existing networks and make it available to FPs via the Extranet.

Action 2: FPs to ask SCO for further information or clarification of requests sent to them, e.g. related to questionnaires, in case it is required.

3.3 Growth of the Expert Database

Sérgio Potier Rodeia from SCO gave a presentation on the growth of EFSA's Expert Database (EDB) since its launch in June 2008. FPs were then asked to identify national expert databases related to EFSA's remit. The intention is to further populate EFSA's database with experts included in national databases. The procedure would envisage contacting the managers of the databases and agree with them how to best share expert profiles with EFSA. EFSA could later prefill expert data into its database and invite experts to join it, safeguarding data protection requirements. It was made clear that the main objective is to find a possibility for cooperation, and that EFSA does not envisage "taking over" any existing databases.

Finally, it was clarified, that the EDB search tool was only accessible to AF Members, as previously decided by the AF. However, SCO would seek clearance from the AF to also allow FPs to access the search tool.

Action 3: FPs to identify national expert databases and to inform SCO.

3.4 Update of activities under Article 36

Ilias Papatryfon from SCO gave feedback on activities under Article 36. He informed participants of the updated Article 36 list of competent organisations, which was adopted by EFSA's Management Board (MB) in December 2008. Future updates of the list are foreseen every two years, and on an *ad-hoc* basis if a scientific need is identified. Ilias Papatryfon also gave an overview of the Article 36 work programme for 2003-2008 and for 2009. In the following discussion it was clarified that while the AF received details of unpublished calls, this information could not be sent to FPs due to confidentiality issues. Some FPs felt that the application procedure for Article 36 projects was too complicated. The French FP offered to share a tool, which helps filling in the application forms.

Action 4: French FP to share the tool for application to Article 36 calls via the Extranet.

3.5 Feedback - questionnaire on harmonisation of risk assessment approaches in MS

Andras Szoradi from SCO thanked the FPs for their support in answering the questionnaire on harmonisation of risk assessment approaches in MS. He gave an overview of the results, including the organisation of risk assessment in MS, the challenges in risk assessment, publication of risk assessment outputs, and the use of guidance documents and quality management tools in the risk assessment process. Furthermore, he presented the recommendations of the ESCO Working Group, to be discussed at the AF meeting in February 2009 (e.g. the development of country profiles). The ESCO Report is available on EFSA's website. Johann Steinwider thanked FPs on behalf of Roland Grossgut (Chair of the ESCO Working Group) for providing the ESCO Working Group with the necessary information by returning the questionnaire.

4 COUNTRY PROFILES

Michaela Nürnberg from the German FP presented the BfR Project "EU Food Safety Almanac". The aim of the project is to create an overview of the public authorities and structures of food and feed safety in the EU, from the angle of public law, focussing on risk assessment. She gave an overview of the structure of the Almanac, which would include a country profile for each MS. The support of all FPs was sought to validate these country profiles.

In the following discussion it was pointed out that this initiative coincided with one of the recommendations of the ESCO Working Group on Harmonisation of Risk Assessment Approaches in MS to develop food safety related country profiles. FPs asked why this was a BfR and not an EFSA initiative. It was suggested to establish a FP Working Group on Country Profiles, provided the AF agreed. Nominations from FPs to join the Working Group should be sent to SCO by 25 February 2009. Nominees should ideally have already been involved in similar projects.

Action 5: FPs to nominate a person for the FP Working Group on Country Profiles, if interested, by sending an e-mail message to SCO (scientific.cooperation@efsa.europa.eu) until 25 February 2009.

5 RELEVANT ISSUES FROM THE AF MEETING

Torben Nilsson, from the Scientific Committee & Advisory Forum Unit, Advisory Forum Team Leader, informed participants of relevant issues from the AF Meeting held on 20-21 November 2008 in Denmark:

- The discussion on nanotechnology during the period of public consultation emphasised that insufficient information was available. The AF decided to pool the expertise in Europe by involving FPs to obtain and share information.
- The achievements and proposed revised Terms of Reference of the AF IT Working Group were presented.
- An overview was given on EFSA's work for ensuring the transparency and scientific quality of risk assessment.
- Feedback was given on the review of the implementation of the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking, work under Article 36 and FP activities. Comments of AF Members regarding the FP work were very positive and it was agreed that activities should continue. Similarly, AF Members expressed their willingness to continue to implement the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking, with key areas in harmonisation of risk assessment, data collection and training.
- The AF was briefed on the outputs of the Steering Group on Cooperation Meeting in October 2008, the ESCO Working Groups, and Communications activities.
- The main topics raised by MS included data collection in plant health and parasites in fish.
- EFSA presented its opinion on nitrate in vegetables and the crisis handling manual.

Participants were informed that the minutes of this meeting are available on EFSA's website.

6 COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES

Christoph Buller, Head of Public Information and Events Unit of the Communications Directorate, informed participants about EFSA's communications work, including press activities, EFSA's website, publications and events. Further, he gave an overview of FP outreach activities, such as the development of FP web pages and the distribution of EFSA newsletters. To improve networking and raising EFSA's visibility in future, FPs should:

- create/expand their network with national target audiences;
- create and further develop national web pages; and
- develop and disseminate information and material.

These activities should be developed in close cooperation with the respective AF Communications Working Group (AFCWG) Members in their countries. The Communications Directorate will provide an up-to-date list of AFCWG Members. In

addition, Communications offered their support to FPs, e.g. for the development of web pages.

Action 6: FPs to contact Communications if they require support.

Action 7: Communications to provide an up-to-date list of AFCWG Members.

Action 8: SCO to distribute the list of AFCWG Members to FPs.

Action 9: FPs to provide feedback to Communications on what worked well and what did not work well at events organised jointly with EFSA's Communications Directorate.

Action 10: Communications to provide feedback on which countries were included, when counting the number of countries that had established FP web pages.

7 UPCOMING ISSUES FOR 2009

Bernhard Berger presented upcoming issues for 2009. These included the dates of FP, AF and AFCWG meetings, as well as the timelines for FP reporting.

8 EXPECTATIONS FOR THE 2ND YEAR OF FPS

8.1 Interim review of the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking

Saadia Noorani from SCO informed participants about the results of the assessment of the feedback to the questionnaire on the implementation of the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking. The report on the interim review of the Strategy had been presented to the Steering Group Cooperation, AF and Management Board at the end of 2008. As a result of the review, the follow-up would be discussed internally at EFSA and by the AF.

8.2 Discussion on priorities of FP work

Bernhard Berger presented the priorities of FP work for 2009: 1) to improve the exchange of scientific information, 2) to further develop EFSA's EDB and the Article 36 network, and 3) to improve networking and to raise EFSA's visibility. The latter was discussed in more detail as part of the session on Communications activities. The recommendation of the "Interim Review of the Strategy on Cooperation and Networking" regarding the FP work was to consolidate existing rather than starting new activities.

To improve the exchange of scientific information, the use of the Information Exchange Platform (IEP) should be promoted. Since MS had committed themselves to share annual and strategic work programmes of Member States' risk assessment bodies, FPs were asked to upload them onto the IEP. SCO would prepare a report, summarising information related to risk assessment initiatives in MS. The aim is to inform MS and EFSA about each other's priorities and avoid duplication of work. More details on which documents should be uploaded onto the IEP were discussed under point 9 of the agenda.

To further develop EFSA's EDB, FPs should continue to stimulate experts in their countries to apply. Furthermore, as previously discussed during the session on the EDB, FPs were asked to identify national expert databases and inform EFSA to determine whether cooperation and sharing of data would be possible. During 2009, EFSA will also assess the EDB to identify data gaps and give recommendations on the necessary actions to overcome them.

To further develop the Article 36 network, FPs and EFSA need to ensure that the Article 36 List is kept up-to-date and functional. Moreover, FPs and EFSA would foster the network of Article 36 organisations, e.g. by establishing an Extranet workspace. Finally, EFSA will prepare a report by the end of the year on the work conducted through Article 36 projects.

Action 11: FPs to upload annual and strategic work programmes onto the IEP.

Action 12: SCO to prepare a report, summarising information on planned risk assessment initiatives in MS over the following years, using the annual and strategic work programmes of MS.

Action 13: FPs to inform EFSA of any changes to the Article 36 List.

Action 14: SCO to prepare a report on the work conducted through Article 36 projects by the end of 2009.

9 INFORMATION EXCHANGE

9.1 Research platform on emerging risks and the open access repository – presentation by the UK

Alisdair Wotherspoon from the UK FP presented the platform on emerging risks developed under the SafeFoodEra project, which is being led by colleagues at the Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (VWA) in The Netherlands. The platform aims at exchanging information on current and future research on emerging feed and food safety risks. It serves as a tool to coordinate transnational research and helps with the proactive identification of emerging feed and food safety risks at a pre-early warning stage. Alisdair Wotherspoon described the different members of the platform and how it would be financed. More information is available under <http://www.safefoodera.net>.

Alisdair Wotherspoon also demonstrated the UK Food Safety Authority's (FSA) Open Access Repository (www.foodbase.org.uk). This tool was developed as an extranet-type service to facilitate peer-review (internally) and to increase the accessibility of FSA-funded research outputs, particularly final reports (externally).

9.2 Information Exchange Platform – outcome of the pilot phase

Anne-Marie Boland, member of the FP Working Group on the IEP, informed participants of the discussion and recommendations of the Working Group meeting held on 2-3 February 2009:

- The total number of visits to the IEP and the number of documents uploaded were limited.
- Additional motivation for use was needed. Information on the IEP should be updated at least on a monthly basis. Access to the IEP should be broadened to scientists interested in risk assessment of food and feed in the long-run, however before granting such “read only” access rights, the platform should become more “solid”.
- The overall structure and layout was user friendly and allowed for easy navigation. The folder structure should be maintained according to EFSA Panels.
- Some technical adjustments were required for certain functions/features.
- The types of documents to be uploaded should be restricted to risk assessment outputs and mandates/requests (more information under point 9.3), annual and strategic work plans, country profiles, and symposium/conference proceedings. SCO would circulate a one-page definition guide on what was understood by risk assessment outputs (e.g. opinion, statement, guidance document, etc.). It was stressed that only non-confidential documents may be uploaded onto the IEP.
- A reporting tool would be made available to all IEP users to generate self-defined reports at any time.

In light of the discussions, participants of the working group suggested changing the scope of the IEP from: “The IEP provides a platform for EFSA and Member States to facilitate the exchange of scientific information.” to “The IEP provides a platform for the Advisory Forum/Focal Point members and EFSA to facilitate the exchange of risk assessment outputs undertaken by the official bodies in the different Member States.”.

The AF would be informed of the discussions and recommendations at the next AF Meeting in February 2009. The minutes of the FP Working Group on the IEP meeting would be circulated to all FPs for further information. An updated IEP user guide would also be made available.

Action 15: SCO to circulate a one-page definition guide on what was understood by risk assessment outputs (e.g. opinion, statement, guidance document, etc.).

Action 16: SCO to circulate the IEP Working Group meeting minutes to all FPs.

Action 17: SCO to update the IEP user guide and inform FPs.

Action 18: SCO to remind FPs, on a fixed date of each month, to update the IEP with relevant documents from their country.

Action 19: FPs to periodically update information on the IEP (monthly or annually depending on type of document, following reminder e-mail from SCO).

9.3 Expanding activities on the IEP

The session began with a presentation by Philippe Prigent from the French FP, putting forward ideas on how best to collect relevant information for sharing between MS. A number of issues had already been addressed by the FP Working Group on the IEP. The

presentation included questions on what documents to collect, how best to collect them, and how best to share them.

As part of the discussion it was clarified that the documents on the IEP would mainly be limited to risk assessment outputs. To avoid duplication of work, links to existing web pages where risk assessment outputs are available (in MS and EFSA), would be uploaded onto the IEP. Risk assessment outputs not easily accessible, e.g. if not published on the web or if in another language than English, should be uploaded onto the IEP. This would include non-full-assessments with a clear indication of preliminary or partial risk assessment. In addition to the risk assessment outputs, also information on started risk assessment initiatives should be uploaded, e.g. mandates/requests. If these were not publically available, general information should be given, without uploading a document. It was agreed that information on started risk assessment would be included in the appropriate existing folders, marking them as “started” risk assessment to make it searchable. SCO would prepare a document on what FPs should do.

Action 20: FPs to provide links to national web pages where risk assessment outputs are available.

Action 21: SCO to upload links of national and EFSA’s web pages with opinions onto the IEP.

Action 22: SCO to prepare a guidance document on what FPs should do on the IEP.

10 NANOTECHNOLOGY: ACTIVITIES OF EFSA AND MS

David Carlander, scientific officer of the Scientific Committee & Advisory Forum Unit, presented the draft opinion on potential risks arising from nanoscience and nanotechnologies on food and feed safety. In the overview he stressed that currently limited data and information were available on potential hazards of engineered nanomaterials. The final opinion is expected to be published in March.

At the AF Meeting in November 2008, FPs were asked to collect information on activities on nanotechnology in MS. Much information had been received by FPs and had been compiled in a document. This document would be made available to FPs via the Extranet. FPs were asked to check and add information, if applicable. The document would then be forwarded to the Scientific Committee & Advisory Forum Unit.

Action 23: SCO to make available the nanotechnology activity document to FPs via the Extranet.

Action 24: FPs to check and add information to the nanotechnology activity document, if applicable.

11 AOB

Structure & Organisation of Focal Points in MS

FPs were reminded to please fill in the table "Structure & Organisation of Focal Points in MS". To that date, 8 FPs had submitted their contributions. The table also included the contact details of the FPs.

Action 25: FPs to fill in the online table "Structure & Organisation of Focal Points in MS" using the check-in and check-out tool of the Extranet.

E-mail distribution list

FPs agreed to look into the option of creating corporate e-mail addresses, particularly in view of disseminating the addresses. For FPs which did not have a corporate e-mail address, the personal addresses would be used.

Action 26: FPs to check the possibility of creating a corporate e-mail address for FP work and inform SCO accordingly.

12 CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

The Chair closed the meeting. He thanked participants for attending the meeting and for their active contribution to discussions. He stressed the continued commitment of the SCO Unit to cooperate with, and support, the FPs in their work.

SUMMARY OF ACTION POINTS

Reference	Who	What
Action 1	SCO	to update the list of existing networks and make it available to FPs via the Extranet
Action 2	FPs	to ask SCO for further information or clarification of requests sent to them, e.g. related to questionnaires, in case it is required
Action 3	FPs	to identify national expert databases and to inform SCO
Action 4	French FP	to share the tool for application to Article 36 calls available via the Extranet
Action 5	FPs	to nominate a person for the FP Working Group on Country Profiles, if interested, by sending an e-mail message to SCO (scientific.cooperation@efsa.europa.eu) until 25 February 2009
Action 6	FPs	to contact Communications if they require support
Action 7	COMM	to provide an up-to-date list of AFCWG Members
Action 8	SCO	to distribute the list of AFCWG Members to FPs

Action 9	FPs	to provide feedback to Communications on what worked well and what did not work well at events organised jointly with EFSA's Communications Directorate
Action 10	COMM	to provide feedback on which countries were included, when counting the number of countries that had established FP web pages
Action 11	FPs	to upload annual and strategic work programmes onto the IEP
Action 12	SCO	to prepare a report, summarising information on planned risk assessment initiatives in MS over the following years, using the annual and strategic work programmes of MS
Action 13	FPs	to inform EFSA of any changes to the Article 36 List
Action 14	SCO	to prepare a report on the work conducted through Article 36 projects by the end of 2009
Action 15	SCO	to circulate a one-page definition guide on what was understood by risk assessment outputs (e.g. opinion, statement, guidance document, etc.)
Action 16	SCO	to circulate the IEP Working Group meeting minutes to all FPs
Action 17	SCO	to update the IEP user guide and inform FPs
Action 18	SCO	to remind FPs, on a fixed date of each month, to update the IEP with relevant documents from their country
Action 19	FPs	to periodically update information on the IEP (monthly or annually depending on type of document, following reminder e-mail from SCO)
Action 20	FPs	to provide links to national web pages where risk assessment outputs are available.
Action 21	SCO	to upload links of national and EFSA's web pages with opinions onto the IEP
Action 22	SCO	to prepare a guidance document on what FPs should do on the IEP
Action 23	SCO	to make available the nanotechnology activity document to FPs via the Extranet
Action 24	FPs	to check and add information to the nanotechnology activity document, if applicable
Action 25	FPs	to fill in the online table "Structure & Organisation of Focal Points in MS" using the check-in and check-out tool of the Extranet
Action 26	FPs	to check the possibility of creating a corporate e-mail address for FP work and inform SCO accordingly