

# 14th MEETING OF EFSA STAKEHOLDER BUREAU

**VIRTUAL MEETING, 09 APRIL 2024**



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## INTRODUCTION

The 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Stakeholder Bureau took place on 9 of April 2024.

The Bureau meetings are an opportunity for EFSA and stakeholders to exchange on the most relevant topics and exchange feedback.

This meeting was particularly relevant as it marked the conclusion of Bernhard Url's official mandate as EFSA's ED. Once again, he highlighted the significant role of the Stakeholder Bureau as EFSA's advisory body for engagement, anchoring its risk assessment to societal expectations.

Shortly after the Bureau meeting, following an agreement by written procedure, the Board has decided to nominate Bernhard Url as acting Executive Director of EFSA, effective from 1st June 2024. This decision will ensure stability and continuity for EFSA as the selection process for the new Executive Director, due to be completed next year (2025), moves forward. Bernhard will serve in his role until the new ED is in place.

During his opening, Bernhard emphasised the co-evolution process that the organisation has undergone in these last 10 years. An organisation which is today very different from how it previously was, yet firmly anchored around two core principles: independence and transparency. EFSA's policy of independence has been continuously reinforced over the years and is now acknowledged as the most advanced within the EU. Moreover, the Transparency Regulation has been a 'game changer', significantly enhancing the transparency of EFSA's risk assessment work. As a matter of fact, all the information that EFSA uses to carry out its risk assessments are today publicly available. This aids the trust that European consumers have in the system; and provides benefits to the scientific community at large, laying out a framework for increased MSs collaboration and sustainability of the risk assessment system in the EU. In this process of change, Stakeholders have represented a crucial part, facilitating the transition and the internalisation of processes.

Bernhard also outlined the agenda for the meeting, which was structured into three main blocks. The first block aimed to tackle feedback received during the 6th Stakeholder Forum, along with new items specifically raised for this session. The second block provided an update on EFSA's policy on independence. The third block explicitly addressed two agenda items requested by stakeholders: one from the industry category and another from academia.

Following the welcome address, Aivars Bērziņš, Chair of EFSA's Management Board, introduced himself and commended Bernhard for his remarkable ten-year journey. He expressed gratitude to the Stakeholder Bureau members for their valuable feedback, emphasizing its role as a catalyst for improvement within the Management Board as well.

Aivars also provided an update on the state of play regarding the appointment of a member and an alternate member of EFSA's Management Board as representatives of environmental non-governmental organisations following Member resignation on 12/07/2023.

The new member and alternate should be appointed by Autumn. An official update has been provided by Deputy DG Claire Bury at EFSA MB meeting in March this year under AOB, publicly available on EFSA's website: [97th Management Board meeting | EFSA \(europa.eu\)](#)

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# FOLLOW UP ON THE FEEDBACK RECEIVED REGARDING ENGAGEMENT PROCESSES WITH REGISTERED STAKEHOLDERS

## **Introduction to upcoming Registered Stakeholder workshop: Communication and Engagement Methods for Food Safety - New Evidence and Tools (COMET)**

Transitioning onto the first agenda item, Giorgia Zamariola, social scientist of the EFSA's Strategic Communications team, provided an update on EFSA Annual Strategy Survey, 2023 edition, indicating a slight decrease in satisfaction regarding Risk Assessment and Risk Communication, and further inviting Stakeholders to contribute to the next edition of the survey by September 2024.

Moreover, she introduced the new COmmunication and engagement Methods for food safety - new Evidence and Tools (COMET) project aimed at providing stakeholders with an opportunity to have a direct say into alternatives to Transparency Regulation (TR) for building a communication toolkit for public consultations, comprising the pre-, during- and post- consultation phases.

This project can be identified within the general roadmap for action on Evidence-based risk communication in the EU Food Safety System. Following the implementation of the Transparency Regulation, public consultations became mandatory at EFSA for new Applications, which resulted in an increase in the number of engagement activities carried out. As such, there was a pressing need to evaluate the effectiveness of the transparency initiatives undertaken and to identify project proposals in the area of public consultations and transparency initiatives which ultimately will allow EFSA to increase trust in its science, improve the quality of the scientific output and identify a series of potential solutions that can address the identified challenges and blockers.

More specifically, the project aims to:

1. Enhance the quality of information exchanged between stakeholders, the public at large, and the EU food safety system, through the use of technology to fact-check food safety information in the public domain combined with innovative (tailor-made) models of public participation;
2. Expand the set of communications strategies available to tackle topics of public concern, evaluating the effects of the impact of risk communication on target audiences to improve its effectiveness;
3. Create benefits for the food safety knowledge ecosystem from scalable risk communication solutions, developing and testing new approaches and tools to evidence-based risk communication.

The first step of the project involves focus group sessions, taking place online, and serving as interactive forums where stakeholders can engage in open discussions regarding the EFSA public consultation process and their participation therein. These sessions are designed to gather qualitative insights into stakeholders' perceptions, needs and challenges related to EFSA's public consultations. The focus groups discussion will occur approximately in late May/early June 2024. All subsequent steps of the project will continue from mid-June 2024 onwards.

The presentation laid the ground to a few questions, the first raised by the industry category which aimed to gain a clearer understanding of EFSA's intended use of the information collected and the underlying fallacies driving such initiatives.

Giorgia, clarified that the workshop is indeed needed to gather insights and to have a clearer vision on which areas need more improvements than others.

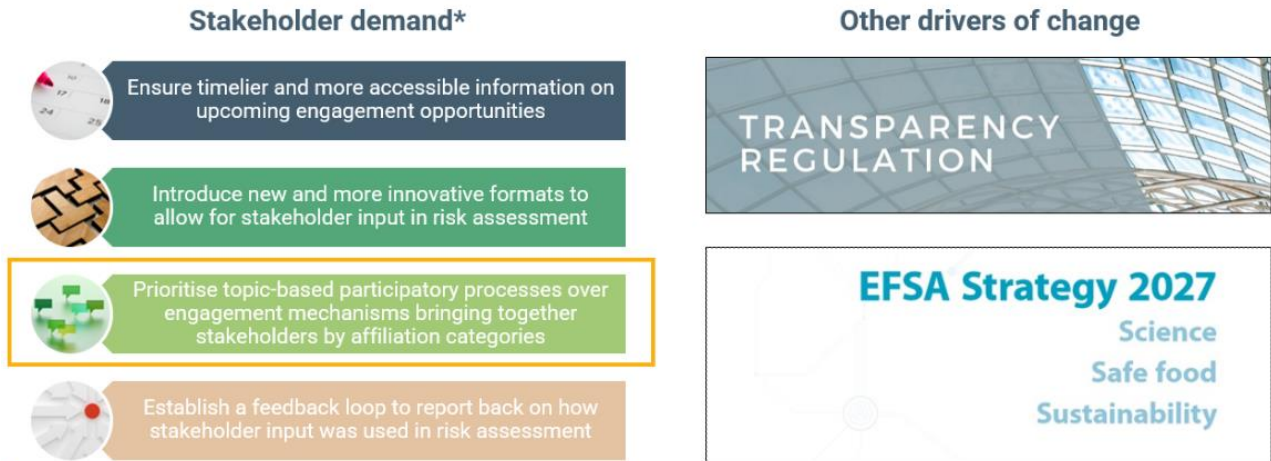
Victoria Villamar, Head of EFSA’s Engagement and External Relations Unit, complemented the above by further elaborating that the project aims to identify the specific issues concerning Public Consultations (PCs) , whether related to time constraints, interest, resource limitations, the tools or digital blockers. Understanding these challenges will allow EFSA to select the preferred channels of communication and best-fit engagement formats.

Finally, the NGO representative expressed the need for increased engagement and greater consideration of their category’s input. In response, EFSA's Executive Director clarified that while EFSA very much values the input provided, evaluating the validity of all contributions within the risk assessment context is imperative. Due to the volume of PCs, prioritizing streamlined processes has become essential.

**Moving Engagement forward together. Topic-based participatory processes**

Engagement Officer Cinzia Percivaldi elaborated on topic-based participatory processes, offering practical examples of how these processes are integrated throughout the risk assessment lifecycle.

Firstly, she introduced what is meant by topic-based engagement: *an engagement approach based on thematic participatory processes bringing together diverse stakeholders with an interest in the same topic for early and regular engagement during risk assessment,* and later explored that topic-based engagement was mainly (but not only) triggered by stakeholder demand.



\* Source: SEA evaluation survey 2019 and feedback collected at the Annual Stakeholder Forums.

Cinzia provided an update on the timeline for developing the thematic engagement process, along with practical examples:

- 1) In the realm of **Novel Foods**, an engagement plan targeting primarily the applicants starting in May 2023 with a stakeholder mapping and the scientific colloquium on cell-culture derived foods was implemented, leading towards the adoption of a new guidance document in June 2024 with regular engagement throughout guidance development.

- 2) On the **Animal welfare** front: the process unfolds under a distinct framework, initiated from the acceptance of the mandate, wherein relevant stakeholders are identified, until after adoption. Currently, there are 4 ongoing mandates on Animal Welfare that are seeing significant engagement and satisfaction from SHs who are pleased with early engagement as repeatedly requested.

In essence, the main objective of regularly employing topic-based engagement is to move away from the "one size fits all" approach which limits the ability to tailor expertise according to the different risk assessment areas the organisation was working on.

Presentation was found clear by stakeholders. As a matter of fact, it did not trigger a lot of comments if not a reiteration that stakeholders would like to receive direct emails inviting them to participate in engagement activities pertinent to their areas of expertise. Notably, EFSA was already actively addressing this request.

### **Presentation of preliminary concept for the upcoming 7th Stakeholder Forum**

The third item of the first block saw Elisa Simeoni, Engagement officer, providing some first insights into the organisation of EFSA's 7<sup>th</sup> Stakeholder Forum, scheduled to take place in Brussels approximately in November 2024, and which main objective is to keep ensuring connections between the different stakeholder categories and EFSA's management. Elisa invited stakeholders to propose topics of interest and to let EFSA know whether they would like to have an active role at the event. Representative from the Industry sector expressed interest in replicating and expanding the session dedicated to applicants, following the model set forth in the 6th Forum. Similarly, the NGO representative also expressed a desire for expert discussions and increased participation from NGOs (also not limiting participation to one stakeholder per organisation).

The Consumer representative proposed including discussions on EFSA's ongoing evaluation and how its mandate can evolve in terms of sustainability. Additionally, they suggested deliberating on the One Health approach and its potential enhancement under the new Commission, possibly mirroring the format of the One Health conference held in 2022.

On the first point, raised by the Industry representative, EFSA's ED clarified that while the Forum serves as a valuable platform, it is not solely scientific in nature. Therefore, it is essential to strike the right balance when selecting topics for discussion. Bureau Members were invited to provide further comments on the draft concept for the Forum meeting by written procedure. The Bureau will be kept informed on progress and will be associated to the planning and execution of the programme, with an expected active role in promoting and leveraging the outcome of these annual gatherings with all registered stakeholder organisations.

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## EFSA POLICY ON INDEPENDENCE: STATE OF PLAY AND LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

Dirk Detken, the Head of EFSA's Legal Services Unit, offered an update on EFSA's independence policy.

The policy on independence was initially adopted by the Management Board in 2017, with provisions for a review within five years of its entering into force. This review was duly triggered within the timeline and is currently in progress.

To conduct the review, EFSA has outsourced the services to an external contractor who submitted a report<sup>1</sup> in October 2023.

The evaluation encompasses two primary dimensions:

- **Retrospective:** this involves assessing the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of policies on EFSA.
- **Forward-looking:** this entails evaluating the suitability of the policy within EFSA's evolving framework.

These two dimensions were explored with a methodology spanning three different pillars:

- 1) Stakeholder consultation (intended in the broader sense, including EFSA staff, Management Board, Advisory Forum, Focal Points, Art. 36 organisations etc...), interviews and surveys.
- 2) Desk research: aimed at reviewing bodies of the EU to check what issues (if any) had surfaced beyond EFSA at EU level.
- 3) Benchmarking exercise: with a focus on organisations similar to EFSA in terms of mandate and modus operandi. Examples include ECDC, ECHA, EMA, but also on national level like ANSES.

The primary findings suggest that the policy has demonstrated strong performance and remains aligned with EFSA's objectives, values, and overarching framework. In a nutshell<sup>2</sup>:

- EFSA has a robust system in place that ensures a satisfactory level of independence and prevention of undue conflicts of interest (...). The Policy is coherent with objectives and values of EFSA corporate strategy and requirements laid down in the legal framework.
- There is widespread recognition of EFSA recent improvements in relation to independence(...). Evidence of positive reputational impact can be found in EU supervisory bodies' reports in feedback from scientific community and stakeholders.
- (...) future sustainability could be challenged by the expected increase in EFSA activities, especially through outsourcing of scientific work. (...). Other minor issues mainly regarding the clarity and the consistency of specific provisions or implementation measures (...) not represent substantial and/or urgent threats to the functioning and achievement of the Policy's objective.

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<sup>1</sup> [Ex post evaluation of the Policy on Independence of the European Food Safety Authority adopted by EFSA Management Board on 21/06/2017](#)

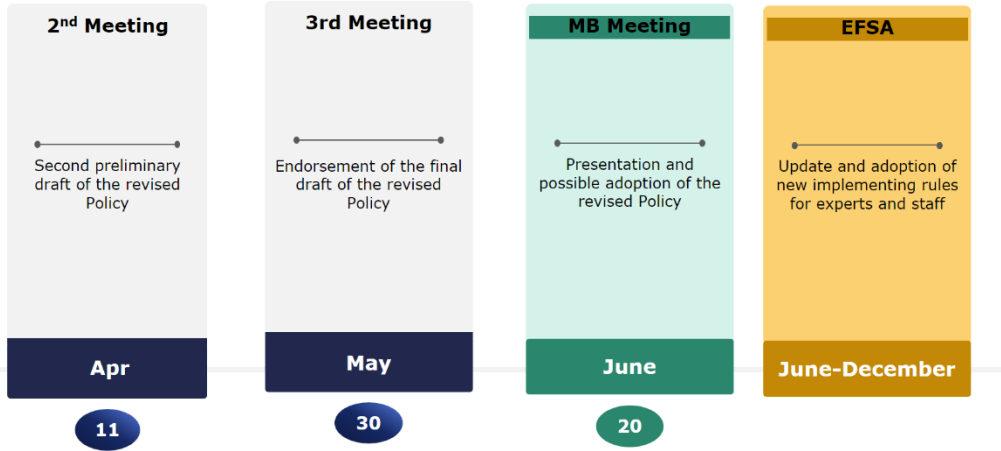
<sup>2</sup> The text is exactred from the Key findings and recommendations section of the Ex post evaluation report (pg.3), available at the above link.

Compared to the preceding policy implemented before 2017, this policy has notably addressed independence concerns, yielding tangible improvements. While the conclusions have highlighted certain areas needing improvements, none of the recommendations pose critical obstacles to EFSA's overarching goal of maintaining independence. This further underscores the transformative impact of the 2017 policy as a pivotal development for EFSA. The report is publicly available on [EFSA's website](#).

Upon receiving the report, the Management Board made the decision to form a dedicated sub-group in June 2023 tasked specifically with overseeing the review process. This sub-group will operate independently of the regular board meetings and will focus on thoroughly examining the external report. Subsequently, the sub-group will provide insights and recommendations to the Management Board during plenary sessions. Their objective is to determine the necessity of revising EFSA's independence policy and to propose any required courses of action based on their review findings.

Moreover, Dirk provided Stakeholders with a glimpse of the main recommendations and future timeline for the development of the entire process, highlighted below:

- Communicate and engage
- Provide clarity to some specific concept
- Reinforce IT processing and leaning
- Enhance coherence and subsidiarity in outsourcing.



In his concluding remarks, Dirk thanked Stakeholders for their time and for the contributions they provided throughout this policy evaluation process.

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## AGENDA ITEMS REQUESTED BY STAKEHOLDERS

### **Discussion on operational aspects of Transparency Regulation (OSOA, IUCLID use and Post-TR tactics)**

The representative from the Industry delivered an extensive presentation on transparency operational aspects, covering the utilization of tools and other practices within EFSA.

The presentation highlighted the industry's perspective that EFSA did not sufficiently use technical (experts') hearings for regulated products. While there were numerous exchanges with EFSA staff on research purposes, there was a noticeable absence of such exchanges during the risk assessment phase, leading to many inconclusive opinions. A suggestion was put forward to replace the industry roundtable with ad-hoc or on-demand meetings when most needed.

Moreover, comments and feedback were also provided regarding the IUCLID tool, indicating that it created administrative burdens and on communication methods, suggesting that LinkedIn information is usually too brief and advocating for more detailed Plain Language Summaries.

Given that the time allocated to this agenda item was not sufficient, it was agreed that a follow-up meeting with the industry category representatives would be organized (taking place 27<sup>th</sup> of May), so to allow a deeper exchange. The outcome of such a meeting will be shared with all SHB members.

### **Update on Stakeholder Discussion Group on Environmental Risk Assessment**

In line with EFSA 2027 Strategic objectives on ensuring preparedness for future risk analysis needs, more up-to-date scientific guidance and methodological approaches needed to be developed. For regulatory environmental risk assessment (ERA), opportunities identified so far included the integration of several aspects related to the landscape (e.g., landscape structure and ecology) and combining prospective and retrospective assessments. To develop such integrated assessments, EFSA has established a multiannual plan for 2024-2028 to advance the ERA of PPPs. The activities under this multiannual plan aimed, primarily, to consolidate risk assessment methodologies for PPPs, and to integrate new tools and scientific knowledge. Considering both the complexity of the subject and the stakeholder and public interest, EFSA has decided to establish a Stakeholder Discussion Group on ERA (DG on ERA). The group would be informed and, where needed, consulted at various stages of the revision of the GD, and on any relevant development of the EFSA multiannual plan and activities in the area of ERA.

Agnès Rortais, scientific officer of the Environment, Plants & Ecotoxicology Unit presented an update on the timeline, selection criteria, and preliminary outcomes of the discussion group. The first meeting of the DG would most likely take place in Autumn of 2024. Since the presentation at the 13th Stakeholder Bureau in October 2023, EFSA has received 15 expert nominations from 10 organizations in the subsequent months. The selection process was finalized between February and March 2024 and made public in April 2024 based on the following criteria:

- Knowledge and expertise, particularly on terrestrial ecotoxicology, including agronomy and landscape ecology.
- Interest in the field and expected benefits from the participation of the organisation as expressed in its application;
- Role and remit of the organisation at the EU level;
- Achieving a balanced representation of stakeholder interests and categories.



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## AOB

### **EFSA External Evaluation**

The Commission representative and Policy coordinator, Athanasios Raikos, delivered a concise update on EFSA's external evaluation, planned to be finalised by 28<sup>th</sup> of March 2026. The first call for evidence received 57 comments which the Commission is evaluating. The work with the external contractor is planned to be starting in July 2024. Stakeholders expressed satisfaction with this update and were encouraged to provide any additional feedback they deemed necessary directly to the Commission.

Bernhard Url concluded the meeting thanking everyone for their commitment and the comments provided.

## ANNEX 1: AGENDA

Time	N	Item	Speakers
14:30-14:50	1	<b>Welcome to the meeting</b>	<b>Bernhard Url,</b> Executive Director <b>Aivars Berzins,</b> Chair of the EFSA Management Board
<b>Follow up on the feedback received regarding engagement processes with registered Stakeholders, incl. Q&amp;A:</b>			
14:50-15:00	2	<b>Introduction to upcoming Registered Stakeholder workshop: Communication and Engagement Methods for Food Safety - New Evidence and Tools (COMET)</b>	<b>Giorgia Zamariola,</b> Social Scientist, Strategic Communications
15:00-15:25	3	<b>Moving Engagement forward together. Topic-based participatory processes</b>	<b>Cinzia Percivaldi</b> Engagement officer, Engagement and External Relations Unit
15:25-15:40	4	<b>Presentation of preliminary concept for the upcoming 7<sup>th</sup> Stakeholder Forum</b>	<b>Elisa Siméoni, Christophe Wolff</b> Engagement officers, Engagement and External Relations Unit
<b>Independence Policy:</b>			
15:40-16:10	5	<b>EFSA Policy on Independence: state of play and latest developments</b>	<b>Dirk Detken</b> Head of Legal Services Unit
<b>Agenda items raised by stakeholders:</b>			

16:10-16:35 6 **Discussion on operational aspects of Transparency Regulation (OSOA, IUCLID use and Post-TR tactics)**

**Giuseppe Luca Capodiecì**  
Member of Business and Food Industry category

**Bénédicte Vagenende**  
Head of Front Desk & Workforce Planning

**Sara De Berardis**  
Team Leader, Front Desk & Workforce Planning

16:35-16:40 7 **Update on Stakeholder Discussion Group on Environmental Risk Assessment**

**Agnès Rortais**  
Scientific Officer, Environment, Plants & Ecotoxicology Unit

(requested by: **Lorraine Maltby**, Member of Academia category)

16:40-16:50 8 **AOB & Closing remarks**

**Bernhard Url,**  
Executive Director

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## ANNEX 2: PARTICIPANTS LIST

### STAKEHOLDERS

Name	Category
Camille Perrin	Consumers - Member
Angeliki Lyssimachou	NGOs and Adovacy Groups - Member
Eva Sali	Farmers and Primary Producers – Alternate
Luca Capodieci	Business and Food Industry – Member
Nelli Hajdu	Distributors and HORECA - Member
Rimma Ishimbaeva	Practitioners - Alternate
Lorraine Maltby	Academia – Member

### EFSA

Name	Position
Bernhard Url	Executive Director
Aivars Berzins	Chair of the EFSA Management Board
Victoria Villamar	Head of Engagement and External Relations Unit
Dirk Detken	Head of Legal Services
Bénédicte Vagenende	Head of Front Desk & Workforce planning Unit
Sara De Berardis	Team Leader, Front Desk & Workforce planning Unit
Agnès Rortais	Scientific Officer, Plants & Ecotoxicology Unit
Christophe Wolff	Policy Officer, Engagement and External Relations Unit
Sérgio Potier Rodeia	Community Management Team Leader, Engagement and External Relations Unit
Cinzia Percivaldi	Engagement Officer, Engagement and External Relations Unit
Elisa Simeoni	Engagement Officer, Engagement and External Relations Unit
Giorgia Zamariola	Social Scientist, Strategic Communications
Martina Liccardo	Junior Officer, Engagement and External Relations Unit

### EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Name	Position
Athanasios Raikos	Policy Coordinator, E.1, DG SANTE, European Commission