

COMMUNICATIONS

EFSA's Communications strategy: 2010 -2013 perspective Executive Summary

1. This document sets out the overall strategic framework and objectives for EFSA communications and the expected outcomes. It identifies EFSA's key target audiences and outlines how EFSA implements its communications activities through the selection of appropriate communications channels and tools and evaluates their impact and effectiveness. Looking forward, the document defines key strategic priorities for 2010-2013, in line with the Authority's Strategic Plan, including the presentation of key success indicators to help measure performance and adapt approaches over time.
2. EFSA's Communications Strategy, developed according to the clear mandate and accountabilities in risk communications laid down in the Authority's Founding Regulation, was formally adopted by the Management Board in November 2006¹. Given the significant developments since that time – both in EFSA's internal and external environments – EFSA undertook to review its Communications Strategy. At its meeting of 8 October 2009 the Board endorsed a discussion paper² proposing a methodology and timeline for the review and outlining the key factors to be taken into consideration by the Authority.
3. In order to inform the review of the Communications strategy, EFSA commissioned qualitative research by an independent consultant carried out from October- December 2009 amongst its key target audiences. The aim of the research was to assess awareness and understanding of EFSA (its role, organisation and principal outputs) as well as its overall image (in terms of expertise, value, usefulness of outputs, confidence in etc...). Learning from this research has been taken into account in the presentation of the updated EFSA Communications Strategy.

2006 Communications strategy: where do we come from?

4. The Communications strategy, adopted by the Board in 2006, defined EFSA's overall mission in communications as being "to provide appropriate, consistent, accurate and timely communications to all interested parties and stakeholders and to the public at large, based on the Authority's risk assessments and scientific expertise," in line with EFSA's Founding Regulation.
5. It identified EFSA's **key target audiences** as being those who commission work from the Authority (ie the risk managers) and those who have a particular involvement and interest in food, food safety and nutritional issues (ie risk assessors in Member States and outside the EU, stakeholders with a specific interest in the food chain, the broader scientific community, and other specialised audiences (eg health professional networks).
6. It outlined **three inter-related key outcomes** which have guided implementation of the strategy since 2006: visibility - building awareness for EFSA's corporate mission and scientific expertise; simplicity - enhancing the clarity and relevance of EFSA risk communications; and coherence - promoting coherence in risk communications across the Community.

Review of EFSA's Communications strategy: what have we achieved? What have we learned?

7. The scope of EFSA's communications work has greatly expanded since 2006, mirroring the development of its scientific activity. **EFSA's scientific outputs have both increased and diversified since 2006**. Work in the area of nutrition and health, nanotechnology and cloning have added new dimensions to its work and new relevance for a wider audience. New output types, such as data collection in areas supporting work in nutrition and on rapid response to new risks in the food chain (eg melamine in foods) as well as co-operation projects in Member States resonate with diverse audiences.

¹ EFSA Risk Communications Strategy and Plans (<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/keydocs/docs/commstrategy.pdf>)

² Review of EFSA's Communications Strategy, 8 October 2009 (<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/091008/doc/mb091008-ax7.pdf>)

8. EFSA's communications outputs and their uptake have significantly increased, attesting to the **growing visibility of its scientific work**. Indicators such as visits to the EFSA website, subscribers to email newsletters and the level of EFSA-related media coverage have all doubled from 2006 to 2009³. The increasing number of publications (including a greater number available in all EU languages) and events has supported outreach in Member States. Strengthened co-operation with Member States through the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications as well as co-ordination of communications with the European Commission-- in particular on rapid response issues such as dioxin contamination of pork or melamine in foods—and international outreach have facilitated **timely, coherent dissemination of risk communications messages** in Europe and world-wide.
9. The qualitative research carried out amongst EFSA's target audiences confirms that EFSA is on the right track with respect to its Communications approach. EFSA is seen as a good communicator with significant output. Coherence in risk communications between risk assessors and managers is seen to have improved. However, research findings outline **two key opportunities** for EFSA with respect to the need to simplify its messages and expand its outreach.
10. A key learning from this research is that EFSA needs to **simplify its communications across all outputs**: from the scientific opinions and reports it produces, to presentations at meetings and finally to its communications materials. EFSA's immediate target audiences request simpler and more relevant communications, including also clearer information as to why risk assessment has been requested and how it will be used.
11. With respect to **choice of target audiences**, research findings confirm EFSA's approach to direct its communications activities to the immediate users and beneficiaries of its scientific work: its customers, partners, stakeholders and other interested parties. Interviewees recognise the role of such networks in working with EFSA to reach broader audiences with coherent and clear messages and-- whilst there appears to be no real consensus regarding the desired approach-- research findings indicate that there is scope for EFSA to explore more direct engagement with the public.

Looking forward: key strategic priorities 2010-2013

12. The review of EFSA's communications work⁴ confirms that the strategic framework outlined in the 2006 strategy – EFSA's mission, objectives and overall approach of working closely with national food safety agencies and stakeholder networks in its communications outreach – is as appropriate today as it was then. EFSA must however **improve the simplicity and relevance of its communications for all of its target audiences**, including its immediate partners and customers. There is also an opportunity for EFSA to **expand its outreach to informed lay audiences**, in co-operation with national food safety authorities in Member States.
13. Taking stock of this learning and experience as well as directions outlined in EFSA's Strategic Plan, EFSA proposes the following key strategic priorities to guide further development of its communications work in 2010-2013⁵:
 - **Simplicity and transparency:** Increase relevance and understanding of EFSA communications for key target audiences and informed lay audiences, in co-operation with Member States
 - **Visibility and outreach:** Enhance outreach, in the EU and beyond, by increasing awareness and recognition of EFSA and its work
 - **Coherence:** Further increase the coherence of risk communications across the EU and beyond
 - **Dialogue:** Enhance dialogue with stakeholders and increase audience interactivity

In support of these priorities, EFSA will continue to strengthen its **capacity** to develop, disseminate and oversee effective risk communications.

14. The draft EFSA Communications Strategy, updated in the light of key learning and outlining strategic priorities for 2010-2013, was submitted to the Board for discussion at its meeting on 18 March 2010 and endorsed for public consultation. This new draft integrates comments made by the Board and is now made available on the EFSA website for public consultation. A more targeted consultation of the EFSA Advisory Forum and its Working Group on Communications, the Scientific Committee, the Advisory Group on Risk Communications and the Stakeholder Consultative Platform, will also be carried out in parallel.

³ See Annex I: EFSA communications in figures (comparison between 2006 and 2009)

⁴ See Annex II: Review of EFSA's Communications Strategy: what have we achieved? What have we learned?

⁵ See Annex III: Key strategic priorities, initiatives, monitoring tools and key indicators (2010-2013)

EFSA's Communications strategy: 2010 -2013 perspective

I. Introduction

1. EFSA has had a communications strategy formally in place since November 2006 when it was adopted by the Management Board. There have been important developments both in EFSA's internal and external environments since that time. EFSA has taken important steps forward in the areas of organisational vision and strategy – outlined in its Strategic Plan 2009-2013— as well as working processes and structures. This document updates the existing strategy in the light of experience and changing conditions. The review of EFSA's Communications strategy has also been supported by learning from qualitative research carried out in October – December 2009 amongst its key target audiences. The draft EFSA Communications Strategy 2010-2013 was submitted to the Management Board for discussion at its meeting on 18 March 2010 and endorsed for public consultation. The new draft, integrating comments made by the Board, is now made available for public consultation on the EFSA website.
2. EFSA was created following a series of food crises including BSE and dioxins which undermined consumer confidence in the safety of the food chain and led to serious public and political concern regarding the capacity of existing authorities to fully protect consumer interests. It was therefore decided to establish a new scientific advisory body charged with providing an independent and objective source of advice on food safety issues while the European Commission, European Parliament and Member States retained responsibility for risk management.
3. Communications is a central part of EFSA's core business and is integral to achieving the objectives behind the establishment of EFSA that were set out in the White Paper: "... contribute to a high level of consumer health protection in the area of food safety, through which consumer confidence can be restored and maintained." Since its inception, EFSA has had a clear mandate for its risk communications work laid down in its founding regulation (EC) N° 178/2002.
4. The regulatory requirements relating to EFSA's role in risk communications are as follows:
 - To ensure that the public and interested parties receive rapid, reliable, objective and comprehensible information in the fields within its mission (Article 23).
 - The Authority shall communicate on its own initiative in the fields within its mission without prejudice to the Commission's competence to communicate its risk management decisions (Article 40).
 - The Authority shall act in close collaboration with the Commission and the Member States to promote the necessary coherence in the risk communication process (Article 40).
 - At the request of the Commission, the Authority shall provide assistance concerning communication on nutritional issues within the framework of the Community health programme (Article 22)
5. It was against this background that EFSA established its Communications Directorate and developed its overall approach to implement its risk communications activities. Taking into account the development of that work programme, recommendations arising from EFSA's first external evaluation carried out in 2005 and consultation with key partners and stakeholders (ie the Scientific Committee, the Advisory Forum and its Working Group on Communications, the Advisory Group on Risk Communications and the Stakeholder Consultative Platform), EFSA formalised its communications strategy which was first discussed with the Management Board in 2005 and formally adopted by the Board in November 2006.

6. EFSA's fundamental mandate has not changed since 2006, but there have been important developments in both internal and external environments. EFSA has grown and matured as an organisation; its workload has increased; and its external relationships and networks have further developed. The communications landscape has also changed. New communications and technologies are available and impact on all communicators' approaches to targeting their audiences in the most effective ways.
7. These and other developments are reflected in the strategic plan 2009-2013, which recognises the importance of communications in priority 5: "to *reinforce confidence and trust in EFSA and the EU food safety system through effective risk communications and dialogue with partners and stakeholders*". It is logical for the communications strategy to take into account this wider strategic context.

II. Communications Strategy: 2010-2013

8. The review of EFSA's communications work⁶ confirms that the strategic framework outlined in the 2006 strategy – EFSA's mission, objectives and overall approach of working closely with national food safety agencies and stakeholder networks – is as appropriate today as it was then. EFSA must however **improve the simplicity and relevance of its communications** for all of its target audiences, including its immediate partners and customers. There is also an opportunity for EFSA to **expand its outreach to informed lay audiences**, in co-operation with national food safety authorities in Member States.

II.I Mission and Objectives

9. EFSA's overall mission in communications remains consistent with that defined in 2006. EFSA's **prime task** is "to provide appropriate, consistent, accurate and timely communications to all interested parties and stakeholders and to the public at large, based on the Authority's risk assessments and scientific expertise".
10. By providing risk managers with independent scientific assessments of the highest quality and disseminating such advice through effective risk communications in cooperation with the European Commission and authorities in Member States, EFSA strives to build public confidence in the risk assessment process and in the EU food safety system as a whole. A critical success factor in achieving this goal lies in EFSA's ability to establish itself as an authoritative and trusted voice with regards to food safety concerns.
11. For EFSA, ensuring scientific independence and implementing sound procedures are essential preconditions for the development of effective communications. The quality of EFSA's scientific advice and working processes, (eg the clarity of its scientific opinions, the selection of experts, practice of openness, and continuous enhancement of risk assessment methodologies) are critical to attaining its communications objectives.
12. One of the key elements underpinning EFSA's establishment, enshrined in its Founding Regulation, is the principle of transparency. This not only underpins the ways of working of the whole organisation, but provides the backdrop to its communications approach. Transparency places a responsibility on the whole organisation, and focuses its communications efforts on developing tools and channels, delivering outputs and working in ways that live up to that key value.
13. More specifically, EFSA's **objectives** in the areas of risk communications identified in 2006-- adjusted to reflect the Authority's increasing work in the area of nutrition and health-- are as relevant in 2010. These are to:
 - Establish the Authority as an expert and trusted source of information on food safety and nutritional issues (within its risk assessment mandate)
 - Promote the Authority's reputation as an open and responsive organisation dedicated to scientific excellence, independence and transparency
 - Ensure that messages are relevant, understandable and address food safety and nutritional concerns
 - Enhance the coherence of information on food safety and nutritional matters across the Community.

⁶ See Annex II: Review of EFSA's Communications Strategy: what have we achieved? What have we learned?

II.II Target audiences: who does EFSA communicate to?



14. The primary targets and recipients of EFSA's scientific advice and related communications activities are those who commission work from the Authority and/or have a particular involvement or interest in food, food safety and nutritional issues. These include: the European institutions who can task EFSA to carry out scientific work (ie the European Commission, European Parliament and Member States); national food safety authorities; stakeholders with a specific interest in the food chain (including consumer organisations, industry, environmental and other NGOs); stakeholders from the scientific and academic communities; and other audiences with a particular interest in food, food safety and nutritional issues (eg health professional groups).
15. Much of EFSA's scientific work is by nature highly technical and specialised. However, food safety issues are important to everybody and EFSA's work can therefore be of interest to a wide range of audiences and ultimately to the consumer.
16. Given the different levels of consumer awareness, interest in and attitudes towards communications on food, food safety, nutrition and health, it is neither possible nor desirable for EFSA to seek to address the resulting diverse and multiple information needs of consumers in Member States through a single and unique message disseminated across Europe. When crafting effective communications, one size does not fit all.
17. All of the opinions of EFSA's Scientific Panels and EFSA's own scientific outputs are ultimately available to the public at large, notably through their publication on the Authority's website. Whilst EFSA's scientific advice is technical in nature and cannot cater to all the information needs of the public at large, it must nevertheless be understandable to non-scientists and, within a broader public audience, be meaningful and relevant to those with an interest in EFSA's work and notably to an informed layperson.
18. To make sure that consumers receive the right type of information through channels they are familiar with and in a format and language that they can best understand, EFSA works in partnership with the bodies responsible for food safety in the EU Member States, in particular food safety authorities responsible for risk assessment at national level.
19. EFSA's communications strategy therefore focuses on *"influencing the influencers,"* and on providing those organisations who engage regularly in consumer communications at national level as well as stakeholder and other groups in direct contact with consumers, with the information they require and with messages which can be further adapted and tailored to meet specific audience needs. Media are an important conduit and channel for reaching these groups as well as a broader audience with more targeted messages.
20. In 2010-2013 EFSA will seek to **strengthen its co-operation with national food safety authorities** in order to expand its communications outreach and understanding of messages by consumers with an interest in the issues addressed by EFSA.

II.III Key Strategic Priorities: 2010 – 2013

21. Taking stock of research learning and experience gained as well as directions outlined in EFSA's Strategic Plan, EFSA proposes the following key strategic priorities to guide further development of its communications work in 2010-2013⁷:

- **Simplicity and transparency:** Increase relevance and understanding of EFSA communications for key target audiences and informed lay audiences, in co-operation with Member States
- **Visibility and outreach:** Enhance outreach, in the EU and beyond, by increasing awareness and recognition of EFSA and its work
- **Coherence:** Further increase the coherence of risk communications across the EU and beyond
- **Dialogue:** Enhance dialogue with stakeholders and increase audience interactivity

In support of these priorities, EFSA will continue to strengthen its **capacity** to develop, disseminate and oversee effective risk communications.

II.IV Taking the strategy forward: how does EFSA undertake its communications work?

22. In carrying out its communications work to address the 2010-2013 strategic priorities, EFSA seeks to:

- Understand consumer and public perception of food, risk and risks associated with food
- Tailor information to audience needs
- Harness support of key actors to reach consumers with pertinent and effective messages
- Promote coherent risk communications across the risk assessment/risk management interface.

**Understand consumer and public perception of food, risk and risks associated with the food chain*

23. Many factors influence consumer attitudes to food and food safety, public perception of risk, reactions to potential risk and willingness to accept scientific uncertainty surrounding risk. Whilst EFSA's communications work does not target consumers directly, it is critical that EFSA understand consumer concerns and monitor overall consumer confidence. The development of effective risk communications messages requires an in-depth knowledge of target audiences including: their level of awareness and understanding of food safety issues; their attitudes to food in general and food safety in particular; the possible impact of communications on behaviour; and the appropriate channels for effective dissemination of messages

24. EFSA will in 2010 carry out a Eurobarometer on food-related risks in order to assess how awareness and attitudes have evolved since the first such research carried out in 2005. Jointly commissioned with Directorate-General Health and Consumers, the 2005 Eurobarometer provided valuable insights regarding both consumers' food safety concerns and their views and confidence in the role of food safety authorities to protect consumer interests. Findings confirmed the diversity of consumer awareness and attitudes with respect to food safety and hence the importance of tailoring strategies and messages in order to address the diverse and multiple information needs of consumers in the EU Member States. EFSA aims to carry out such research, if possible every 3 years, in order to gauge how consumer risk perception and consumer confidence evolve over time.

**Tailor information to audience needs*

***Bridge the gap between science and the consumer*

25. In order to be effective, risk communications must explain and contextualize risk. In developing public communications, EFSA seeks to translate scientific evidence into clear, accessible and meaningful messages, addressing the needs of key audiences. In addition to explaining risk assessment findings, risk communications must also, where required, provide clear advice to the recipients as to whether individual action is required and set out clearly any action steps recommended for any or all interested parties (ie governments, industry and/or consumers). This requires close co-operation between risk assessors and risk managers, taking into account their respective roles.

⁷ See Annex III for identification of EFSA's key strategic priorities, initiatives, measurement tools and performance indicators for 2010-2013

***Meet the needs of immediate target audiences*

26. Learning from the target audience research carried out in 2009 indicates that EFSA's communications remains too technical, even for the direct audiences with which it interfaces. This is a key point to be addressed in the further development of EFSA's communications so that those organisations that request, utilise and further disseminate EFSA's scientific advice have a clear understanding of the key findings, conclusions and relevance of the work for consumer and/or environmental protection.

***Engage with the scientific community*

27. EFSA has a wide range of audiences, with diverse information needs. Whilst many of EFSA's immediate target groups (eg other risks assessors, risk managers, stakeholders...) call for greater clarity in EFSA's risk communications work, the scientific community has different needs. Here EFSA needs to build its visibility, utilising appropriate channels and tools of the academic community. For instance, the launch in 2009 of the new EFSA Journal will foster this outreach by presenting EFSA scientific outputs in a way that these can be more easily considered and referenced in scientific reference databases.

**Harness support of key actors in order to reach consumers with pertinent and effective messages*

28. EFSA seeks to involve national food safety authorities in Member States and stakeholders both in the development and dissemination of its scientific advice. This in order to ensure that messages are culturally sensitive and address public concerns appropriately. EFSA liaises closely with national food safety authorities through its **Advisory Forum and Advisory Forum Communications Working Group** (which brings together all of the Heads of Communications from national food safety authorities) so as to facilitate timely and consistent dissemination of risk communications messages across the Community. The support of Focal Points further expands outreach of messages to stakeholders and other audiences at national level. EFSA also co-operates with the European Commission to ensure that EFSA risk communications, whilst independent of that of risk managers, forms part of a coherent approach to risk communications across risk assessment and risk management.
29. EFSA seeks to engage in a dialogue on risk communications with all of its stakeholders including consumer associations and other NGOs as well as industry in order to strengthen understanding of EFSA's work, build learning regarding risk perception and augment the dissemination of risk communications messages to stakeholder constituencies and consumers.
30. EFSA's risk communications work is also supported by an expert **Advisory Group on Risk Communications** (AGRC), established in 2005. This multi-disciplinary group of social science experts assists EFSA in the implementation of its mission with regard to risk communications by providing advice, on an informal basis, regarding the development and implementation of its risk communications strategies and plans.

**Promote coherent risk communications across the Risk Assessment/Risk Management interface*

31. Risk communications is a shared accountability of risk assessors and risk managers. EFSA's own role in risk communications is to inform risk managers, national authorities, stakeholders and the public at large about food safety and nutritional issues and to provide scientific advice in an open and transparent manner. For EFSA, co-ordination with risk managers (in particular the European Commission and national food safety authorities in Member States), whilst maintaining the Authority's independence, is critical to ensure coherence of public communications.
32. Such an approach is particularly important where a risk in the food chain has been identified and confirmed and an increase in public awareness is required. In such instances, EFSA's role is to provide scientific information about risks associated with the food chain including, where desirable or needed, advice to allow consumers to make their own informed choices about the foods they select. By providing the general public with objective, reliable and easily understandable information on the results of its work, EFSA is fulfilling its mission to restore consumer confidence, as laid down in its Founding Regulation. In doing so, EFSA works closely with both the European Commission and Member States.

II.V Executing the strategy: communications planning, channels and tools

33. Capacity building is critical for EFSA in developing, disseminating and overseeing effective risk communications. EFSA has developed and will continue to strengthen its communications planning processes, from mandate to final output, across its diverse areas of work and in co-operation with its networks and partners. EFSA will also seek to further streamline and simplify its working processes in order to facilitate the development and dissemination of timely and meaningful messages.
34. All EFSA communications are structured by a planning process. The Communications Directorate liaises with units across EFSA to monitor forthcoming activities, identify issues to communicate on and plan communications approaches. This planning process is laid down in Standard Operating Procedures.⁸ Decisions on EFSA's communications activities are made by the Communications Review Committee, which includes the Executive Director and the Directors of Risk Assessment, Scientific Co-operation and Assistance, Administration and Communications⁹.
35. The Communications Directorate develops handling plans on key issues to ensure messages are developed and key audiences reached, using the different communications channels available. In defining its communications approach with regards to its scientific opinions and advice, EFSA takes into account considerations such as:
- the significance of the risk assessment results (eg routine vs new findings)
 - the nature of the risk (eg emerging, possible, identified and confirmed)
 - the potential public health impact
 - public perception and anticipated reactions
 - the legislative and market contexts, as appropriate.
36. Close cooperation between communications and scientific staff at EFSA as well as external scientific experts is critical to achieving both meaningful and accurate communications based on EFSA's scientific outputs. EFSA will continue to build its capacity in this area by training of communications and science staff in drafting and delivery of effective risk communications messages. EFSA will also continue to invest in research in order to be able to test and refine messages disseminated to key target audiences.

Pre-notification of public announcements

37. EFSA has established procedures to pre-notify important announcements to external parties, including the European Commission, national food safety authorities and, where appropriate, to selected stakeholders concerned by a specific announcement. Through this process, EFSA sends communications materials under embargo in order to gain input regarding possible areas of concern in advance of publication and enable interested parties to prepare their own communications and hence foster a more consistent communications approach.
38. With respect to stakeholders, EFSA liaises with both consumer and industry groups on the premise that: confidentiality is respected; the organisations concerned are supportive of EFSA's role in these areas; and that they can contribute to the dissemination of public messages. In addition, EFSA advises key international organisations and food safety agencies outside the EU (eg WHO, FAO, OIE, FDA, Health Canada, FSANZ, Japan Food Safety Commission....) prior to dissemination of selected public announcements.

Communications channels and tools

39. EFSA tailors its communications approach to provide the appropriate level and depth of information whilst respecting its overall mandate of openness and transparency. Communications and outreach strategies cover a broad spectrum including: timely provision of scientific findings through publication on the EFSA web site; targeted mailings to specific audiences; media relations; organisation of colloquia, workshops, technical hearings and/or conferences to exchange points of view and debate findings; and depending on the nature of

⁸ SOP19 (Drafting, approving, pre-notifying, publishing and disseminating Press Releases and Web stories) and SOP27 (Planning Communications Activities)

⁹ SOP27 (Planning Communications Activities)

the risk assessment and where warranted, a more proactive dissemination of findings through press releases and media briefings. Events and meetings can be supported by webcasting to expand outreach.

40. EFSA has a well-established set of communications channels and tools to serve its core audiences, which are the basis for the Communications Directorate's structure: press office, web team, publications and events team. The different communications channels are mobilised in an integrated way, by co-ordinating activities to ensure the various channels are suitably exploited to reach target audiences on key issues. EFSA will continue to closely monitor the communications and media landscape –exploring emerging online communications tools such as social media – to ensure that the most appropriate mix of channels are developed and used for EFSA's communications.

II.VI Measuring success: monitoring and evaluation

41. EFSA seeks to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of its communications activities taking into account learning from: consumer and target audience research; media monitoring and analysis; output analysis (eg timeliness of publications); web traffic analysis; web user surveys; event participation analysis and participant surveys; and more generally, dialogue and feedback from all of the Authority's customers and stakeholders. (The principal monitoring tools and key performance indicators are identified in Annex III).

42. Some of the key outcomes which can demonstrate our level of success with respect to fulfilment of our risk communications mission include increase in:

- use and citation of EFSA's scientific advice by key institutional players in food safety and nutrition and health policy makers
- references to EFSA's advice in scientific literature
- extent and accuracy of media reporting of EFSA advice
- use of EFSA's website by target audiences as a reference point for information on food safety, nutrition and health
- coherence of risk communications messages (measured through analysis of media monitoring, online communications...).

43. Ultimately, EFSA's communications work aims to contribute to:

- increased awareness and confidence in EFSA and its scientific work amongst key target audiences
- increased consumer confidence in the EU food safety system and the role of public authorities - including EFSA - in protecting consumer interests.

III. Review timescale and process

44. This document will form the basis for the more detailed planning of communications activities that will be included in EFSA's Annual Management Plans, and will be reviewed after 3 years or as necessary reflecting any reviews of EFSA's Strategic Plan 2009-2013.

Annex I**EFSA Communications in figures**

	2006	2009
Media Coverage	400 articles per month	750 articles/month
Press releases and Web news stories	40	71
Visits to website	100,000 visits/month	200,000 visits /month
Newsletter subscriptions	12,500 subscribers	Over 24,000 electronic newsletter subscribers
Publications	1 newsletter issued every 3-4 months 6 different publications produced 4 in four languages (EN/FR/DE/IT)	5 full-length newsletters targeted for different user groups, with online subscription 139 publications produced Multilingual publications: 3 publications in 2009 in 23 languages 16 publications in 4 languages (EN/FR/DE/IT)
Events	8 events organised	19 events organised / co-organised
Staff	28	43
Budget	€ 1.254.000	€ 2.507.000

Annex II:

Review of EFSA's Communications Strategy: what have we achieved? What have we learned?

1. The initial task for EFSA was to establish its risk communications function and EFSA itself as an independent and trusted voice on food safety matters. As the organisation has matured, our focus has moved to strengthen cooperation and coordination of activities with other partners and stakeholders in order to maximise reach and effectiveness. As the communications function has also developed, an increased professional capacity has enabled the establishment of teams to deliver the key elements of EFSA's communications work plan: the press office; the web team; and the public information and events team.
2. EFSA has pursued the implementation of its Communications strategy focusing on **three inter-related key outcomes**: visibility - building awareness for EFSA's corporate mission and scientific expertise; simplicity - enhancing the clarity and relevance of EFSA risk communications; and coherence - promoting coherence in risk communications across the Community.
3. The scope of EFSA's communications work has greatly expanded since 2006, mirroring development of its scientific activity. EFSA communicates on all fields within its mission including: food and feed safety, nutrition, novel foods, animal health and welfare, plant protection and plant health. However, EFSA's scientific outputs have both increased and diversified since 2006. Work in the area of nutrition and health claims, nanotechnology and cloning have added new dimensions to its work and new relevance for a wider audience, contributing to significant increase in media coverage on EFSA-related work and user traffic on the EFSA website. EFSA's focus on providing an integrated approach to delivering scientific advice, from field to plate, as well as the pursuit of new risk assessment approaches (eg risk benefit) create new communications opportunities.
4. EFSA has taken on an increasing amount of work in the process of fully implementing the Founding Regulation. A number of activities were carried out for the first time after 2006, including in the fields of data collection, emerging risks, coordinating European Scientific Cooperation (ESCO) projects and outsourcing scientific work under Article 36 of the Regulation. As a result, EFSA now issues more scientific outputs and a wide range of scientific output types in addition to the opinions of the Scientific Committee and Panels. Data collection supports robust risk assessment increasingly in areas of wide interest around nutritional intakes and emerging risks such as melamine.
5. Key developments for EFSA have been the strengthening of the cooperation with Member States which has been mirrored by the work with communicators in national food safety authorities. The establishment of focal points as part of the cooperation strategy has provided a new focus for communication and cooperation. The review of the terms of reference of the Advisory Forum Working Group on Communications (AFCWG) in 2007 has also provided firm foundations for the future. In 2009, EFSA also implemented its international strategy recognising international co-operation in risk communications as key to building coherence in an increasingly global communications environment. EFSA has established cooperation agreements with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Food Safety Commission of Japan and is liaising closely with agencies outside the EU (eg. Australia, Canada, New Zealand...) as well as international organisations (WHO, FAO, OIE, OECD...).
6. In 2006, a review of EFSA's risk communications work and results was commissioned following a call for tender. The review produced by King's Centre for Risk Management (King's College, London) as well as EFSA's comments regarding its principal recommendations and conclusions is published on the EFSA website.¹⁰
7. The qualitative research¹¹ carried out amongst EFSA's key target audiences in Autumn 2009 confirms that EFSA is seen as a good communicator with significant output. Interviewees (including high level officials, scientists, executives and media) see EFSA's communications activities as a continuum, from the Authority's

¹⁰ European Food Safety Authority – Risk Communications Annual Review, King's College London, 28 May 2009 (http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/agrc/documents/agrc_riskcommreview_en.pdf)

¹¹ EFSA Image, Qualitative Research Report, February 2010 (<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/events/event/mb100318.htm>)

scientific opinions, to its reports, meetings, presentations and finally including communications outputs such as the EFSA website, press releases, newsletters etc...

8. Interviewees recognise that both risk assessors (EFSA and Member States) and risk managers (Commission and Member States) are involved in communications on risks associated with the food chain and believe that coherence of communications between the two has improved since the early days of the Authority's establishment.
9. EFSA is seen to have the right communications tools in place. The EFSA website is highly valued and regarded as being at the very core of all EFSA communications. EFSA is seen to have a solid output of reports and reference materials; a very effective email newsletter communications; well-organised events and meetings; and publications well-made in terms of "look and feel." Whilst content of press materials is seen to have improved, in the main, they are found to be too technical. Some interviewees also expressed the wish for EFSA to be more present and visible in the media. Feedback on media relations is less consistent as few interviewees had had direct experience with EFSA in this area; however, some expressed wish for EFSA to be more open and engaging in its media relations. Concerning new "social media" (such as blogs, microblogs and social network services), interviewees generally considered that these were not necessarily utilised by EFSA's target audiences and that use of such media may not necessarily be compatible with EFSA's image as a serious, scientific organisation.
10. The overall take-out from the research is that EFSA is doing a good job at communications and improving all the time. In particular, interviewees appreciate the establishment of focal points which facilitates outreach in the Member States as well as EFSA's practice of sending press releases on its scientific work under embargo to Member States and stakeholders directly concerned by an EFSA public announcement. This then allows recipients to prepare for possible further communications on a given issue.
11. The biggest challenge remaining for EFSA is the "translation of science into human language." EFSA's communications – from its opinions to its final communications outputs—are perceived as being too technical and difficult to understand. As communications materials are based on the scientific outputs - whose conclusions are at times difficult for readers to fully understand - it follows that these are then difficult to understand and use, particularly by focal points who support EFSA in further communications outreach in Member States.
12. With respect to EFSA's target audiences, interviewees judged that the Authority is engaging with the right groups of institutions, stakeholders and other interested parties, although the matrix itself was seen as complex, the task potentially huge, and hence the need for careful prioritisation. The positioning of the national food safety agencies should be close to EFSA and the added value of the member state network clearly recognised.
13. EFSA's role in communicating with the general public remains a polarising issue; all interviewees recognising that this was a complex issue. Some respondents were clearly in favour of more direct communications with the public, recognising that building awareness and recognition of EFSA and its work is key to building consumer confidence in EFSA and its role in the EU food safety system. Others however believe that direct communications to the public is unrealistic and inappropriate given the breadth of the task (ie 500 million citizens) and diversity in consumer attitudes, dietary habits and risk perception. Respondents stressed the importance of utilising current network channels, in particular the role of national food safety authorities, in reaching consumers with appropriate and effective messages.
14. Notwithstanding the diversity of views, research findings indicate that there is scope for EFSA to explore more direct engagement with the public, notably by ensuring that consumers who may use the EFSA website can understand EFSA's role in EU risk assessment, its support to risk managers and can find basic information about key topics of interest. The use of less technical language across all EFSA communications outputs would also help to address the needs of an interested public - ie informed lay audiences - as well as EFSA's direct target audiences.

Annex III

2010 -2013 perspective: Key strategic priorities

To reinforce confidence and trust in EFSA and the EU food safety system through effective risk communication and dialogue with partners and stakeholders (*Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013*).

Priorities	Initiatives	Monitoring tools	Key indicators
<p>Simplicity and transparency</p> <p>Increase relevance and understanding of EFSA communications for key target audiences and informed lay audiences, in cooperation with Member States</p>	<p>Deepen EFSA’s understanding of key audience needs and consumer risk perception, to inform communications approaches and messages.</p> <p>Establish effective communication channels to reach audiences – who, what, why and how.</p>	<p>Target audience research to evaluate awareness, communication needs, usefulness and appreciation of EFSA communications (every 2 years).</p> <p>Eurobarometer survey results on risk perception (every 3 years).</p> <p>Ongoing monitoring of data on audience uptake of press, web, publications and events products.</p>	<p>Awareness, image and confidence in EFSA.</p> <p>Understanding of messages</p> <p>Positive trends in media analysis - EFSA’s scientific advice increasingly and accurately reported in media.</p> <p>Positive trends in web statistics - EFSA’s website increasingly used by target audiences as a reference point for food and feed safety information.</p> <p>Positive trends in uptake of publications and events products.</p>
	<p>Provide simple, clear and meaningful messages based on EFSA’s scientific advice. Identify key themes on which to communicate proactively.</p>	<p>Target audience research to evaluate awareness, usefulness and appreciation of EFSA communications (every 2 years).</p>	
		<p>Media monitoring statistics e.g. on most covered issues and Panels.</p>	
		<p>Web statistics e.g. on most visited pages and downloads on EFSA website.</p>	
		<p>Ongoing monitoring of data on audience uptake of press, web, publications and events products.</p>	

Objectives	Initiatives	Monitoring tools	Key indicators
<p>Simplicity and transparency</p> <p>Increase relevance and understanding of EFSA communications for key target audiences and informed key audiences, in cooperation with Member States</p>	<p>Develop appropriate messages relevant for different audience groups, with support from AFWGC and Focal Points.</p>	<p>Feedback from AFWGC and Focal Points on usefulness and appreciation of EFSA communications.</p> <p>Target audience research to evaluate awareness, usefulness and appreciation of EFSA communications.</p> <p>Ongoing monitoring of data on audience uptake of press, web, publications and events products.</p>	<p>Awareness, image and confidence in EFSA.</p> <p>Understanding of messages</p> <p>Positive trends in media analysis -EFSA's scientific advice increasingly and accurately reported in media.</p>
	<p>Develop comprehensive communication plans mobilising all communications channels to reach target audiences on key themes (ie. across press, web, events, publications, institutional relations, etc...).</p>	<p>Target audience research to evaluate awareness, usefulness and appreciation of EFSA communications.</p> <p>Findings of internal debriefing processes on communications campaigns.</p> <p>Ongoing monitoring of data on audience uptake of press, web, publications and events products.</p>	<p>Positive trends in web statistics - EFSA's website increasingly used by target audiences as a reference point for food and feed safety information.</p> <p>Positive trends in uptake of publications and events products.</p>

Objectives	Initiatives	Monitoring tools	Key indicators
<p>Visibility and outreach Enhance outreach in the EU and beyond, by increasing awareness and recognition of EFSA and its work.</p>	<p>Build a strong EFSA brand and support brand equity through organisation-wide guidelines and initiatives.</p>	<p>Target audience research to evaluate awareness and appreciation of EFSA's work (every 2 years). Ongoing monitoring of data on audience uptake of press, web, publications and events products.</p>	<p>Consistent messages in all elements of communications mix. - Awareness, image and confidence in EFSA. Positive trends in media analysis – EFSA's scientific advice increasingly and accurately reported in media. Positive trends in web statistics – EFSA's website increasingly used by target audiences as a reference point for food and feed safety information. Positive trends in uptake of publications and events products.</p>
	<p>Promote EFSA's reputation as an organisation dedicated to scientific excellence, independence, openness and transparency, by mainstreaming these principles in all EFSA communications.</p>	<p>Target audience research to evaluate awareness and appreciation of EFSA's work (every 2 years). Media monitoring data on accuracy of reporting on EFSA and its work.</p>	
	<p>Increase visibility in the scientific community, including further development of online EFSA scientific journal.</p>	<p>Monitoring of scientific referencing databases in relation to EFSA outputs. Monitoring of scientific literature in relation to EFSA outputs.</p>	<p>EFSA scientific outputs successfully included in online referencing databases. EFSA's scientific advice increasingly referenced in scientific literature.</p>
	<p>Improve communications delivery to informed lay audiences, including using the website to better explain EFSA's role in risk communications and how it relates to the national food safety agencies.</p>	<p>Web user survey Feedback from AFWGC and Focal Points (ie. target audience research)</p>	<p>Awareness, understanding and confidence in EFSA Understanding of messages</p>

Objectives	Initiatives	Monitoring tools	Key indicators
Visibility and outreach Enhance outreach in the EU and beyond, by increasing awareness and recognition of EFSA and its work.	Continued monitoring, analysis and investment in online communications, including appropriate use of emerging online communication tools such as social media.	Ongoing monitoring of data on audience uptake of online communications products.	Positive trends in audience uptake.
	Increase outreach in the Member States through mobilising the Focal Point networks to ensure all relevant national audiences are reached.	Information from Focal Points on national networks and audiences reached.	Statistics showing a high level of outreach at national level.
	As part of EFSA's International Strategy, increase outreach with international partners including international organisations, EU bodies and national organisations outside the EU. Organise international risk communications conference in 2011.	Feedback from international partners on EFSA communications initiatives and services. Media monitoring and analysis.	Statistics showing a high level of outreach at international level. International risk communications platform established with key partners.
Coherence Further increase the coherence of risk communications across the EU and beyond.	Continue to strengthen the AFWGC as a forum for ensuring coherence of food safety messages across the Community, including development of Risk Communications Guidelines.	Feedback from AFWGC on EFSA communications initiatives and services. Media monitoring and analysis.	Successful implementation of risk communications guidelines.
	Further develop communications channels with Member States including early warning mechanisms and joint communications activities.	Feedback from Member States on EFSA communications initiatives and services. Monitoring national food safety authorities' communications in relation to EFSA outputs. Media monitoring and analysis.	EFSA's scientific advice increasingly cited by Member States, Commission and international partners.
	Further develop coordination of communications with the European Commission.	Feedback from Commission customers on EFSA communications initiatives and services. Media monitoring and analysis.	Greater coherence of messages between EFSA and Member States, Commission and international partners.
	Continue to cooperate with non-EU national bodies and international organisations and consider opportunity for joint communications initiatives on issues of global relevance (eg. cloning, bisphenol A, aspartame).	Feedback from international partners customers on EFSA communications initiatives and services. Media monitoring and analysis.	

Objectives	Initiatives	Monitoring tools	Key indicators
Dialogue Enhance dialogue with stakeholders and increase audience interactivity.	Further develop EFSA activities with stakeholders including the SH consultative Platform, stakeholder meetings on specific themes and online consultations on draft scientific outputs.	Target audience research to evaluate awareness, usefulness and appreciation of EFSA communications (every 2 years).	High level of appreciation of EFSA communications-
	Continue to gather input from stakeholders and strengthen dialogue in priority areas.	Stakeholder feedback on EFSA consultation, meetings and other activities. Level of stakeholder participation in key stakeholder initiatives.	High level of appreciation and participation in stakeholder initiatives.
	Take initiatives to enhance interactivity and dialogue with target audiences to maximise accessibility and user-friendliness.	Statistics on number of interactive initiatives launched by EFSA. Statistics on public consultations, technical hearings...	Successful launch and enhancement of initiatives “Ask EFSA” service and online subscription services.

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Objectives	Initiatives	Monitoring tools	Key indicators
<p>Capacity Strengthen EFSA's capacity to develop, disseminate and oversee effective risk communications.</p>	<p>Ensure communications considerations are integrated into EFSA's scientific processes, from receipt of mandate to publication of scientific output.</p>	<p>Mandates Review Committee Handling plans Communications Review Committee Target audience research</p>	<p>Understanding of messages Positive trends in media analysis</p>
	<p>Continue to strengthen EFSA's communications processes through further development of planning, SOPs, and handling plans on high profile issues.</p>	<p>Communications Review Committee Handling plans Risk Assessment Workflow SOPs</p>	<p>Timeliness Integrated communications plans RAW workflow for communications outputs</p>
	<p>Contribute to EFSA's work on the harmonisation of risk assessment terminology and its implication for communications.</p>	<p>Scientific Committee Working Group on harmonisation of risk assessment terminology. Media monitoring & analysis.</p>	<p>Consistent use of risk assessment terminology by media.</p>
	<p>Streamline and more effectively coordinate the development of communications initiatives and research across EFSA.</p>	<p>Communications Review Committee. Communications calendar / handling plans.</p>	<p>Timeliness Integrated communications programmes.</p>
	<p>Clarify roles and responsibilities of staff involved in drafting, reviewing and validating messages for external communications.</p>	<p>Job descriptions, CDACs. Communications development process.</p>	<p>Revised SOPs Integrate in job descriptions and CDACs.</p>
	<p>Continue to train communications and science staff in drafting and delivery of effective communications messages. Pursue media training for scientific panel experts.</p>	<p>Training programmes. Media monitoring and analysis. Target audience research.</p>	<p>Effectiveness of communications outputs and spokespeople.</p>