

PROJECT REPORT OF EFSA

Focal Point Activities 2009¹

European Food Safety Authority²

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ABSTRACT

This Project Report summarises the work of the Focal Points carried out in 2009, including the collection and sharing of information, the uploading of documents onto the Information Exchange Platform, the sharing of annual, strategic and multi-annual work plans, the development of national networks, the support to the Expert Database and Article 36, the organisation of national workshops and conferences, and the dissemination of information on EFSA. The report concludes with recommendations for priorities for the work of Focal Points for 2010.

SUMMARY

Following the positive evaluation of the work of the Focal Point Network by members of the Advisory Forum and EFSA, Focal Points continued their work in 2009 with the support from EFSA. Overall, the new Focal Point Agreements signed in 2009 provided for a slightly increased funding and allowed for a more permanent character of the Focal Points. All 27 EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland continued their active participation in the work of the Focal Point Network and its meetings. In addition, representatives from Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey, the three EU Candidate Countries, joined the Focal Point Network in September 2009 as observers.

During 2009 Focal Points continued to collect and share information amongst themselves and with EFSA on various topics and issues. Six questionnaires and specific requests, such as those on Bisphenol A, nanotechnology or maximum levels of uranium in food and water, supported the work of EFSA's Scientific Committee and Scientific Panels. In other cases, the information requested and compiled was crucial to decide on further cooperation activities between Member States and EFSA (e.g. national training initiatives and the exchange of planned activities in the area of risk assessment of food and feed). Cases where Focal Points reacted on requests from other Focal Points increased compared to 2008, which also demonstrates the consolidation of the Network.

In the course of 2009 the scope of the Information Exchange Platform has been modified and narrowed to share the following documents: (i) risk assessment outputs and requests; (ii) work plans; and (iii) country specific information. Focal Points have collected and uploaded a total of 516 documents by the end of November 2009.

Many Focal Points have shared annual, strategic and multi-annual work plans as well as planned activities with other Member States and EFSA, thus contributing to a more coordinated planning of risk assessment activities and avoiding duplication of work.

Focal Points have further strengthened their networks with Article 36 organisations, via dedicated meetings with (potential) Article 36 organisations. They supported EFSA in ensuring that the Article 36 List is up-to-date and functional, both in terms of contact details and structural changes in the Article 36 organisations themselves. Focal Points also encouraged the organisations in their country to apply for published Article 36 calls. Nearly all Focal Points participated in a training organised by EFSA on how to apply and take part in Article 36 grants, thus enabling them to support organisations in their countries in the application process as well as throughout the project cycle.

The population of the Expert Database continued to grow in 2009 with, amongst others, the support of Focal Points. In addition to presenting, distributing or publishing information on the Expert Database, Focal Points have been active in identifying national expert databases and network of experts, in order to inform and encourage scientists to apply to EFSA's Expert Database.

Focal Points continued to increase awareness, understanding and outreach of EFSA's, the Advisory Forum's and the Focal Points' work by disseminating information through a variety of communication channels, newly developed communication tools and through extending target audience networks within Member States.

Focal Points have organised over 35 events in their countries, ranging from targeted workshops to international conferences. At many of them other Focal Points as well as EFSA staff presented their work and cooperation activities. Focal Points have also contributed to 75 national and international events with presentations, posters and written contributions, thus raising the awareness of the Focal Point Network as well as of EFSA.

To further strengthen the scientific cooperation between EFSA and Member States, a set of priorities for the Focal Point Network for 2010 is proposed. These are to:

- maintain the Article 36 List of competent organisations up-to-date, thereby ensuring its functionality;
- stimulate Article 36 organisations to apply for Article 36 calls, in particular in the context of the mid-term planning of the scientific cooperation between Member States and EFSA;
- foster the Network of Article 36 organisations by using the newly developed IT tools (database of Article 36 organisations, Extranet space for Article 36 organisations);
- further develop the Information Exchange Platform and upload all relevant documents, including planned activities in the area of risk assessment;
- facilitate the cooperation between EFSA and national lists/databases of scientific experts with a view to enlarge EFSA's Expert Database, in particular in scientific and geographical areas currently underrepresented;
- continue efforts in 2010 to further leverage the cooperation with the Advisory Forum Communication Working Group and EFSA to support communication plans for 2010;
- organise national events to raise the visibility of Focal Points' and EFSA's work, to address (scientific) issues of concern in their countries, and to foster the various scientific cooperation projects between Member States and EFSA.

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BACKGROUND

The “Strategy for Cooperation and Networking between EU Member States and EFSA”³ from December 2006 initiated the establishment of the Focal Point Network. Consequently, by the end of 2007 all EU Member States have nominated their Focal Point and the Network became operational in early 2008. Norway and Switzerland, from the very beginning, actively participate in the work of this Network as observers. EFSA provides financial support to Focal Points, as laid down in specific Focal Point Agreements concluded with the nominated Focal Point authorities in all EU Member States.

The activities of the Focal Point Network in its first year of existence are summarised in the “Report on Focal Point Activities 2008”. Based on the successful work undertaken by Focal Points in 2008 the Advisory Forum confirmed its continued support for the Focal Point Network at its 29th meeting in November 2008 in Copenhagen. To allow for a better planning of the work carried out by Focal Points, it was suggested to sign multi-annual Focal Point Agreements between the EU Member States and EFSA to ensure a medium-term planning.

The “Interim Review of the Strategy for Cooperation and Networking between EU Member States and EFSA”, endorsed by the EFSA Management Board in December 2008, has also acknowledged the positive experience of the Focal Point Network in its first year of existence, and concluded that the cooperation and networking between EU Member States and EFSA has been well developed and that the networks established, including the Focal Point Network, should continue their activities with a more permanent character.

Consequently, EFSA concluded new Focal Point Agreements with the nominated Focal Point authorities in the EU Member States for the year 2009, allowing for the possibility of renewal up to four times, each time for one calendar year. At the same time, EFSA has slightly increased the overall financial support for the Network in 2009.

The main task of the Focal Points is to support the Advisory Forum member for their country. The Focal Point ensures the exchange of information amongst Member States and EFSA, provides advice and help to EFSA for the Article 36 Network and EFSA’s Expert Database, and helps raising EFSA’s scientific visibility and outreach in the EU Member States and beyond. All strategic issues and decision-making remain the responsibility of the Advisory Forum.

In line with the Focal Point Agreements, all EU Member States have provided EFSA with a detailed report of their key activities performed in 2009 together with a justification of the financial resources used in the implementation of the tasks assigned to Focal Points. This Report on “Focal Point Activities 2009” is based on these national Focal Point reports and gives an overview of the activities of the entire Focal Point Network in 2009. In addition to the EU Member States, Norway has also submitted an activity report, thereby bringing the total number of national Focal Point reports to 28.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Scientific Cooperation Unit of EFSA – based on request from the EFSA Management – compiles all annual national Focal Point reports in a yearly summary report to provide a comprehensive overview on the work of the Focal Point Network.

³ Strategy for Cooperation and Networking, December 2006,
http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/DocumentSet/mb_strategy_28thmee_en_6a.1.pdf

ASSESSMENT

1. Introduction: Prolongation of Focal Point Agreements

In 2008 – the first year of the Focal Point Network – Focal Point Agreements have been signed with all EU Member States. In 2009, these Agreements have been prolonged until 31 December 2009 with a possibility for renewal of up to four times, on each occasion for one calendar year.

Norway (having officially nominated its Focal Point, but without signing an Agreement with EFSA for legal reasons) and Switzerland continue to participate in the work of the Focal Point Network and its meetings as observers. In addition, the EU Candidate Countries (Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey) have joined the Network as observers in September 2009.

All organisations formerly notified to EFSA for Focal Point activities have remained members of the Network in 2009. Within EFSA, the Scientific Cooperation Unit continues to be the main contact point for Focal Points. The Unit coordinates all formal correspondence between Focal Points and EFSA, provides the secretariat for the Focal Point meetings, manages the Focal Point Agreements and drafts the yearly Focal Point Report.

Following the positive evaluation of the work of the Focal Point Network by members of the Advisory Forum and EFSA, Focal Points continued their work in 2009 with the support from EFSA. Overall, the new Focal Point Agreements signed in 2009 provided for a slightly increased funding and allowed for a more permanent character of the Focal Points. All 27 EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland continued their active participation in the work of the Focal Point Network and its meetings. In addition, representatives from the three EU Candidate Countries joined the Focal Point Network in September 2009 as observers.

2. Focal Point activities

Focal Points were established to support their Advisory Forum members, in particular with the following tasks:

- to facilitate the exchange of scientific information;
- to support activities under Article 36;
- to support the population of EFSA's Expert Database; and
- to raise the visibility of EFSA's scientific work and EFSA's outreach, at national level.

Following a proposal from the Focal Point Network, the Advisory Forum, at its 30th meeting in Ljubljana (18-19 February 2009) agreed upon the main priorities for Focal Points for 2009, which are as follows:

- to ensure that the Article 36 List is up-to-date and functional and to foster the Network of Article 36 organisations;
- to stimulate experts in the EU Member States to subscribe to EFSA's Expert Database and to identify national and/or international expert databases to explore cooperation possibilities;
- to regularly (monthly) upload relevant documents onto the Information Exchange Platform, and in particular to ensure swift exchange of information on hot topics (either on request from Member States or in case of emergencies);
- to further develop and expand national networks;
- to further raise EFSA's scientific visibility and outreach, by creating and further developing national Focal Point web pages, by publishing and disseminating information materials (e.g. press releases, web stories or newsletters) and by organising events in cooperation with EFSA (joint events).

To coordinate all these activities, three Focal Point meetings have been organised between Member States and EFSA in 2009. From across the 27 EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland, 28 countries attended the 4th and 5th meeting. On the occasion of the 6th meeting, representatives from 32 countries were present, as - for the first time - the EU Candidate Countries were also invited to attend.

2.1. Exchange of scientific information

2.1.1. Requests for sharing information and data

Beyond sharing scientific information via the Information Exchange Platform (see section 2.1.2), the exchange of information on topics of mutual interest to Member States and EFSA remained an important task of this Network.

A series of requests have been sent to Focal Points, either directly from EFSA (including EFSA Panels) or from the Focal Points themselves. All of these requests have been distributed to Focal Points via the Scientific Cooperation Unit. Table 1 gives an overview of some of the main requests. The high number of replies received for the different requests allowed for the information to be compiled, either by EFSA or by the Focal Point requesting the information.

Table 1: Main requests for information and data sent to Focal Points

Number	Item	Replies ⁴
1	Questionnaire on Quantitative Structure Activity Relationship (from EFSA's PPR Panel)	7
2	Questionnaire on national training activities in Member States (from EFSA's SCO Unit)	25
3	Request for information on maximum levels of uranium in food and water (from EFSA's CONTAM Panel)	13
4	Request for information on Bisphenol A (from the Advisory Forum)	14
5	User survey on the use of the Expert Database (from EFSA's SCO Unit)	25
6	Exchange of planned risk assessment activities (from EFSA's SCO Unit)	8 ⁵
7	Exchange on activities regarding risk assessment in the field of nanotechnology (from EFSA's Scientific Committee and Advisory Forum Unit)	16

The information gathered by Focal Points on national training activities have been summarised and presented in a separate report. This report will serve as an important information source for any decisions taken by EFSA and Member States regarding the need for targeted training activities⁶ in the area of risk assessment of food and feed.

The information collected on ongoing Bisphenol A activities in Member States, will assist EFSA to see if it is necessary to update the existing TDI of Bisphenol A, following a study commissioned by the American Chemistry Council.

The user survey on EFSA's Expert Database allowed for the identification of features for improvement as well as the identification of countries and scientific areas requiring additional promotion activities.

In addition to the seven requests listed in the Table above, over 100 requests for assistance and input were sent by EFSA, or by the Focal Points themselves, to members of the Focal Point Network in 2009. These included:

- requests to disseminate information from EFSA on conferences, public consultations, stakeholder workshops, calls for data or tenders (including Article 36 calls);
- requests for contributions and nominations for workshops and EFSA Working Groups;
- request to ensure that the Article 36 List is up-to-date;
- request to identify national expert databases with a view to initiate cooperation on exchanging information;
- monthly requests to upload risk assessment outputs, requests, work plans and country specific information onto the Information Exchange Platform;
- requests to assist in the improvement of the Information Exchange Platform;

4 In some cases Focal Points may not have replied as the issue was not applicable to them (e.g. no activities are undertaken in their country in this respect).

5 In addition, 9 annual work plans were uploaded to the Information Exchange Platform by 5 different countries, 12 strategic work plans by 10 different countries, and 8 other plans by 3 different countries.

6 Training has been identified to be further pursued as an important activity in the "Interim review for Cooperation and Networking between EFSA and Member States". Its importance is also mentioned in EFSA's Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013.

- requests from Focal Points: (i) on the use of the toxicological threshold of concern (TCC) principle; (ii) on the storage and distribution temperature of frozen pre-baked bread dough; (iii) on the use of plants or plant parts as herbal tea; or (iv) on the use of *Stevia rebaudiana* as a sweetener;
- requests to distribute EFSA information materials (e.g. Newsletters, Annual Report, Strategic Plan 2009-2013);
- request to check the respective part of the BfR EU Food Safety Almanac.

The annual reports from Focal Points demonstrate that Focal Points have actively disseminated information to the national networks they have established and continued to enlarge, and respond to the various requests. Compared to 2008, the overall number of requests has increased from 81 to over 100 in 2009.

During 2009 Focal Points continued to collect and share information amongst themselves and EFSA on various topics and issues. Seven questionnaires and specific requests, such as those on Bisphenol A, nanotechnology or maximum levels of uranium in food and water, supported the work of EFSA's Scientific Committee and Scientific Panels. In other cases, the information requested and compiled was crucial to decide on further cooperation activities between Member States and EFSA (e.g. national training initiatives and the exchange of planned activities in the area of risk assessment of food and feed). Cases where Focal Points reacted on requests from other Focal Points increased compared to 2008, which also demonstrates the consolidation of the Network.

2.1.2. Information Exchange Platform

Following the 6-month pilot phase of the Information Exchange Platform, members of the Information Exchange Platform Working Group in agreement with Focal Points decided to narrow the scope of the platform. Since March 2009 the Information Exchange Platform has three main sections. The largest proportion of documents are found in Section 1 – Risk assessment outputs and requests, where Member States can inform each other about started, ongoing and finalised risk assessment activities in relation to food and feed safety. Risk assessment outputs include: opinions, statements, guidance documents, as well as technical and data collection reports. These risk assessment outputs and requests are arranged in this section according to EFSA's Scientific Panels and Units, however there are additional folders on drinking water, new and harmonised approaches in risk assessment or emerging risks. Section 2 – Work Plans, is restricted to the annual and strategic (or multi-annual) work plans of Member States, while Section 3 – Country Specific Information, is the place to upload documents like quality and crisis manuals or country profiles (e.g. country profiles of the BfR EU Food Safety Almanac developed in cooperation with Focal Points). Moreover, through the Calendar feature of the platform, Member States and EFSA can inform each other about national and international scientific conferences, meetings and seminars.

The platform allows Member States to react instantly to upcoming urgent issues and has already proved valuable on several occasions, in particular in urgent cases (e.g. dioxin in Irish pork) or on (re)emerging issues (e.g. Bisphenol A).

At present, documents can only be uploaded onto the platform by members of the Advisory Forum, members of the Focal Point Network and EFSA staff. In the course of 2009 access to the platform has been broadened. Read-only access has been granted to members of EFSA's Scientific Committee and Panels, and to over 200 experts nominated by members of the Advisory Forum. It is intended to further broaden the read-only access rights in the beginning of 2010 by granting access to members of Networks between Member States and EFSA.

Most Focal Points collected and uploaded relevant documents onto the Information Exchange Platform. The majority of them have however faced difficulties in uploading risk assessment requests

or mandates as they do not exist in writing, or if they do exist they are either published together with the scientific output or are considered confidential, henceforth not qualifying for upload. Only a handful of Member States have a system in place similar to EFSA’s Register of Questions for publishing risk assessment mandates and requests. The same applies to risk assessment outputs.

All Focal Points have supported the preparation of the BfR EU Food Safety Almanac by providing comments on the draft profile of their country. As a result of this joint effort between Focal Points and the Federal Institute of Risk Assessment (BfR), the Almanac has been published in October 2009. The individual country profiles describing the food safety system in the EU Member States as well as the EEA/EFTA countries are also available on the Information Exchange Platform. In addition to the country profiles, a number of quality and crisis manuals have also been uploaded under Section 3 of the tool.

Thanks to the efforts of Focal Points, by the end of November 2009 the platform contained a total of 516 documents of which 460 were risk assessment outputs and 8 are risk assessment requests. Figure 1 shows how the number of documents uploaded onto the Information Exchange Platform have increased between March 2009 and November 2009, while Figure 2 shows the distribution of these documents in the different sections and folders.

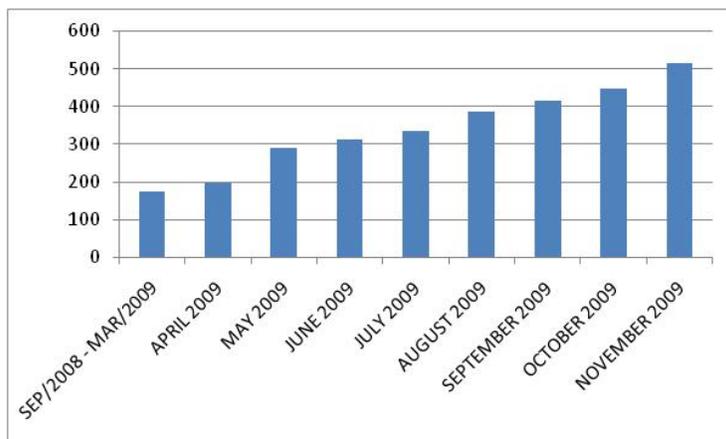


Figure 1: Evolution of the number of documents uploaded onto the Information Exchange Platform during the pilot phase and period between March 2009 (launch of the revised version of the Platform) and November 2009

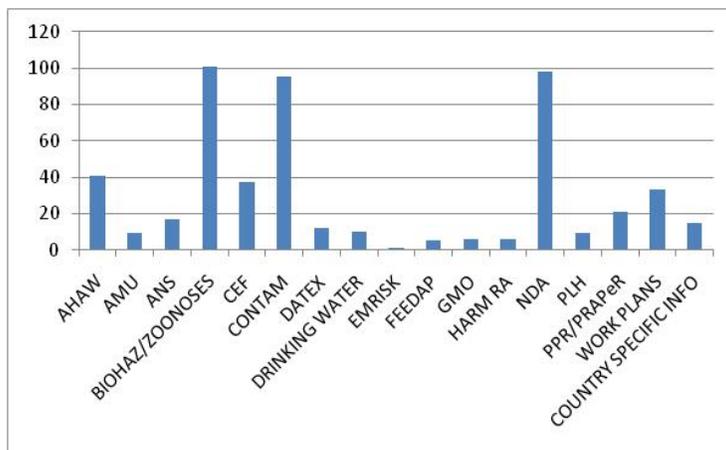


Figure 2: Distribution of documents on the Information Exchange Platform by section and folders (by the end of November 2009)

The Information Exchange Platform monthly reports have been launched in 2009. These monthly reports provide detailed information on risk assessment requests and outputs uploaded by the EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland. In addition they give an overview of the risk assessment activities of EFSA in the same month. The Information Exchange Platform monthly reports are distributed to all those having access to the Platform.

In the course of 2009 the scope of the Information Exchange Platform has been modified and narrowed to share the following documents: (i) risk assessment outputs and requests; (ii) work plans; and (iii) country specific information. Focal Points have collected and uploaded a total of 516 documents by the end of November 2009.

2.1.3. Work programmes and strategic work plans

Sharing of national work programmes has been identified to be of particular value in planning medium- and long-term activities of national risk assessment bodies and EFSA and to avoid the duplication of work. The exchange of such documents was formally agreed among Member States and EFSA at Advisory Forum level with the signature of the Declaration of Intent in September 2006. The importance of this initiative was further enhanced in the “Strategy for Cooperation and Networking between the EU Member States and EFSA” adopted by the EFSA Management Board in December 2006.

During the course of 2009, Focal Points have been requested to upload both annual and strategic (or multi-annual) work plans under Section 2 – Work Plans, of the Information Exchange Platform. By mid 2009, 15 such documents have been uploaded onto the Platform. The analysis of these documents revealed that most of them vary in size, structure and content, which makes it difficult to identify medium- and long-term risk assessment activities of common interest. In an attempt to overcome these constraints members of the Focal Point Network agreed to develop a harmonised reporting table for sharing information on planned risk assessment activities in an easy and concise format. During a pilot phase (ending mid November 2009) 8 Focal Points have used the reporting template.

By the end of November 2009, 16 countries have uploaded a total number of 29 planning documents onto the Information Exchange Platform of which 16 are in English. For details see Table 2.

Table 2: Work plans uploaded onto the Information Exchange Platform by November 2009

Item	Number of documents
Annual work plans	9
Strategic work plans	12
Multi-annual control plans	5
Other documents (e.g. 3-month plan)	3

Since October 2009 Member States have two different possibilities for sharing information on planned activities: (i) either by uploading annual and strategic (or multi-annual) work plans onto the Information Exchange Platform, (ii) and/or by filling in the standardised reporting table available on EFSA’s Extranet site. Using one or both tools, 18 countries have so far provided information on planned activities. The next step is to investigate how the reporting table could be integrated into the Information Exchange Platform.

Many Focal Points have shared annual, strategic and multi-annual work plans as well as planned activities with other Member States and EFSA, thus contributing to a more coordinated planning of risk assessment activities and avoiding duplication of work.

2.2. Article 36

Article 36 of EFSA's Founding Regulation states that EFSA "shall promote the European networking of organisations operating in the fields within the Authority's mission"⁷ and remains one of the most important pillars of the scientific cooperation between Member States and EFSA.

In 2009, EFSA has launched a total of 15 calls for proposals under the Article 36 grant scheme for a total value of 2.9 million Euros. This is complemented by 50 calls for tender and other procedures launched under the procurement scheme in the scientific area, bringing the total value to 7.5 million Euros.

Following the significant broadening of the Article 36 List in 2008, the priority for Focal Points in 2009 was to ensure that the Article 36 List is up-to-date and functional and to foster the Network of Article 36 organisations.

Nearly all Focal Points indicated in their annual report that they have further broadened and developed their Article 36 Network. Focal Points in general communicate with the Article 36 organisations via e-mail and telephone. In addition Article 36 organisations are also informed via the national Focal Point web pages. Fourteen Focal Points reported to have organised meetings (even up to 8 meetings) with Article 36 organisations in their respective countries. These meetings either had a very specific agenda (only addressed to Article 36 organisations) or had a broader objective (including participants from potential Article 36 organisations and stakeholders) of informing attendees of EFSA's work together with Member States on Article 36.

It is important to highlight that all organisational changes in the structure of Article 36 organisations are notified to EFSA via the permanent representations in Brussels to ensure that the provisions of Commission Regulation (EC) No. 2230/2004 are respected. In addition, it is crucial that EFSA is informed of any changes in the contact details of Article 36 organisations to ensure that all these organisations are immediately informed once a call is launched. All Focal Points indicated in their annual report that they have checked the status and contact details of Article 36 organisations in their country. In 13 cases changes have been notified to EFSA, resulting in the necessary update of the List.

An important task of Focal Points in the context of the Article 36 grant scheme is to stimulate Article 36 organisations in their country to submit calls for proposals. All Focal Points (with the exception of one country where the participation is indeed already very high) stated in their annual reports that they made numerous efforts to stimulate Article 36 organisations to submit proposals for Article 36 calls published on the EFSA website. This included sending special reminders to the Article 36 organisations, providing information at special scientific events, publishing calls in newsletters, or even providing support in the application process (e.g. by developing a dedicated electronic tool to facilitate the application process). Even though the average application rate per call has slightly increased from 2008 to 2009 (from 1.94 to 2.00 applications per call on average), more efforts are needed to stimulate Article 36 organisations to apply for such calls.⁸

26 Focal Points have attended the training organised by EFSA on the occasion of the 6th Focal Point meeting in September 2009. The training, provided by EFSA staff, intended to familiarise Focal Points with the Article 36 scheme in general and the application process in particular so that they themselves become trainers for Article 36 organisations in their country. As part of this training, Focal Points made numerous valuable proposals to improve the Article 36 scheme.

⁷ Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 28 January 2002.

⁸ This issue is further addressed in the report on "Evaluation of EFSA's grants and Science Procurement Schemes"

Focal Points have further strengthened their networks with Article 36 organisations, via dedicated meetings with (potential) Article 36 organisations. They supported EFSA in ensuring that the Article 36 List is up-to-date and functional, both in terms of contact details and structural changes in the Article 36 organisations themselves. Focal Points also encouraged the organisations in their country to apply for published Article 36 calls. Nearly all Focal Points participated in a training organised by EFSA on how to apply and take part in Article 36 grants, thus enabling them to support organisations in their countries in the application process as well as throughout the project cycle.

2.3. EFSA’s Expert Database

EFSA’s Expert Database continued to be populated in 2009 with the help of Focal Points. Promotion activities took form in a number of different ways:

- presentation of the Expert Database at national scientific events;
- distribution of EFSA leaflets on the Expert Database to members of the national Focal Point Networks;
- publication of information about the Expert Database on national Focal Point web pages, newsletters, newspapers or national scientific journals.

In addition to the above, many Focal Points have identified expert databases managed by national scientific bodies. The database managers of these national expert databases have been contacted to see what would be the most appropriate way to inform these experts about the existence of the Expert Database and how to encourage them to submit their application for EFSA’s Expert Database. Throughout the national promotion activities many Focal Points have assisted experts in filling in the online registration form on EFSA’s website.

In parallel with the promotion activities undertaken by Focal Points, EFSA has contacted a number of international organisations (e.g. FAO, WHO, OIE, IPPC, etc.) to see if they have similar databases in place. The purpose of this exercise was to raise awareness of the Expert Database amongst experts included in international databases and to invite them to join the Expert Database.

Overall, 2262 experts have submitted an application to join the Expert Database by early December 2009. Figure 3 shows the evolution of the number of applications submitted since the launch of the Expert Database in June 2008, while Figure 4 shows the number of experts, by country of origin, having submitted an application by early December 2009.

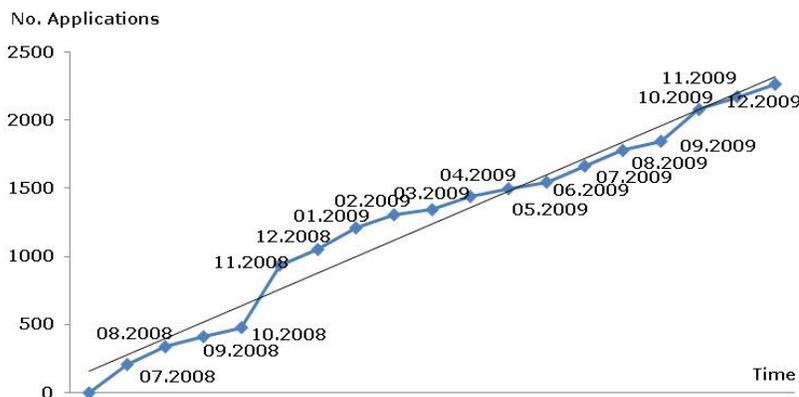


Figure 3: Evolution of the number of Expert Database applications submitted between June 2008 and early December 2009

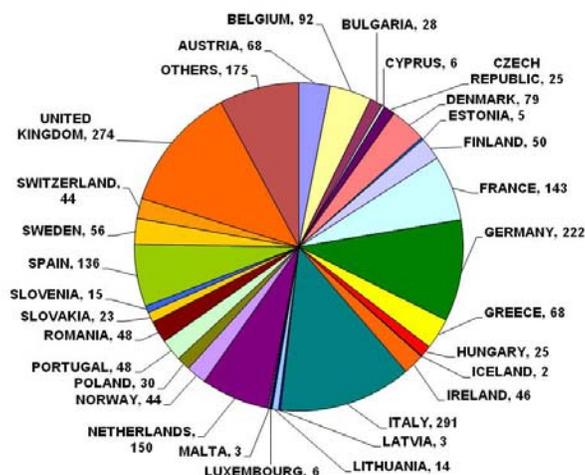


Figure 4: Number of experts, by country of origin, having submitted an Expert Database application by early December 2009

During the course of February 2009, in agreement with the EFSA Advisory Forum, members of the Focal Point Network have been granted access to the Expert Database search tool. In November 2009, an Expert Database user-survey was carried out. Focal Points were requested to comment on the use of the Expert Database and the user-friendliness of the Expert Database search tool. The feedback provided by Focal Points on the Expert Database contributed to the identification of necessary improvements and future areas of promotion⁹.

The population of the Expert Database continued to grow in 2009 with, amongst others, the support of Focal Points. In addition to presenting, distributing or publishing information on the Expert Database, Focal Points have been active in identifying national expert databases and network of experts, in order to inform and encourage scientists to apply to EFSA’s Expert Database.

2.4. Raising visibility of EFSA’s scientific work and Focal Points

Focal Points have raised the visibility of their own and EFSA’s scientific work, at national level, through a range of activities.

2.4.1. Communications activities and materials

To raise visibility of EFSA and its role in the EU food safety system, it is essential to have the support of strong networks. Working with the Advisory Forum the Focal Points are a key element of EFSA’s national dedicated networks, committed to assist EFSA in its data and information exchange, consultations, and in disseminating EFSA’s communications materials nationally. For example, Focal Points have continued also in 2009 to increase awareness, understanding and outreach of EFSA’s and the Focal Points’ work by developing various outreach materials or by disseminating information.

All Focal Points continued to define and create network(s) for disseminating EFSA material. Most Focal Points created networks reaching out to contacts at national level, some (4) to national and regional level, two to regional level only. Individuals reached by the Focal Point Network vary from

⁹ More information can be found in the “Expert Database 2009 Evaluation report”.

≤ 100 to ≥ 6,000 where in one case 5,800 copies of corporate publications were circulated to a wide range of organisations and individuals - consumer, industry, government, researchers, national expert committees, etc. A few Focal Points did not provide information on the number of individuals reached.

All Focal Points except three liaised with their Advisory Forum Communications Working Group member to jointly develop communication initiatives increasing EFSA's visibility. Twenty eight initiatives were organized including press releases, newsletters, Focal Point leaflets and presentations about EFSA. Three Focal Points had not yet established contacts with the Advisory Forum Communications Working Group for joint communication activities as they needed to prioritise data collection and compilation tasks.

Good progress was made with regards to Focal Points web pages as all Focal Points except one established/maintained an institutional webpage with information about EFSA/national cooperation and other topics. This progress reflects also the use of the web-page creation guidance document provided by EFSA. A few Focal Points plan to re-launch the existing webpage depending on budget availability. One Focal Point, due to server problems, could not establish a dedicated web presence for EFSA information. All Focal Points except a very few promoted on their webpage topics such as the EFSA newsletters, EFSA's Expert Database, the call for INEX experts, and other EFSA public announcements. One Focal Point, instead of promoting the EFSA newsletters on its webpage, proactively forwarded them by e-mail alongside publishing all opinions and other inputs on the website. Yet another Focal Point opted to run its promotion via a direct distribution to local research organisations, stakeholders and relevant individuals and to postpone the promotion of all the topics on its website until next year.

The majority of Focal Points (15) produced brochures, leaflets, articles on the role of Focal Points, activities and cooperation with EFSA. Some Focal Points which did not develop new brochures etc. either focused on distributing EFSA's existing materials or on dissemination of information through their web pages and other digital materials.

A few (12) Focal Points have produced digital or printed national newsletters or special issues such as: weekly digital newsletters; a printed quarterly journal (e.g. "Food Safety"); regular electronic newsletters; articles about Focal Point activities, zoonoses and pesticides; digital bulletins (e.g. "NodoAESAN informa"). The number of issues varied from 3 up to 150 per year with recipients from 26 up to 5,000. The majority of Focal Points (16) is redistributing EFSA's existing newsletters which they consider excellent as they cover most of the important topics and can be understood by their national/regional target audiences. Some Focal Points did not yet produce any national newsletters due to resource and budget constraints or due to choosing the Focal Point website as the key information channel.

It is also worth noting that one Focal Point developed a positioning document/ communication plan with target audience and activities planned for 2009.

Focal Points continued to increase awareness, understanding and outreach of EFSA's, the Advisory Forum's and the Focal Points' work by disseminating information through a variety of communication channels, newly developed communication tools and through extending target audience networks within Member States.

2.4.2. National Focal Point meetings and scientific events

In an attempt to broaden the national networks established by Focal Points and to keep the partners of their networks fully informed about ongoing activities, 20 Focal Points have organised different scientific events (in total 35), ranging from small targeted workshops to broader conferences to

present the work of EFSA and the Focal Points. In addition, two of the Focal Points stated that they are planning such events in the near future.

In most cases representatives from EFSA were invited to these events and presented the work of EFSA, either on very specific subjects (e.g. Zoonoses, Genetically Modified Organisms or data collection) or more in general to highlight the key projects with Member States on scientific cooperation. In many cases Focal Points have invited neighbouring Focal Points to such events, thus strengthening the regional cooperation between Member States. In 2009, three Focal Points organised so called “joint events” with EFSA, involving members of EFSA’s Management Team.

Presenting the work of the Focal Points and/or EFSA’s work at national or international scientific events remained an important task of Focal Points in 2009. Overall, 23 Focal Points indicated that they gave such presentations (even at up to 8 occasions), with a total of 75 presentations/posters for the entire Focal Point Network. Thereby, Focal Points raised the visibility not only of their own work, but also of the various scientific cooperation activities between Member States and EFSA (e.g. Expert Database, Article 36 Network, Information Exchange Platform) as well as EFSA at large.

Focal Points have organised over 35 events in their countries, ranging from targeted workshops to international conferences. At many of them other Focal Points as well as EFSA staff presented their work and cooperation activities. Focal Points have also contributed to 75 national and international events with presentations, posters and written contributions, thus raising the visibility of the Focal Point Network as well as of EFSA.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2010

Based on the work carried out by Focal Points in 2009, the experience gathered in the first two years of the Focal Point Network and the need to further strengthen the scientific cooperation between Member States and EFSA, the following priorities are proposed for the Network:

- maintain the Article 36 List of competent organisations up-to-date, thereby ensuring its functionality;
- stimulate Article 36 organisations to apply for Article 36 calls, in particular in the context of the mid-term planning of the scientific cooperation between Member States and EFSA;
- foster the Network of Article 36 organisations by using the newly developed IT tools (database of Article 36 organisations, Extranet space for Article 36 organisations);
- further develop the Information Exchange Platform and upload all relevant documents, including planned activities in the area of risk assessment;
- facilitate the cooperation between EFSA and national lists/databases of scientific experts with a view to enlarge EFSA's Expert Database, in particular in scientific and geographical areas currently underrepresented;
- continue efforts in 2010 to further leverage the cooperation with the Advisory Forum Communication Working Group and EFSA to support communication plans for 2010;
- organise national events to raise the visibility of Focal Points' and EFSA's work, to address (scientific) issues of concern in their countries, and to foster the various scientific cooperation projects between Member States and EFSA.

APPENDIX

A. MESSAGES SENT TO FOCAL POINTS 2009¹⁰

Item	Date sent	Deadline for FPs
Calls for data and contributions		
Call for data on the implications on animal cloning (SCNT) – request for FPs to gather relevant information and forward to EFSA	20/03/2009	30/04/2009
Information sent to FPs that SCAF informed AF about the call for data on the implications on animal cloning (SCNT), asking them to liaise with FPs to send information	06/04/2009	-
Calls for data in the area of food additives	24/11/2009	-
Calls for expressions of interest		
Information on extended closing date for expressions of interest to become a member of EFSA's Scientific Committee and Panels	06/01/2009	-
Call for external reviewers	24/04/2009	-
Call for new EFSA Management Board members	22/07/2009	-
Call for applications for an in-service training period at EFSA	10/08/2009	-
Information on public consultations		
Reminder on public consultation on guidance document on dermal absorption	07/01/2009	-
Information on public consultation on draft opinion on "Use and mode of bacteriophages in food production"	02/02/2009	-

¹⁰ Not included in this list: messages and feedback regarding agendas, minutes, working documents, DoIs. etc.

Item	Date sent	Deadline for FPs
Public consultation on the draft Scientific Opinion on Preparation of a Guidance Document on Pesticide Exposure Assessment for Workers, Operators, Bystanders and Residents	10/08/2009	-
Questionnaires		
Request from UK: Questionnaire on the use of toxicological threshold of concern principle	07/01/2009	26/01/2009
Request from EFSA (PPR Panel): Questionnaire on Quantitative Structure-Activity Relationship (QSAR)	15/05/2009	15/06/2009
Request from EFSA (SCO Unit): Questionnaire on national training activities on food safety risk assessment	17/09/2009	09/10/2009
Article 36 and other scientific cooperation projects		
Feedback on the update of the Article 36 List (links to updated list, decision from the Management Board and EFSA annual Work Programme for grants for 2009)	16/01/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - CFP/EFSA/FEEDAP/2009/01 - Review of mycotoxin detoxifying agents used as feed additives: mode of action, efficacy and feed/food safety	23/02/2009	-
Article 36 - training	05/06/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - CFP/EFSA/AHAW/2009/01 - Project to develop Animal Welfare Risk Assessment Guidelines on Housing and Management	23/06/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - CFP/EFSA/DATEX/2009/01 - Electronic Transmission of Chemical Occurrence Data	23/06/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - CFP/EFSA/CONTAM/2009/01 - Toxicological study related to 3-MCPD esters	23/06/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - CFP/EFSA/EMRISK/2009/01 - Modelling, predicting and mapping the (re)emergence of aflatoxin B1 in cereals in the EU due to climate change	23/06/2009	-
Article 36 - calls for proposals - CFP/EFSA/PPR/2009/01 - Identification of Common Assessment Groups of Pesticides	23/06/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - CFP/EFSA/PLH/2009/01 - Pest risk assessment for the European Community plant health - a comparative approach with case studies	15/07/2009	-

Item	Date sent	Deadline for FPs
Article 36 - call for proposals - CFP/EFSA/AHAW/2009/02 - Collection, Collation, Evaluation and synthesis of data on welfare and health aspects of genetic selection in broilers chickens	20/07/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - CFP/EFSA/DATEX/2009/02 - Pilot study in the view of a Pan-European dietary survey - Infants and children	20/07/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - CFP/EFSA/AMU/2009/01 - Inventory of data sources relevant for the identification of emerging diseases in the European aquaculture population	20/07/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - CFP/EFSA/DATEX/2009/03 - Probabilistic tool to estimate “usual” intake distribution in the Comprehensive Food Consumption Database	28/07/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - CFP/EFSA/BIOHAZ/2009/01 - Data harvesting on Campylobacter in broiler meat	28/07/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - CFP/EFSA/SCAF/2009/01 - Preparation of a report on applicability of physicochemical data, QSARs and read-across in Threshold of Toxicological Concern assessments	29/07/2009	-
Article 36 - calls for proposals - documents UPDATE	11/08/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - deadline extension - CFP/EFSA/CONTAM/2009/01 - Toxicological study related to 3-MCPD esters	21/08/2009	-
Identification of potential spelling mistakes and inconsistencies on the Article 36 list	16/09/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - CFP/EFSA/FEEDAP/2009/02 - Bibliographic review on the potential of micro-organisms, microbial products and enzymes to induce respiratory sensitisation	29/09/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - re-launch - CFP/EFSA/EMRISK/2009/01 - Modelling, predicting and mapping the emergence of aflatoxins in cereals in the EU due to climate change	15/10/2009	-
Article 36 - call for proposals - deadline extension - CFP/EFSA/FEEDAP/2009/02 - Bibliographic review on the potential of micro-organisms, microbial products and enzymes to induce respiratory sensitisation	23/10/2009	-
Launch of EFSA`s Article 36 Extranet Workspace (Art36-NET)	18/12/2009	-

Item	Date sent	Deadline for FPs
Expert Database		
Information about receiving access to the Expert Database search tool and request for support of FPs to identify national expert databases in their countries	06/03/2009	-
Reminder to identify national expert databases and to send information to SCO	07/04/2009	24/04/2009
User survey on EFSA's Expert Database	23/10/2009	06/11/2009
User survey on EFSA's Expert Database - reminder	30/10/2009	06/11/2009
Information Exchange Platform		
Request for comments and suggestions on any aspects of the IEP	06/01/2009	13/01/2009
Extension of deadline to submit comments and suggestions on any aspects of the IEP	18/01/2009	27/01/2009
Request to provide for links to web pages for the IEP	18/02/2009	27/02/2009
Information about launch of new IEP version and actions required from FPs	12/03/2009	-
Monthly reminder for IEP uploads	24/04/2009	-
IEP - new folders created on novel influenza virus and nicotine	29/04/2009	-
IEP reports now available – March report	30/04/2009	-
IEP report for April	20/05/2009	-
IEP report for May	12/06/2009	-
Monthly reminder for IEP uploads	29/06/2009	-
Debriefing from the Advisory Forum meeting on the Information Exchange Platform	07/07/2009	-
IEP report for June	17/07/2009	-
Monthly reminder for IEP uploads	22/07/2009	-

Item	Date sent	Deadline for FPs
IEP report for July	14/07/2009	-
Monthly reminder for IEP uploads	24/08/2009	-
IEP report for August	08/09/2009	-
Monthly reminder for IEP uploads	01/10/2009	-
IEP report for September	08/10/2009	-
Monthly reminder for IEP uploads	26/10/2009	-
IEP report for October	13/11/2009	-
Monthly reminder for IEP uploads	25/11/2009	-
IEP report for November	10/12/2009	-
Monthly reminder for IEP uploads and improvements to tool	18/12/2009	-
Requests from FPs		
Information about conference in Prague (21-22 April 2009)	24/03/2009	-
Request for information on the storage and distribution temperature of pre-baked frozen bread dough in Member States	20/10/2009	-
Request for information on plants used as herbal tea in the EU	10/11/2009	27/11/2009
Request for information on <i>Stevia rebaudiana</i>	03/12/2009	-
Announcement - 1st International Congress on Food Technology - 2010 (Antalya-Turkey)	16/12/2009	-
Summary of storage and distribution temperature of pre-baked frozen bread dough in Member States	16/12/2009	-
Requests from EFSA's Communications Department		
EFSA's call for external reviews to help it evaluate the quality of its scientific work	24/04/2009	-
EFSA in Focus newsletter for distribution	06/05/2009	-

Item	Date sent	Deadline for FPs
EFSA publishes its Annual Report for 2008	11/05/2009	-
Summary of EFSA's Annual Report 2008 in all EU languages	14/07/2009	-
EFSA in Focus - Issue 4	11/09/2009	-
EFSA's Strategic Plan 2009-2013	05/10/2009	14/10/2009
Requests from SCO		
Request for information on nanotechnology activities in countries	14/01/2009	23/01/2009
Request to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • check if the document on nanotechnology activities is up-to-date • nominate expert for FP WG on country profiles 	10/02/2009	13/02/2009 25/02/2009
Request for information on the budget and staff in FP organisation	12/02/2009	20/02/2009
Reminder to send information on the budget and staff in FP organisation	20/02/2009	20/02/2009
Document to update - Networks between Member States and EFSA	19/02/2009	27/02/2009
Information on development of country profiles and FP involvement	16/03/2009	-
Information on availability of document on Networks between Member States and EFSA (https://sciencenet.efsa.europa.eu/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_32_0_229_0_-1_47/http://bea-aps.efsa.eu.int;11930/collab/do/document/overview?projID=91473&folderID=257503)	20/03/2009	-
Reminder to fill in the table on Structure and Organisation of Focal Point in Member States (Extranet)	06/04/2009	-
Information on availability of document on Structure and Organisation of Focal Point in Member States (https://sciencenet.efsa.europa.eu/portal/server.pt/gateway/PTARGS_32_0_229_0_-1_47/http://bea-aps.efsa.eu.int;11930/collab/do/document/overview?projID=91473&folderID=91480)	11/05/2009	-
Call for nominations – FP Working Group on sharing of annual and strategic work plans	26/05/2009	02/06/2009
Request for comments on the reporting table on Work Plans	16/09/2009	25/09/2009
Request for comments on the working document on Training activities on food safety risk assessment	16/09/2009	25/09/2009

Item	Date sent	Deadline for FPs
Focal Point Reporting 2009	23/09/2009	15/11/2009
Reporting table on planned activities (pilot phase)	30/09/2009	15/11/2009
Focal Point Agreements - renewal	09/10/2009	23/10/2009
Reporting table on planned activities (pilot phase) - reminder	28/10/2009	15/11/2009
Focal Point Reporting 2009 - update	02/11/2009	15/11/2009
Requests from others EFSA Units and Panels		
Reminder of possibility to register for PPR Unit's workshop about the revision of the Guidance Document Persistence in Soil	11/02/2009	-
Request for information on national maximum levels of uranium in food and water by EFSA's CONTAM Panel	11/02/2009	end February
Information on publication of report on the public consultation on dermal absorption	26/03/2009	-
EFSA Stakeholder Consultation Workshop: Parma (Italy) - November 2009	10/06/2009	10/08/2009
Request for information on Bisphenol A activities	04/11/2009	12/11/2009
Summary of Bisphenol A activities in Member States	04/12/2009	-
Registration now open for PPR Stakeholder Workshop on Protection Goals for Environmental Risk Assessment of Pesticides	07/12/2009	-
Others		
EFSA in Focus - distribution	06/05/2009	-
Advisory Forum meeting dates in 2010	03/06/2009	-
Publication of the new composition of EFSA's Scientific Panels and Committee	10/06/2009	-
National training activities on food safety risk assessment – overview table	27/10/2009	-
EFSA MCPD ester knowledge base	03/12/2009	-