

# **Interagency Scientific Cooperation**

## **2015 Annual Report**

## Abstract

In 2015, EFSA took an active role in coordinating networks with other agencies, such as the EU Agencies Network on Scientific Advice (EU-ANSA). Also, EFSA established work programmes with EU agencies and the JRC on cross-cutting topics, such as multiple hazards, antimicrobial resistance, whole genome sequencing and endocrine active substances. This report gives an overview of EFSA's activities in 2015 with other EU agencies, networks and institutions to support scientific cooperation.

## Introduction

The *Scientific Cooperation Roadmap 2014-2016* sets the direction to build risk assessment (RA) capacity together with Member States (MS) and institutional partners. In particular, the Roadmap states that EFSA should work with the EU institutions and agencies to ensure a consistent risk assessment approach at EU level and contribute to international harmonisation.

By working together with the EU institutions and agencies, EFSA aims to build EU risk assessment capacity, enhance the application of harmonised risk assessment approaches across the EU and internationally, make intelligent use of resources available in the EU, avoid duplication of efforts, and share scientific information and data on topics of common concern.

The Roadmap details how in the coming years EFSA will work with the EU bodies, agencies and institutions on various issues, including antimicrobial resistance, molecular typing, data collection on zoonoses, use of in vitro, in silico and 'omics' for chemical risk assessment, identification of emerging risks, developing chemical databases, evaluation of packaging materials, food/feed additives, pesticides and veterinary drugs.

In 2015 EFSA played an active role in coordinating networks with other agencies, such as the EU Agencies Network on Scientific Advice (EU-ANSA). Also, EFSA established work programmes with EU agencies and the JRC on cross-cutting topics, such as multiple hazards, antimicrobial resistance, whole genome sequencing and endocrine active substances.

## I. EU Agencies Networks

### a. EU Agencies Network on Scientific Advice (EU-ANSA)

The Heads of EU Agencies network (HoA) set up sub-networks to provide support on specific issues common within the EU. In 2013, the HoA decided to set up a specialised network for EU agencies tasked to provide scientific and technical advice to the EU Institutions, Member States and other relevant policy makers: the *EU Agencies Network on Scientific Advice* (EU-ANSA). EFSA (Hubert Deluyker, EFSA Scientific Adviser) has chaired the EU-ANSA network since the second half of 2014. The EU-ANSA network met twice in 2015: the 5<sup>th</sup> EU-ANSA

meeting took place on 1-2 June 2015 in Brussels (at DG CONNECT), and the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting was held on 5-6 November in Dublin (at EUROFOUND).

The network addresses horizontal topics/challenges relevant for European agencies providing scientific advice. Currently, the EU-ANSA network has established working groups on the following topics: horizon scanning, open data, peer review, uncertainty, access to EUROFOUND data, and networking to address research needs. The working groups map existing procedures, exchange practices and challenges in the above areas, with the main aim of organising mutual support and preparing common positions where necessary.

In 2015 the EU-ANSA network published two reports:

- I. In August 2015, the EU-ANSA network published a report summarising its mission, giving a concise overview of the nature of scientific advice provided by and the processes in place at the decentralised agencies of the European Union. Consistent with the EU-ANSA mandate, the report covers scientific activities and processes only. The aim of this document is to provide a quick reference for comparison, so as to avoid the need to search each agency’s website individually. The publication is available at the [EU Bookshop](#).
- II. The ‘peer review’ working group finalised a reflection paper on key principles for the use of peer review approaches within the context of EU agencies providing scientific advice and technical support. EU peer reviews differ in a number of ways from the classical peer review used in academic publishing. The paper is meant to contribute to an on-going debate regarding developments within the broader scientific community in relation to peer review. It should be noted that the EU-ANSA peer review proposal is in line with EFSA’s current approach for peer reviews in the context of EFSA Conclusions in the pesticides area. The publication is available at the [EU Bookshop](#).

The EU-ANSA network has established close networking relations and interactions with research services of the European Parliament (EP) and the European Commission (EC), which join the network as observers (see Table 1).

<b>European Parliament (EP)</b>	
<b>Scientific Foresight (STOA) Unit</b>	Theodoros Karapiperis, from the STOA Unit of the EP’s Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Service (DG EPRS), joined the network in November 2014 as observer. STOA’s scientific foresight activities aim to enhance communication among science, society and policy. A regular information exchange and interactions between the EU-ANSA network and STOA have been established.

<b>European Commission/Directorates-General (DGs)</b>	
<b>Research &amp; Innovation (DG R&amp;I)</b>	DG R&I attended both 2015 EU-ANSA meetings as observer and gave an update on the creation of the Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM) <sup>1</sup> , the aim of which is to support the EC with independent scientific advice for policy-making. EU-ANSA has full support from the Heads of EU Agencies and Heads of Administration Networks to pursue the participation of agencies in the EC's SAM project.
<b>Joint Research Center (DG JRC)</b>	On 20 March 2015, Hubert Deluyker attended the 3 <sup>rd</sup> meeting of the JRC Scientific Committee in Brussels, Belgium, where he presented the EU-ANSA network. As a follow-up, Göran Lövestam (DG JRC), JRC Chief Scientist (CS) and coordinator of the DG JRC Scientific Committee (SC), attended the 2015 EU-ANSA meetings as observer. The network was informed about the role of the JRC SC as well as the JRC's expertise, competencies and research areas. Actions for possible further cooperation between EU-ANSA and the JRC have been agreed.
<b>Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE)</b>	Stefan Schreck, from DG SANTE (Unit C2 – Country knowledge and scientific committees), representing the Secretariat of the EC's non-food Scientific Committees, joined the 6 <sup>th</sup> EU-ANSA meeting as observer and informed the network about the EC's current Scientific Advisory Structure for consumer safety, public health and the environment. In April 2016, the current structure will change based on Commission Decision C(2015) 5383 of 7.08.2015, streamlining the functioning of the SCs and establishing two Committees, SCCS and SCHEER.
<b>Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT), Publications Office (DG OP), Informatics (DG DIGIT)</b>	During the 5 <sup>th</sup> EU-ANSA meeting, a dedicated session was devoted to the EC's activities on Open Data. Prabhat Agarwal (DG CONNECT) introduced the policy framework and on-going trends towards Open Data and Open Science within the EU environment; Valentina Fratto (DG OP) gave a general introduction on Open Data and the EU Open Data Portal (ODP); and Vassilios Peristeras (DG DIGIT) presented the ISA (Interoperability Solutions for European Public Administrations) Programme for Open Data.

**Table 1.** 2015 EU-ANSA networking activities

## b. Informal Network of EU Agencies with Pre-Accession and European Neighbourhood Programmes

EU Agencies working with the European Commission Instruments of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) meet regularly through an informal network with both DG Neighbourhood and

<sup>1</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/research/sam/index.cfm>

Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to share experiences and good practice, and to foster better coordination between the agencies. The informal network also provides an opportunity to discuss current and future issues with representatives of DG NEAR and EEAS.

In 2015 EFSA participated in an informal network meeting, held on 23-24 April at EU-OSHA, Bilbao. The network agreed to send a letter to DG NEAR and EEAS via the Head of Agencies network to raise common concerns regarding the continuation of the ENP programme.

## II. Working together with European Commission services

### a. Joint Research Centre (JRC)

Since 2008, EFSA has established a strong cooperation with different JRC directorates/units. The JRC is the EU’s main scientific research institute; its expertise and capabilities are essential for EFSA to validate and implement innovative methods and approaches for its risk assessments. The EFSA/JRC Roadmap describes the areas and modalities for scientific cooperation in the period 2015-2022.

**Two high-level EFSA/JRC meetings**

On 27 January 2015, a delegation of the JRC’s senior management, composed of Mrs Elke Anklam, Director of the Institute for Reference Materials and Measurements (IRMM), and Mr Krzysztof Maruszewski, Director of the Institute for Health and Consumer Protection (IHCP), visited EFSA to take stock of the various EFSA/JRC scientific activities, and to consider and plan future initiatives, as recorded in the roadmap for EFSA/JRC scientific activities. The visit confirmed the successful collaboration between JRC and EFSA, and follow-up actions have been agreed in many areas, such as food contact materials, food additives, chemical contaminants, feed, nanotechnology, GMO, plant health, emerging risks, environmental assessment, genome sequencing, and novel chemical hazard characterisation approaches.

On 11 November 2015, Bernhard Url and Hubert Deluyker met with JRC Director General Vladimir Šucha to further strengthen relations with the JRC by developing a multiannual strategic programme. It was agreed to hold an EFSA/JRC workshop to set out plans for the future, possibly in January 2016.

<p><b>Landscape risk assessment</b></p>	<p>On 1 October 2015, EFSA visited the JRC and identified several points of common interest regarding the JRC/EFSA long-term project on developing methodologies for landscape risk assessment. The JRC has received with interest EFSA's proposal of a long-term project to develop a tool for landscape risk assessment, mapping environmental risks/impacts at EU level (e.g. in the areas of pesticides and plant health) and using GIS-based tools and data available at the JRC. During a meeting at the JRC Institute for Environment and Sustainability (JRC-IES), options were discussed. The approach considered preferable by both parties was to integrate EFSA's risk assessment knowledge and needs into the IT/GIS tools and data bases available at the JRC and already used for other EU environmental impact assessments. A first draft proposal, including pilot activities and timelines, will follow.</p>
<p><b>Bee health</b></p>	<p>Since March 2015, a representative of the Monitoring Agricultural ResourceS (MARS) Unit of the JRC-IES has been involved in EFSA's working group dealing with the health of managed honey bee colonies, given that mapping the landscape around bee hives is an important aspect of the HEALTHY-B mandate.</p>
<p><b>Animal and plant health</b></p>	<p>In addition to the long-term cooperation between JRC-IES and EFSA's plant health team (ALPHA Unit) on modelling environmental suitability for exotic plant pests (including climate and host plants, both agricultural and forestry species),<sup>2</sup> cooperation with JRC-IPSC has also been intensifying over the past years to further develop a media monitoring tool for early identification of plant health threats in the EU. The improved EFSA MediSys platform will be completed for plant health in 2016 and will provide an improved structure that could be extended to other food safety areas. In 2015, two papers were published:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Assessing the potential distribution of insect pests: case studies on large pine weevil (<i>Hylobius abietis</i> L) and horse-chestnut leaf miner (<i>Cameraria ohridella</i>) under present and future climate conditions in European forests.<sup>3</sup></li> <li>II. Development and testing of the media monitoring tool MedISys for early identification and reporting of existing and emerging plant health threats.<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>

**Table 2.** 2015 EFSA/JRC activities at a glance

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/it/supporting/pub/247e>; <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/supporting/pub/434e>

<sup>3</sup> <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/epp.12208/pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/epp.12209/pdf>

## b. DG SANTE, Secretariat of the non-food Scientific Committees

EFSA and a delegation of the Secretariat of the non-food Scientific Committees meet once a year to exchange work programmes and to discuss possible cooperation on activities of common interest.

In the 2015 meeting (18 June), EFSA and the delegation of the Secretariat of the Scientific Committees of DG SANTE exchanged information regarding ongoing activities between EFSA's Scientific Committee and the EC's emerging risks and non-food Committees. EFSA provided updates on:

- Work programme of 'weight of evidence' working groups;
- Uncertainty in risk assessment;
- Benchmark dose and biological relevance;
- Current scientific cooperation and communication activities.

The non-food Scientific Committees of DG SANTE expressed the need for collaboration in the early development stages of guidance on horizontal interests (e.g. guidance on uncertainty). In November 2015, the Secretariat of the non-food Committees joined the EU-ANSA network as observer and watched the work of EFSA's Scientific Committee on environmental risk assessment.

## III. Working together with EU sister agencies

### a. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)

EFSA has established many collaborative activities with ECDC. On 5 June 2015, Mike Catchpole, Chief Scientist at ECDC, and Mrs Celine Gossner visited EFSA and met with units of the Authority's Risk Assessment and Scientific Assistance (RASA) Department to discuss EFSA/ECDC collaboration on foodborne diseases, zoonoses and antimicrobial resistance; the SOP on rapid risk assessments; and the joint database initiative on molecular surveillance. The establishment of a regular informal exchange between EFSA and ECDC on zoonotic issues at the animal-human interface was envisaged. Some of the activities and areas of collaboration are described in more detail in the table below.



Areas	Activities
<b>Molecular typing</b>	In the framework of two specific mandates from the EC, EFSA and ECDC have been working together to develop and maintain two databases for the collection of molecular typing data – Pulsed Field Gel Electrophoresis (PFGE) and Multiple Loci Variable-number tandem repeat Analysis (MLVA) – on <i>Salmonella</i> , <i>Listeria monocytogenes</i> and STEC isolates. EFSA is responsible for managing the database on isolates from food, feed, animals and their environment. ECDC is responsible for managing the database on human isolates. EFSA and ECDC will also perform, with the support of the relevant EU Reference Laboratories, joint analyses of the molecular typing data stored in a joint database hosted by ECDC for the purposes of multi-country outbreak detection and assessment.
<b>Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS)</b>	There are regular exchanges between ECDC and EFSA on the WGS Strategy and related planned projects. ECDC participated in EFSA's 20th Scientific Colloquium on 'whole genome sequencing of food-borne pathogens for public health protection' (June 2014). ECDC is regularly informed about EFSA-funded WGS projects (procurement & grants) and is usually invited to participate in the meetings of those projects.
<b>Zoonoses</b>	Every year EFSA and ECDC jointly produce <i>EU Summary Reports on Trends and Sources of Zoonoses, Zoonotic Agents and Food-borne Outbreaks</i> . EFSA and ECDC collaborated on EFSA's scientific opinion on <i>Echinococcus multilocularis</i> infections in animals. ECDC provided EFSA with human data on <i>Echinococcus</i> infections, which were considered by the working group.
<b>Antimicrobial resistance</b>	ECDC is informed of EC mandates on antimicrobial resistance issues received by EFSA. Every year EFSA and ECDC jointly produce the <i>EU Summary Report on antimicrobial resistance in zoonotic and indicator bacteria from humans, animals and food</i> . EFSA collaborated with EMA and ECDC in drafting the <i>First joint report on the integrated analysis of the consumption of antimicrobial agents and occurrence of antimicrobial resistance in bacteria from humans and food-producing animals</i> (JIACRA report), which was published in 2014.
<b>Investigations related to international food-borne outbreaks</b>	EFSA also collaborates with ECDC to produce and update joint ECDC/EFSA outbreak assessment reports. EFSA contributes to ECDC's outbreak investigations by providing data from the monitoring of zoonoses and food-borne outbreaks, and by consulting the EFSA Network for Zoonoses Monitoring Data. Contributions are in-depth analyses of food data and robust evidence to link suspected food sources with human cases.

<p><b>Preparedness and responsiveness for risk assessments on vector-borne diseases in the EU</b></p>	<p>The VectorNet project aims to harmonise data collection on the geographic distribution of vectors of human and/or animal pathogens in Europe and the Mediterranean Basin. This collaboration will improve the communication among experts and organisations from the medical and veterinary domains and is in line with other “One Health” initiatives. During the 2015 vector season, entomological surveillance activities led by the VectorNet community took place in more than 20 countries across Europe. Additionally, the VectorNet experts provided ad-hoc advice for EFSA’s and ECDC’s risk assessments.</p>
<p><b>Avian influenza</b></p>	<p>There is continuous collaboration between ECDC and EFSA on avian influenza. In this context, ECDC participated in the EFSA workshop on ‘research activities’ in January 2015, while EFSA took part in the ECDC workshop on ‘influenza preparedness’ in October 2015. Reviewing the animal health aspects, EFSA has been involved in ECDC’s rapid risk assessment of the outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza caused by H5N1 and H5N2 viruses in France. The related report was published on 2 December 2015. On the occasion of ECDC’s 10-year anniversary conference, held in Stockholm on 20 May 2015, EFSA participated in a scientific panel discussion on expectations from ECDC with respect to influenza and other cross-border threats.</p>
<p><b>Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa</b></p>	<p>After publishing a joint EFSA/ECDC report on the risk related to household pets in contact with Ebola cases in humans, EFSA and ECDC continued their collaboration in response to the Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa with the preparation of an EFSA scientific report on the drivers for spillover of the Ebola virus from animals to humans, to which ECDC contributed.</p>

**Table 3.** 2015 EFSA/ECDC joint activities

## b. European Chemicals Agency (ECHA)

EFSA and ECHA have active cooperation in various areas of chemical assessment, which is not only crucial from a procedural point of view (e.g. regarding the alignment of assessment procedures between the two agencies, or the sharing of databases and chemical-specific information), but also from a scientific perspective (in terms of methods for environmental risk assessment, chemical hazard characterisation and the assessment of nanomaterials).

A tri-partite cooperation, involving ECHA, EFSA and the JRC, was established in 2014 to implement new insights in chemical hazard assessment. In addition, ECHA and EFSA participate in OECD expert groups to contribute to the international harmonisation of new developments in the areas of alternative

testing methods, chemical databases, endocrine disruptors and chemical mixtures.

ECHA and EFSA are actively cooperating in the harmonisation/integration of risk assessment methodologies for pesticides, biocides and industrial chemicals under REACH, e.g. through scientific workshops co-organised by both agencies (the latest one in October 2015). In addition, there is close cooperation on the assessment of individual substances used as pesticides and biocides as well as on the harmonised classification and labelling of pesticides, including the regular participation of ECHA in meetings of the EFSA Pesticides Steering Network (PSN). In this context, both agencies have co-led an MS expert group within the PSN for aligning the templates of the Draft Assessment Report (DAR) and the harmonised classification and labelling (CLH) report. In the area of pesticides, timely communication with ECHA and EMA has allowed the early identification of potential discrepancies and avoided divergences in scientific opinions.

Some examples of interactions between EFSA and ECHA in 2015 are listed in the table below.

Areas	Activities
<b>High-level meeting</b>	A top-level trilateral meeting with the Executive Directors of EFSA and ECHA was organised by DG SANTE regarding the harmonised classification of pesticides (9 November 2015).
<b>Bisphenol A</b>	EFSA participated as observer in the ECHA Committee for Risk Assessment (RAC) in Helsinki, where members consulted on the Annex XV restriction proposal for Bisphenol A in thermal paper (29 January).
<b>Nanomaterial safety</b>	An EFSA/ECHA video conference took place to exchange information and increase collaboration in the area of nanomaterial safety (27 May). As a follow-up, ECHA participated in the meeting of EFSA's nanotechnology network on 7-8 July 2015.
<b>Open Data</b>	EFSA's DATA Unit had a teleconference with ECHA on the latest developments regarding EFSA's Open Data project (18 June).
<b>Pesticides</b>	EFSA co-chaired the ECHA/EFSA Topical Scientific Workshop on Soil Risk Assessment, held in Helsinki, to develop new or improved scientific approaches in support of risk assessment under European regulations (7-8 October).

**Table 4.** 2015 EFSA/ECHA joint activities

### c. European Environment Agency (EEA)

While EEA has a risk governance responsibility, it is currently being explored if the Agency has data and information that can be integrated in an overarching tool to move into the direction of landscape level assessments. The main area of interactions is environmental risk assessment.

Area	Activities
<b>Environmental risk assessment</b>	EEA has been observing the work of EFSA's Scientific Committee on overarching elements of environmental risk assessment. Setting protection goals is an important first step of risk assessment and requires a dialogue between risk assessors, risk managers and stakeholders involved in protecting biodiversity. At a dedicated meeting, held on 24 September 2015, EEA indicated interest in the EFSA/JRC project to develop a landscape risk/impact assessment tool for mapping environmental risk at EU level, e.g. in the area of pesticides or plant health (see JRC section above). The possibility for EEA to actively contribute to the project, e.g. by providing available data, would depend on the Agency's availability of resources.

**Table 5.** 2015 EFSA/EEA joint activities

#### d. European Medicines Agency (EMA)

There is a regular dialogue with colleagues in EMA on potentially overlapping issues. EMA's involvement in EFSA activities in 2015 is shown in the table below.

Area	Activities
<b>Antimicrobial resistance</b>	<p>In the context of two specific mandates from the EC, EFSA and EMA are working together drafting two scientific opinions related to antimicrobial resistance:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. EMA/EFSA Joint Scientific Opinion on measures to reduce the need to use antimicrobial agents in animal husbandry in the European Union, and the resulting impacts on food safety: collaborative activity is on-going in the framework of the so-called RONAFA WG (Working Group on Reduction of Need for Antimicrobials in Food-producing Animals). EMA and EFSA jointly coordinate and manage the project, with six experts from each agency being members of the WG (expected deadline: December 2016).</li> <li>II. EFSA Scientific Opinion on the risk for the development of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) due to feeding calves with milk containing residues of antibiotics: one EMA expert will participate in the working group.</li> </ol> <p>As described above in the ECDC section, EFSA cooperated with EMA and ECDC in drafting the JIACRA report.</p>
<b>Animal health</b>	EFSA and EMA collaborated in the context of an EFSA scientific opinion providing an update on oral vaccination of foxes and raccoon dogs against rabies. The opinion was published in July 2015. EFSA and EMA collaborated in the context of the EFSA scientific opinion on <i>Echinococcus multilocularis</i> in animals. The opinion was published in December 2015.
<b>Nanomaterials</b>	EMA and EFSA have explored their respective activities and applications received, and will keep exchanging information with the

	objective to use each other's know-how where guidance for risk assessment is needed.
<b>Pesticides</b>	EMA is following with great interest certain activities in the pesticides area, including the PPR guidance on residue definition, and has asked for participation as observer in a number of peer review meetings.
<b>Environmental risk assessment</b>	EMA has been observing the work of EFSA's Scientific Committee on overarching elements of environmental risk assessment.
<b>Corporate</b>	<p>EFSA participated in the consultation of EMA's strategy document <i>EU Medicines Agencies Network Strategy to 2020 – Working together to improve health</i>. EMA's network strategy was well received by EFSA, especially its objectives in the areas of mutual interest, such as human health and animal health, antimicrobial resistance, and the promotion of a "One Health" approach. EFSA highlighted the essential role that inter-agency scientific cooperation plays in ensuring a consistent risk assessment approach at EU level, and its contribution to the international harmonisation of risk assessment methodologies (June 2015).</p> <p>On 12 November 2015, a teleconference with EMA was held to exchange views on public observers in open committee/panel meetings. EFSA gave an update on its Guidelines for Observers, its experience with open plenary meetings, and its measures aimed at increasing transparency and engagement in EFSA's risk assessment process – an introduction to the TERA Project.</p> <p>EFSA received a request from EMA to access some of the data used in the EFSA opinion on genotoxicity testing strategies, published in 2011. An exchange of information is on-going and will probably be completed in early 2016.</p>

**Table 6.** 2015 EFSA/EMA joint activities

## Conclusion

In 2015, EFSA took a pro-active role in coordinating networks with other agencies, e.g. via the EU Agencies Network on Scientific Advice (EU-ANSA). In addition, EFSA established work programmes with EU Agencies and the JRC on cross-cutting subjects, such as multiple hazards, antimicrobial resistance, and whole genome sequencing.

EFSA's ambitious aspirations, as formulated in its forthcoming Strategy for 2020, are defined by the Strategic Objective 3: 'Build the EU's scientific assessment capacity and knowledge community.' EFSA aims to strengthen capacity building and sharing among partners within and beyond the EU through promoting a common research and risk assessment agenda with Member States,

EU agencies and EU reference laboratories, and in close collaboration with the Commission and international partners. Establishing clusters with other EU agencies and collaborating closely with DG JRC and DG R&I to identify research priorities and funding for key research projects have been found to be key to underpinning this objective.

This report demonstrates the plethora of activities already on-going with EU agencies and institutions. EFSA will continue to work towards increased cooperation to ensure food safety for EU citizens in a coordinated approach based on partnership among the relevant EU agencies and bodies.

### Document history

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