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## European Court of Auditors recognises EFSA's advanced independence policy, makes recommendations

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Press Release

11 October 2012

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is applying some of the most advanced policies and procedures for declaring, assessing and managing potential conflicts of interest, the European Court of Auditors said in a review of the management of conflicts of interests in four independent agencies of the European Union. The Court has made a number of recommendations, many of which are already integrated in EFSA's working processes. EFSA will carefully examine any recommendations which may remain outstanding.

The Court focused its review on the four agencies – EFSA, the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) -- because of the vital role they play in their daily work to inform and protect consumer health and safety in Europe.

In its responses to the Court, EFSA reaffirmed that its most critical commitment is to provide independent scientific advice to help protect consumers.

"From the very outset, EFSA has focused on providing rules on avoiding potential conflicts of interest to those individuals most involved with the Authority's work and has developed its policies in line with the need to secure the impartiality of its scientific advice," EFSA's Executive Director Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle said.

"But we are not complacent on this issue as we know how important it is for the perception of, and trust in, EFSA's work. We will continue to rigorously implement our new Policy on Independence and Scientific Decision-Making Processes and the related implementing rules which came into force in July. These provide additional protection for EFSA's scientific experts in recognition of their commitment to support the organisation in fulfilling its public health mission. Our actions will be guided by the recommendations of the European Court of Auditors' report and the views of the European Parliament," Ms Geslain-Lanéelle said.

An independent report published last month by international consultants Ernst and Young noted the high quality of EFSA's scientific outputs as well as the agency's culture of transparency and robust systems to ensure impartial scientific advice. The external evaluation made a number of recommendations on how the Authority can further improve its performance which EFSA will use as an important contribution to shaping future development of the organisation.

National competent food authorities in Europe recently issued a joint declaration to mark the 10th anniversary of the creation of EFSA, recognising EFSA's achievements over the past decade. The authorities reaffirmed their endorsement of the valuable work EFSA has carried out to improve consumer safety since 2002, and re-stated their commitment to safeguarding the role of scientific experts and organisations as trusted, independent sources of advice.

### **EFSA ensures outputs free from undue influence**

The European Court of Auditors reviewed the procedures in place in the four agencies up to October 2011. EFSA, as a forward-looking agency, has explained to the Court that it was already in compliance with many of the recommendations it had made.

#### [List of measures in place to ensure the independence of EFSA's scientific advice](#)

EFSA's working processes are designed to ensure that European consumers are protected by the highest quality of scientific expertise and that outputs are free from any undue influence. One of EFSA's fundamental pillars is its Policy on Declarations of Interest which enforces strict standards when it comes to handling potential conflicts of interest. Other measures include: scientific opinions are the outcome of collective decision-making of EFSA's Scientific Committee or its scientific Panels; minority opinions are recorded; all scientific outputs are published; there are procedures governing the processing of mandates and requests, data collection, the selection of experts as well as public consultations and a comprehensive quality review programme.

EFSA also has a risk communication mandate which contributes and helps ensure the transparency and independence of its work.

EFSA has also begun making some of the plenaries of its Scientific Committee and Panels available for observer participation to allow interested parties a better understanding of the risk assessment process.

Guided by its Founding Regulation and relevant institutional legislation, EFSA has developed rules and procedures to guarantee the impartiality of its advice. EFSA has required experts to submit annual declarations of interest since the establishment of its scientific Panels in 2003 and adopted its Policy on Declarations of Interest in 2007. In 2011, EFSA published its Policy on Independence and Scientific Decision-Making Processes, integrating all the initiatives EFSA has taken to safeguard its core values – excellence in science, independence, openness and transparency.

- [EFSA welcomes Declaration of Support from Advisory Forum](#)
- [EFSA 10 years on - Independent report says Authority delivering on all fronts, outlines recommendations for further progress](#)
- [Policy on Independence and Scientific Decision-Making Processes](#)

- [Implementing Rules](#)

### **List of measures in place to ensure the independence of EFSA's scientific advice.**

#### Declarations of Interest:

- Experts declare interests annually (annual DoI) and before each meeting in relation to each agenda item (specific DoI). The interests are screened and assessed. The outcome of the assessment is made available in the minutes of the Scientific Committee, Panels and Working Groups which are published on EFSA's website;
- EFSA has required staff since 2007 to submit annual Declarations of Interests and since 2011 additional steps have been introduced to assess candidates prior to appointment;

#### Screening of Declarations of Interest:

- For experts, a screening procedure was implemented before appointment from 2007 and this was improved in 2011 under the new Policy on Independence and Scientific Decision-Making Processes and the related implementing rules;
- For Management Board members, screening is carried out by EFSA after their appointment by the Council;
- For Advisory Board members, screening is carried out by EFSA after their appointment by Member States;
- For experts, screening is carried out by EFSA twice before their appointment, firstly during the selection process and if they are selected, a second time before they are appointed. The screening was based from 2007 on clearly specified criteria, and these were strengthened under EFSA's new independence policy in 2011;

#### Other rules and procedures in place:

- EFSA has defined and implemented breach of trust procedures for all experts (since September 2009), staff members (under Staff Regulations), Management Board members (since March 2009);
- EFSA has put in place rules for staff on five-year contracts leaving the service, binding them to certain obligations. Former staff are required to advise EFSA of future employment, within two years of leaving, so that EFSA can consider whether that may lead to a conflict of interest.
- Regarding confidentiality, staff regulations state that an official should refrain from any unauthorised disclosure of information received in the line of duty unless that information has already been made public or is accessible to the public.
- Training on managing potential conflicts of interests has been compulsory for all EFSA staff since 2010 (2007 for experts) and is supported by a dedicated manual and training material. Management Board members will receive dedicated training on ethics and integrity in October 2012;

- EFSA has implemented an invitation policy since 2009; EFSA for many years applied rules in relation to gifts in accordance with a framework provided by the European Commission and adopted a specific policy in July 2012.

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