



# On the Independence of EFSA

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[A SUMMARY WITH 32 Links about the general topic Independence from the EFSA Website <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/topics/topic/independence.htm>]

[Date of visit 28. 10. 2012]

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0FEVgIpQcw&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0FEVgIpQcw&feature=player_embedded)


The EU food safety system is underpinned by risk assessment to ensure science-based policy making on risks associated with the food chain. As the EU's risk assessment body, EFSA provides scientific advice produced in keeping with the key values based on its Founding Regulation: independence, excellence in science, openness and transparency and responsiveness. EFSA must provide the best scientific advice possible at the right time in order to support policy makers in their decision making.

At the EU level the task of providing scientific advice is assigned to EFSA which means that the Authority's work and its outputs need to live up to these key values.

EFSA works closely with all of its partners, in particular the national food safety agencies as well as with stakeholders in the food chain including consumer, environmental and other interest groups as well as industry. While dialogue is important, independence is critical, and EFSA ensures that the experts on its Scientific Committee and Panels are able to discuss and adopt scientific opinions free from any inappropriate influence.

- [Commentary by EFSA Executive Director on scientific independence and integrity](#)

On 15 December 2011, EFSA's Management Board adopted the Authority's new Policy on independence and scientific decision-making processes, which brings together and strengthens all the measures EFSA has put in place to ensure the objectivity of its scientific advice.

- [EFSA's Policy on Independence and Scientific Decision-Making Processes](#)
- [Independent report on benchmarking of EFSA's Independence policy with similar organisations](#)  (0.8 Mb)

## EFSA's governance

EFSA is managed by the Executive Director, who in turn reports to an independent Management Board governing EFSA. The members of the Management Board are appointed by the Council of the European Union in consultation with the European Parliament following an open call for expression of interest organised by the European Commission. They are appointed to act in the public interest

and do not represent any government, organisation or sector. All members sign a declaration of interests. The Management Board has no power to review EFSA's scientific outputs or to influence their adoption procedure.

- [Management Board](#)
- [EFSA's independence: understanding the role of its Management Board](#)

### **How EFSA ensures the independence of its scientific work**

The Authority applies a robust set of internal mechanisms and working processes to safeguard the independence of its scientific work and that of its Scientific Committee and Panels.

### **Rules on the selection of experts**

Members of the Scientific Committee, Scientific Panels and their Working Groups, as well as other external experts contributing to the work of EFSA, are selected based on their scientific competence and expertise, and according to objective and transparent criteria. During the selection process, interests declared by the applicants are also reviewed. In addition, independent external evaluators review the assessment of applications for scientific panel membership to ensure that the selection process is coherent.

- [Decision of the Executive Director concerning the selection of members of the Scientific Committee, Scientific Panels and external experts](#)

### **Good risk assessment practices and adoption of scientific opinions**

EFSA has developed a comprehensive body of good risk assessment practices to guide the work of its Scientific Committee and Panels to help ensure its opinions respect the highest scientific standards. EFSA's Scientific Committee has also adopted a set of recommendations on transparency in risk assessment to ensure maximum transparency of its independent scientific work.

All the final scientific opinions adopted by the Scientific Committee and Scientific Panels are based on most up-to-date scientific information and knowledge. They are the outcome of collective deliberations and decisions, each member having an equal say. No one expert can unduly influence the decisions of the Panel, and minority views are recorded. If EFSA has identified a conflict of interest for a panel member to participate in the scientific activities related to a certain a topic, it is recorded in the final opinion. In addition, as part of the review process to ensure the quality of its scientific opinions, EFSA verifies appropriate implementation of its policy with respect to Declaration of Interests.

- [Good risk assessment practice](#)
- [Workflow for scientific opinions](#)
- [Transparency in risk assessment](#)
- [Quality assurance](#)

### **Declaration of interests (DOIs)**

All experts of the Scientific Committee, Scientific Panels and Working Groups are required to sign a declaration of commitment, including a commitment to act independently, and to provide an annual declaration of interests (ADoI) for each EFSA group of which they are a member. EFSA closely monitors and reviews the ADoIs of all its scientists. In accordance with the principle of transparency, all of the ADoIs as well as the mandates for each Panel and working group are published on the EFSA website.

Experts are also required to declare in advance their specific interests for each agenda point of a meeting in writing, through a specific declaration of interests (SDoI), and any additional interests orally at the beginning of the meeting. Minutes of meetings are published which show how the policy on declarations has been followed. For example, they will show when an expert declared a particular interest and if that led to his/her withdrawing from the meeting for a particular item.



### **Potential conflicts of interest**

EFSA recognises that high quality scientific expertise – which is the main prerequisite for an expert to be invited to contribute to EFSA’s work – is by nature based on prior experience. Moreover, having an interest does not necessarily imply that there is a conflict of interest. EFSA screens the information provided by an expert in the DOI and assesses whether a declared interest constitutes a conflict on a case-by-case basis. The evaluation takes into account the interests declared by the expert in relation to the mandate of the group in question and the role of the expert in this group. For instance, involvement in industry-funded research does not necessarily constitute a conflict of interest provided that the research does not relate directly to the topic being considered by the Panel or Working Group.

On 21 February 2012, EFSA adopted detailed rules for the implementation of the Authority’s Policy on Independence and Scientific Decision-Making Processes with respect to Declarations of Interest (DoIs). The Implementing Rules strengthen the procedures in place for screening and managing interests declared by those involved in EFSA’s activities, in particular those submitted by EFSA’s scientific experts and other individuals and organisations involved in EFSA’s scientific work. They provide a definition of what EFSA considers to be a conflict of interest (in line with OECD guidelines) and also a clear and transparent set of definitions and general principles for the declaration of interests applicable to all DoIs.

The responsibility for ensuring that DoIs are complete and truthful lies exclusively with the person submitting the declaration, for example the scientific expert. After the DoI is submitted, it is assessed by EFSA to determine if there is a potential conflict of interest. Depending on the outcome of this assessment, and in line with the guidelines set out in the Implementing Rules, EFSA makes a decision on whether or not the person is allowed to participate in EFSA’s scientific work and in what role (for example as Chair, Vice-Chair or Member of a Scientific Panel or working group). In addition to this screening, EFSA will review on a regular basis a representative sample of the Annual Declarations of Interest (ADoIs) to monitor for completeness and coherence with EFSA’s rules.

- [EFSA’s policy on declarations of interests](#)
- [Implementing rules for EFSA’s Policy on Independence and Scientific Decision-Making Processes regarding Declarations of Interests](#)

- [Independent report on implementation of DOI policy on EFSA's Scientific Panels](#)  (0.2 Mb)
- [EFSA report to the European Parliament on the implementation of its Independence Policy 2007-2012](#)  (0.5 Mb)

### **Role of EFSA staff**

EFSA staff act in the public interest and are subject to several obligations under EU staff regulations, including that of acting with independence and integrity and of avoiding conflicts of interests. EFSA staff may provide scientific and administrative support to the Scientific Panels but the Panel experts independently deliberate, decide conclusions and adopt final scientific opinions. In order to ensure a coherent implementation of staff obligations with respect to independence, EFSA requires all its professional staff to fill out an annual declaration of interests. These ADols are screened and those of EFSA's Management Team are published on the EFSA website. EFSA ensures that staff members are not assigned to projects where potential conflicts of interests may arise.

Staff who leave EFSA are required to inform the Authority with respect to future employment, within two years of leaving, so that EFSA can consider whether that may lead to a conflict of interest.

- [EU Staff Regulations](#)
- [Management Team](#)

### **Past activities / Completed work**

- [Latest updates](#)
- [News \(24\)](#)
- [Publications \(1\)](#)
- [Events \(3\)](#)
- [Calls \(1\)](#)
- [Trust in the EU food supply chain](#)

Feature story - 11 July 2012

- [Letter to ILSI from EFSA, sent 10 May 2012](#)

Letter - 16 May 2012

- [EFSA Management Board Chair resigns](#)

Press release - 9 May 2012

- [EFSA's final response to the European Ombudsman regarding a former EFSA staff member](#)

Letter - 18 April 2012

- [EFSA opens up scientific meetings to Observers in pilot project](#)

Press release - 7 March 2012

- [EFSA publishes Implementing Rules for Independence Policy](#)

Press release - 5 March 2012

- [Information Session on Implementing Rules of Independence Policy](#)

News Story - Brussels, 5 March 2012

- [Latest misrepresentations of EFSA's work are as uninformed as before](#)

Letter - 15 February 2012

- [51st Management Board meeting: Management Board adopts EFSA's Science Strategy 2012-2016 and Policy on independence and scientific decision-making processes – Audio available](#)

News Story - Warsaw, 15 December 2011

- [EFSA: strengthened procedures to avoid potential conflicts of interest and "Revolving Door" cases](#)

News story - 14 December 2011