

## Discussion paper

# ESAC peer review proposal

### Background:

The ESAC peer review process was reviewed as part of the recent EPAA workshop on 'Overcoming barriers to validation of 3Rs methods' (ECVAM, Ispra – 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> May 08) to improve the understanding of the process and highlight areas where logistic and administrative arrangements could be optimised. Three main issues were identified during the course of this discussion:

- Frequency of ESAC meetings – formal adoption of methods takes place during these meetings which are currently twice a year
- Quantity of scientific experts – only a limited pool of experts is available to review proposals, which makes it difficult to keep to deadlines
- Lack of dedicated ECVAM staff – at present no member of ECVAM staff is specifically assigned to maintain the peer review process.

### Proposed way forward

The following measures are proposed by EPAA WG5 for consideration by ESAC to optimise or circumvent the issues identified above:

- Frequency of ESAC meetings
  - Explore the potential to increase the number of face-to-face ESAC meetings
  - If not possible, explore whether ESAC could adopt processes to allow methods to be approved outside of face-to-face meetings (e.g. via web conferencing, use of written procedure)
- Quantity of scientific experts
  - Use a 'call for interest' to attract a pool of experts in key science areas to ensure sufficient expertise is in place ahead of method submission or during method evaluation.
  - Establish fixed timelines for each stage of the peer review (e.g. 3 months maximum) and secure the participation of representatives with a specific background on alternatives methods enabling an effective contribution to the peer review process or flexible formation of ESAC in order to facilitate the peer review process.
  - Explore the possibility to compensate experts for time spent on review (e.g. one day on 'external expert' rate)
- ECVAM project management
  - Assign specific responsibility for ESAC peer review to ECVAM project manager - an individual experienced in scientific peer review processes to oversee, evolve and maintain the ESAC peer review process.
  - In addition, consider whether software tools (e.g. e-mail reminders to experts who are late with their review) could be used to reduce the amount of administrative support required.

- Transparency of peer review
  - Consider publication (e.g. via ECVAM website) of:
    - List of experts involved in peer review
    - Timeline for peer review
    - Peer review report
  - Following publication of Peer Review report allow a period for public consultation (e.g. 1 month) whereby comments and critiques can be posted (e.g. via ECVAM website). Explore the resource implications of generating a formal reply to these comments.
  
- Iterative ESAC input to Validation studies
  - To reduce the pressure on the final ESAC peer review, establish a process whereby ESAC receives short updates from each Validation management team at key points during the validation process. These updates would serve to alert ESAC to the ongoing challenges within the Validation study and allow ESAC to provide strategic input at key stages.
  - Suggested milestones for ESAC updates would be:
    - Acceptance of submitted method/Initiation of pre-validation
    - Completion of pre-validation/Initiation of validation
    - Major changes to protocol/prediction model/participants