



Brussels, 20 November 2007

## **Informal Brainstorming on Risk Assessment Capacity in Europe – Supply and training of Risk Assessors**

### **Introduction**

Members of the Commission's Scientific Advisory bodies, independent scientists, Member States, and societal stakeholders have, in numerous occasions, voiced their concern over the apparent shortage of trained risk assessors in Europe and the potential effects this may have on the long term sustainability of risk assessment advice at EU, national, and private sector levels.

There are many plausible explanations that have been offered for this apparent shortage of trained assessors, with declining academic programmes, shifting student preferences to more 'high profile' study areas like biotechnology, and the complexity of the required studies, being the most commonly mentioned reasons.

In addition, experience with the workings of the Commission's Scientific Committees, the general shortage in Risk Assessment Capacity is further exacerbated by the fact that even fully trained risk assessors need 'familiarisation' with the *modus operandi* of the EU Scientific Bodies before they can become fully integrated and functional members.

In light of the above, and in the context of initiatives of the European Commission non food Scientific Committees Inter Committee Coordination Group<sup>1</sup> to promote the scientific dialogue in broad areas of Risk Assessment, an informal brainstorming meeting took place at the Health and Consumer Directorate General (DG SANCO) premises on the 20 November 2007.

### **Objectives of the meeting**

The aims of the meeting were to stock take the situation in the EU, identify needs in the area of risk assessment training and supply, and explore possible initiatives and the levels of action appropriate, in this area that could be promoted. The draft agenda is attached.

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<sup>1</sup> COMMISSION DECISION setting up Scientific Committees in the field of consumer safety, public health and the environment, OJ L 66, 03.03.04

## Meeting Participants

Participating in the meeting were members of the Commission non food Scientific Committees, representatives of national RA bodies (RIVM, BFR), representatives of academic or industry risk assessment societies (EUROTOX, ECETOC, SETAC, ILSI), academia, EU agencies (ECHA), DGs (EAC, JRC, ENV).

Mr. Bernardo Delogu, Head of Unit of the Risk Assessment Unit of DG SANCO opened the meeting. After welcoming the participants and presenting the draft agenda for adoption, Mr. Delogu briefly explained the functioning of the Commission's Scientific Committees and set out the objectives for the discussion.

The meeting progressed with two presentations. The first was a presentation of the results of a study carried out by the Central Science Laboratory in the United Kingdom on behalf of DG SANCO to take an initial stock of English language training courses. The second presentation was a EUROTOX project for short term dedicated courses on Risk Assessment to toxicology graduates.

## Discussion Points and Conclusions

In the ensuing discussion the following elements were identified:

- There is a decreasing offer of basic training in the key areas of toxicology and ecotoxicology. Institutes are closing or recycling into pharmacological studies. This is aggravated by the poor image of toxicology (sometimes wrongly presented as an old fashioned, nineteenth century discipline not at the hedge of scientific development, heavily relying on unethical animal testing practices...).
- There seems to be a short supply of properly trained, experienced Risk Assessors as most academic courses in Toxicology do not teach the basic RA methodology which by definition is multidisciplinary. In addition training of Risk Assessors outside the confines of traditional chemical RA (e.g. UV effects, EMF, etc) is limited.
- Not enough is done by academic authorities and the authorities in charge of education to reverse this trend. They seem not to be aware of the growing needs for risk assessors with a toxicological/eco-toxicological background.
- Many experts (in particular consultants) are presenting themselves as toxicologists without having a specific background (they are biologists or chemists etc). There is neither a clear and recognised definition of this professional profile nor certification mechanisms for qualified risk assessors.
- More broadly, there is a need to train more young scientists with different backgrounds on the risk assessment approach as such. Offer of and participation in training schemes is limited. Moreover there is a lack of opportunities for practical, on the job training, which is essential to become a risk assessor.
- There should be different levels of training depending on the objectives which go from generic understanding of the process (sufficient for certain support activities) up to examining the validity of a risk assessment, co-ordinating a risk assessment or drafting the details of an assessment.

- In addition to modules of increasing depth on the general risk assessment approach, particular aspects would deserve specific training modules, in particular exposure assessment.
- Some training experiences exist which provide precedent on which an approach could be built.
- Possible certification of risk assessors was mentioned as well as the need to ensure training on both regulatory risk assessment and the wider industry practice.

Tentative conclusions:

SANCO would explore with help by EAC whether and how the Commission services can contribute to raise awareness of education and academic authorities in the MS on the need to ensure an adequate training capacity on basic toxicology/eco-toxicology (master level). Consideration in particular of using any suitable network of EAC to organise a meeting between our scientists and key actors in education systems should be given. Other topics for discussion would be initiatives for updating toxicology curricula and improving the image of toxicology among young students (e.g. highlighting progress of modern toxicology, the link with risk assessment and the key role in noble activities like health and environmental protection...)

SANCO will identify, with the help of the Group's members, organisations (including industry) and networks which could be interested in joining forces to develop practical risk assessment training schemes (including various modules, covering the various facets of RA practice and possibly including on the job traineeships).

Finally DG SANCO will examine how the practical traineeship practice of risk assessors with the Commission Scientific Committees can be resumed. Ideally such a practice could be considered by other EU bodies as well

It was agreed that the brainstorming group will convene again once options have been explored and further developed.