

Minutes

From meeting in the VKM Panel on Plant Health – Session 2(2)

Date: 16.02.2015, 12:00-16:00

Place: VKM, Oslo

Chair: Trond Rafoss

The meeting was divided into two sessions. Session 1 (09:00-11:00) was a short panel meeting held in Norwegian. Minutes from this part are given in Norwegian in a separate document. Session 2 (12:00-16:00) was a meeting with EFSA on future collaboration, and was held in English. These are the minutes from Session 2.

Participants – Session 2

From the VKM Panel on Plant Health:

Guro Brodal, Åshild Ergon, Christer Magnusson, Trond Rafoss (Panel Chair), Arild Sletten, Leif Sundheim, May-Guri Sæthre, Anne-Marte Tronsmo, Halvor Solheim, Bjørn Økland

From EFSA, Animal and Plant Health Unit:

Giuseppe Stancanelli

From the Norwegian Food Safety Authority (NFSA):

Terje Røyneberg

From VKM's secretariat:

Marie Louise Wiborg, Elin Thingnæs Lid (ref.)

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

Panel Chair and chair of today's meeting, Trond Rafoss, welcomed the participants to Session 2 of the plenary meeting of the VKM Panel on Plant Health. A special welcome was given to Giuseppe Stancanelli, Senior Officer and Plant Health Team Leader, Animal and Plant Health Unit, EFSA. The intention of this session was to have an informal and introductory discussion and information exchange on topics that could be interesting for an enhanced future cooperation between EFSA and VKM within the plant health area. For future meetings on this topic, VKM would also like to invite members of the EFSA Plant Health Panel.

2. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

3. Presentations

- 1) "An enhanced collaboration between EFSA and VKM, from an administrative point of view", by Marie Louise Wiborg, Deputy Director of VKM

There are many similarities between EFSA and VKM, both when it comes to mandate, structure, and organization of the work. VKM cooperate with EFSA at different levels. VKM participate in EFSA Advisory Forum, EFSA Advisory Forum Communication Working Group, EFSA Focal Points as well as in some of the Scientific Networks established by EFSA to facilitate cooperation with member states.

In Norway, availability of data is a challenge. Data from monitoring of food, feed, animals and plants are localized at many different institutions, where they have been generated or collected. An overview of existing data is therefore lacking. Currently, involved parties in Norway are discussing how to improve the availability of data in the area of food safety. The goal is to improve data availability in Norway and to share more data with EFSA.

In the area of plant health, further cooperation with EFSA could be related to Nordic conditions and climate changes. Co-ordinating the work in this area could improve the scientific quality of the outcome as well as avoid duplication of work. An example of enhanced cooperation with EFSA could be to establish a Nordic work group to give input on Nordic conditions to EFSA's risk assessment of a pest before finalizing. Such joint effort could be beneficial for all parties.

- 2) "Future cooperation - prospects and opportunities", by Giuseppe Stancanelli, Senior Officer and Plant Health Team Leader, Animal and Plant Health Unit, EFSA

In the first EFSA Plant Health Panel (PLH panel) mandate 2006-2009, the PLH panel produced mainly Peer reviews of pest risk assessments made by other parties. Today however, the panel mainly produces pest risk assessments and evaluation of effectiveness of risk reduction options. Guidance documents made by the panel are:

- Evaluation of pest risk assessments and risk management options prepared by third parties (2009)
- Harmonised framework for EU pest risk assessment (2010)
- Environmental risk assessment of plant pests (2011)
- Evaluation of risk reduction options (2012)

Risk assessments done by the EFSA PLH panel the last five years, and ongoing working groups were presented, together with some challenges and needs identified in their work. EFSA have several projects dealing with PRA methods and data in cooperation with other institutions and by outsourcing.

Furthermore, Stancanelli gave an overview over EFSA's regional cooperation with EPPO, and collaboration with Member states through the EFSA Scientific Network for Risk Assessment in Plant Health. The mandate of EFSA on Emerging Risks was presented, followed by a presentation of the media monitoring tool MedISys, an internet monitoring and analysis system developed at the Joint Research Centre (JRC) in collaboration with EC Directorate General SANCO to rapidly identify potential threats to the public health using information from the internet.

- 3) "Data collection and exchange", by Terje Røyneberg, Norwegian Food Safety Authority (NFSA)

An overview was given on how NFSA is organized related to other institutions, followed by a presentation of how NFSA collects and exchanges data today and in the future. Data are collected through 1) surveillance programs on selected plant pests, 2) import control with focus on risk plants/consignments (e.g. Prunus, Malus), and 3) findings as a result at ordinary inspections/audits. Some data (2 and 3 above) are stored at the electronic system MATS, and can be available on request. There is ongoing work to import surveillance data from Diagnostic labs into MATS. Another improvement for availability of data is that all reports from the surveillance program shall be published electronically, and the data should be reported to EPPC/IPPC.

Since the Norwegian plant health legislation is not a part of the EEA-Agreement, Norway and NFSA have no access to EUROPHYT, as well as no obligation to report such data. On request, Norway will supply EFSA with relevant data related to PRA-work. Norway is also participating in a Nordic-Baltic cooperation on plant health.

- 4) "A summary of the VKM Plant Health Panel's work done over the last few years", by Leif Sundheim, member and former chair of the VKM Panel on Plant Health

Sundheim gave an overview of the VKM Plant Health Panel's work done in the period 2004-2014. The panel hopes the work can be useful for EFSA, EPPO and to the Nordic-Baltic countries.

- 5) "Emerging risks", by Christer Magnusson, member of VKM's panel on plant health

Magnusson gave a presentation on emerging risks, elaborated with Pine Wood Nematode as an example. Needs and challenges in the work on emerging risks were listed: Updating relevant datasets; Data collection with involvement of producers, industry and public;

Identify emerging risks in an overwhelming abundance of information; Cooperation and integration of initiatives on identification of emerging plant health risks, nationally, regionally and globally; Access to real time trade data for high risk pathways like plants for planting; Enhance methods for development of contingency plans and undertaking generic pest risk analyses triggered by changes in manage practices and trade; Analyses of past invasions in order to prioritize strategies for detecting emerging risks and preventing potential consequences.

4. Discussion

Introduction:

As an introduction to the discussion, Trond Rafoss summarized today's presentations. Firstly, one can conclude that the current cooperation between EFSA and VKM has many meeting points already:

- EFSA Advisory Forum
- EFSA Advisory Forum Communication Working Group
- EFSA Focal Points
- Scientific Networks, including the Scientific Network for Risk Assessment in Plant Health
- Panels and working groups, particularly the Scientific Panel on Plant health
- Data sharing - through NFSA

Secondly, optional activities to strengthen the cooperation were identified in this meeting:

1) Sharing tools and methods

- Modelling tools for estimating risk of establishment and spread for plant pests, e.g. by sharing data and methods for a more landscape-oriented georeferenced risk assessment
- Identification and monitoring of emerging plant health risks, e.g. VKM access to MEDISYS

2) Sharing data

- Benefit from ongoing EFSA & EPPO joint efforts
- NFSA georeferenced pest occurrence data from Norway

3) Sharing expert information

- EFSA Expert Database (EDB)

4) Avoid duplication of work

- Include Norway in “Risk Assessment Area” of EFSA PLH work
- Consider Nordic/Scandinavian conditions in greater detail when relevant in EFSA opinions

Discussion:

Rafoss challenged the participants to prioritise between the optional activities to strengthen the cooperation. Perhaps a prioritised list could be the main output from today's meeting?

The participants found it difficult to prioritise. It was suggested that different bodies would have different priorities. Scientists need access to data for risk assessments, but this must be organised by someone else. So for the scientists it would perhaps be more appropriate to focus on sharing of tools and methods as 1st pri, whereas perhaps NFSA could prioritise data exchange with EFSA? In any case, it is important to think long-term and step by step.

1) Share tools and methods:

In the context of its mission to identify and characterise emerging risks in its fields, EFSA is developing, in collaboration with the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission, the Medical Information System (MedISys) tool. MedISys, which is owned by the JRC, is part of the Europe Media Monitor (EMM) software, an automated public health surveillance system to monitor human and animal infectious diseases, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats, as well as food contaminations and plant health threats. The system retrieves news articles from a list of internet, categorizes the articles on the basis of predefined multilingual categories, clusters news articles and calculates statistics to detect emerging threats. Users can screen the articles and display world maps highlighting locations together with statistics on the reporting of health threats. EFSA conducted in 2012 an evaluation of MedISys that showed a good potential of this tool for plant health, with a need for further fine-tuning by plant health experts.

The EFSA-JRC project (2014-2016) on media monitoring in plant health, carried out by the University of Lleida in collaboration with the Institut de Recerca I Tecnologia Agroalimentàries, aims to further develop and test the media monitoring tool MedISys for the early identification, monitoring and reporting of warning signs on existing and emerging plant health threats. This project has four specific objectives:

Objective 1: to collate new and appropriate media and information sources at global level, to be added for the screening of plant health threats in MedISys.

Objective 2: to develop and test a multilingual ontology for the global identification of emerging new plant health threats (e.g. emergence of new plant pests or diseases).

Objective 3: to develop and test approaches and strategies to monitor re-emerging plant health threats on global and regional scales (e.g. new outbreaks of known plant pests or diseases, expansion of their geographical and/or host range), with proper multilingual definitions.

Objective 4: to analyse and test approaches for reporting the identified signals to the relevant EFSA units and experts through the MedISys interface, including mapping and georeferencing.

The project has currently completed the tasks related to Objective 1 (collation of data sources) and Objective 3 (development of multilingual ontology for known (re-)emerging risks). EFSA is open to collaborations on this project, for example if VKM would like to test the tool, by following a pest interesting to Norway. As the reporting of plant pests on media is usually not continuous, such monitoring needs a periodical screening of the articles found by the tool. JRC also offers training in use of the tool. It has to be noted that MedISys only can track reports that appear on the media and that usually disease outbreaks are needed for a pest to be discussed by the media.

NFSA finds this tool very interesting, and monitoring emerging risks is something they should prioritise more. The Panel experts also find it very interesting. However, some scepticism was expressed whether a collaboration with EFSA on monitoring plant health emerging risks with the MedISys tool would be too labour intensive, and it was suggested it might be easier to prioritise sharing of modelling tools for estimating risk.

2) Sharing data:

Several of the panel experts find that access to sufficient data is most important in their risk assessment work. Tools for sharing data are available. These tools are even becoming better and cheaper, but still they are of little use. The panel experts often experience that country borders are closed for official data sharing. One important reason for these difficulties is the protection of privacy of farms and industry. When using GPS data for pest findings, individual farmer might be recognized. In the opinions of the EFSA PLH Panel the coarser GPS scale does not allow individual farmers to be recognized.

Stancanelli suggested two areas for possible cooperation: 1) Data and methods for a more regional/landscape oriented georeferenced risk assessment; 2) Identification and monitoring of emerging plant health risks.

In plant health, EUROPHYT is a notification and rapid alert system dealing with plant pest interceptions in consignments of plants and plant products imported into the EU, or being traded within the EU itself. EUROPHYT is established and run by the Directorate General for Health and Consumers of the European Commission. RASFF, on the other hand, is the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed to ensure food safety in the EU and beyond. Norway is member of RASFF, but not of EUROPHYT. There are however currently discussions on possibly merging the two systems. If so, this could hopefully give Norway access to data on plant pest interceptions in EU. A weakness of the EUROPHYT system is that negative data (healthy consignments without interceptions) are not registered, and so the frequency of interceptions is not known. Hopefully, this could also be overcome by merging with RASFF.

When NFSA is improving its data collection on plant health, VKM would like to encourage NFSA to ensure that data from collaborating labs are produced in a format that easily can be transferred to one data base. Improvement of data handling at national level will also facilitate submission of data to EFSA and the availability of data in general.

3) Sharing expert information:

NFSA suggested sharing of the EFSA expert data base to be 1st priority, since it is of current interest, and being already developed little effort is needed. A Nordic-Baltic network is planning to make a database on Nordic-Baltic scientists with expertise relevant to pest risk assessment. However, EFSA has already established an expert data base, and significant resources have been put into this data base, sorting out legal aspects and keeping it updated. Experts are invited to register in this data base, and they can declare whether they wish to be available also to other bodies than EFSA. All Member States and Norway have access to this data base through their Focal Points. NFSA and VKM should prioritise to encourage scientists to register.

4) Avoid duplication of work

With regard to inclusion of Norway in the pest risk assessment area of EFSA PLH Panel opinions, Stancanelli explained that the EFSA plant health data collection already includes Norway; the risk assessment area is however generally defined as the EU territory in the requests received by EFSA, and so far Norway did not express the interest for an extension of the pest risk assessment area to include Norway.

It was discussed that one way of enhanced cooperation with EFSA, could be to provide EFSA with more input on Nordic conditions that could be used in EFSA's risk assessment of a pest.

Such joint effort could be more efficient for all parties. VKM suggested that this could be done by a Nordic work group. If Norway contributes with Norwegian conditions into an EFSA pest risk assessment, a question was raised on who will have the final word in the scientific evaluations concerning Norway? This could perhaps be solved by allowing the Nordic work group to publish their input parallel to EFSA's publication? It is current practice at EFSA that external reports, e.g. from outsourced projects providing data or analyses to support Panel's opinions, are published on EFSA website as supporting publications.

Conclusion:

These are the follow ups from today's meeting:

- The presentations given will be distributed to the participants by e-mail.
- The VKM Plant Health Panel will look further into the possibility to test EFSA's media monitoring tool, MedISys, on an emerging risk.
- VKM will encourage scientific experts on the plant health area to register in the EFSA expert data base. VKM does this from time to time for the whole committee.
- NFSA will encourage their Nordic-Baltic partners to do the same with their scientific experts.
- NFSA is improving their data collection system. As part of this, NFSA will aspire to collect data in a way that makes the data valuable for risk assessments, and easy to share with risk assessors in VKM and EFSA. This will be done in collaboration with the VKM Secretariat, and the EFSA Plant Health Network.
- To strengthen cooperation with EFSA and to avoid duplication of work in the member states, the possibility of establishing a Nordic working group that could give inputs on Nordic conditions to EFSA's risk assessment of a pest should be investigated. Such joint work could be beneficial for all parties.