

EFSA guilty of 'maladministration'

Written by Gerald Callaghan on 31 March 2014 in News
News

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European ombudsman Emily O'Reilly said she regrets the unwillingness of EFSA to properly address the allegations of pesticides action network Europe (PAN Europe) and she didn't accept EFSA's view that it didn't understand the grievances.

"It is important not only that there is good administration but also that, in the eyes of the citizens, good administration is seen to be done".

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"By failing adequately to respond to the complainant's allegations... EFSA did not dispel the citizens' impression that there was a potential conflict of interest. This constitutes an instance of maladministration", concluded the ombudsman.

In 2008, EFSA established a working group to explore the use of a science-based tool for measuring the safety of chemical substances for human health, known as the threshold of toxicological concern (TTC).

The group worked from January 2009 until May 2011, when it submitted its draft opinion on the TTC to the scientific committee.

The scientific committee then endorsed the draft opinion and launched a public consultation on the opinion in July 2011.

However, PAN Europe, a non-profit organisation, argued that EFSA failed to protect the interests of the public and thereby promoted the interests of industry.

In a [previous article for the Parliament Magazine](#) [1], Hans Muilerman, chemical coordinator for PAN Europe stated that "over 70 per cent" of the experts involved on the pesticides panel "were closely linked to industry".

"There is a lack of professionalism within EFSA and a lack of awareness on scientific integrity", he added.

In the same article, Muilerman proposed that EFSA "put in place a 'science integrity officer' whose job is to change the culture at the agency, and restore independent science by involving independent scientists".

On various occasions, PAN Europe reiterated that scientists had worked for both the international life sciences institute (ILSI) and EFSA, therefore ILSI contributed to the shaping of EFSA's decisions, interfering with its independence.

In December 2011, the complainant published the report entitled, 'A toxic mixture? Industry bias found in EFSA working group on risk assessment for toxic chemicals', in which it analysed the scientific and professional background of the working group and argued that its composition was heavily biased.

After the publication of the report, EFSA failed to start an investigation to maintain public trust and the organisation failed to reply to PAN Europe's allegations.

EFSA only presented its views after the opening of the inquiry of the ombudsman.

A statement, released by EFSA stated that the organisation "takes note of the recent conclusions of the European ombudsman with regards to allegations made by pesticides action network Europe about the independence of the authority's scientific panels and working groups".

EFSA acknowledged the importance of "public perception" in relation to its independence and the need to be "clear in explaining its actions in this key area".

About the author

Gerald Callaghan is a journalist for the Parliament Magazine

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