Food chain risk assessment transparency

Following controversies surrounding the authorisation and renewal of certain sensitive products, such as genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and active substances in plant protection products (glyphosate, neonicotinoids), the European Commission has proposed to revise and harmonise transparency rules in these policy areas. A vote to finalise Parliament's position took place at the December 2018 plenary. A provisional agreement reached in trilogue negotiations on 11 February 2019 is now awaiting Parliament's final approval at first reading during the April II plenary session.

Background

On 11 April 2018, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a regulation on the transparency and sustainability of the EU risk assessment process in the food chain, amending the 2002 General Food Law Regulation as well as eight legislative acts dealing with specific food chain sectors: GMOs, feed additives, smoke flavourings, food contact materials, food additives, food enzymes and flavourings, plant protection products, and novel foods. The proposal is a follow-up to the European Citizens' Initiative 'Ban glyphosate' (2017), and, in particular, to concerns expressed in the initiative regarding the transparency of the scientific studies used to evaluate pesticides. The proposal also comes in response to a fitness check of the General Food Law, completed in January 2018.

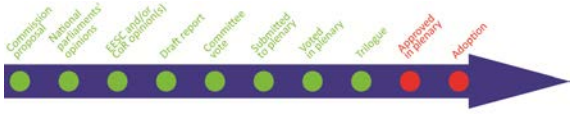
European Commission proposal

The proposal aims at improving public access to industry studies used by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) in its risk assessments. The Commission proposes that all studies submitted to EFSA should be made public at an early stage of the risk assessment, via EFSA's website. Confidential information could be protected, with EFSA assessing whether confidentiality claims are justified. A register of studies commissioned would be set up, making it possible to check that risk assessment applicants are not holding any unfavourable studies back. In controversial cases, the Commission could ask EFSA to commission additional studies, financed from the EU budget. The most controversial points of the proposal relate to the timing of the publication of studies, and the type of information that could remain confidential.

European Parliament position

Parliament and Council reached a provisional agreement on 11 February 2019. The Member States' ambassadors (Coreper) endorsed the agreement on 15 February and the European Parliament's Committee for Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) gave its approval on 20 February 2019. According to the agreement, data linked to an application for authorisation will be made public by EFSA once it considers the application valid and is ready to start the risk assessment. Upon request by the applicant, confidential data will not be made public, provided the applicant can prove that their publication would significantly harm its interests. Information relevant to the safety assessment cannot be kept confidential. The applicant can file a confirmatory request in the event of disagreement with EFSA's assessment of the need for confidential treatment. To help EFSA to attract scientists to participate in its work, Member States will be more active in encouraging experts to take part on EFSA's scientific panels. Parliament is asked to adopt the text as its position at first reading, which would then be adopted by the Council.

First-reading report: 2018/0088(COD); Committee responsible: ENVI; Rapporteur Pilar Ayuso (EPP, Spain). For further information see our 'EU Legislation in progress' briefing on the proposal.



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