Building the evidence base to support food and feed safety risk assessments in Europe

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Introduction

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) was established to assess risks associated with the food chain. EFSA's risk assessment work contributes to improving food and feed safety in Europe and to building public confidence in the way risk is assessed. Risk assessment is a specialised field of applied science (Figure 1) that involves reviewing scientific data and studies in order to evaluate risks associated with certain hazards. In order to ensure the risk assessment process is robust and transparent EFSA is using systematic review principles for the identification, selection, appraisal and synthesis of scientific studies used as the basis for risk assessments. The identification of scientific studies and risk assessments carried out in the Member States by competent authorities is critical for the risk assessment process. These reports, working papers and dissertations are often more difficult to identify and their identification is resource intensive and requires substantial topic expertise, since these types of reports are less consistently archived and indexed in bibliographic databases. As a consequence EFSA in consultation with its Focal Point Network developed the Information Exchange Platform (IEP) to facilitate access to ongoing and completed risk assessments produced by Member State competent authorities. Building on experience gained from the IEP application; EFSA is now developing a repository for scientific documents to support food and feed safety risk assessments.

Figure 1. Four steps of risk assessment each requiring scientific data

Technical specifications

Objectives
• Exchange of risk assessments, guidance documents, research findings and reports between member states
• Increase transparency in the selection of evidence for European risk assessments
• Comprehensive evidence base for the food and feed risk assessment community

Content
Topic area: toxicology, food and feed safety, nutrition, animal health and welfare, plant protection and plant health, environmental safety, assessment of regulated products and health claims, agrofood innovation, biological hazards, chemical contaminants, food consumption and emerging risks.
Document types: risk assessments, crisis manuals, guidance, quality reports and standard operating procedures, monitoring reports, research findings, technical reports, statements, mandates, strategic work plans and other scientific evidence not consistently archived and indexed in bibliographic databases.
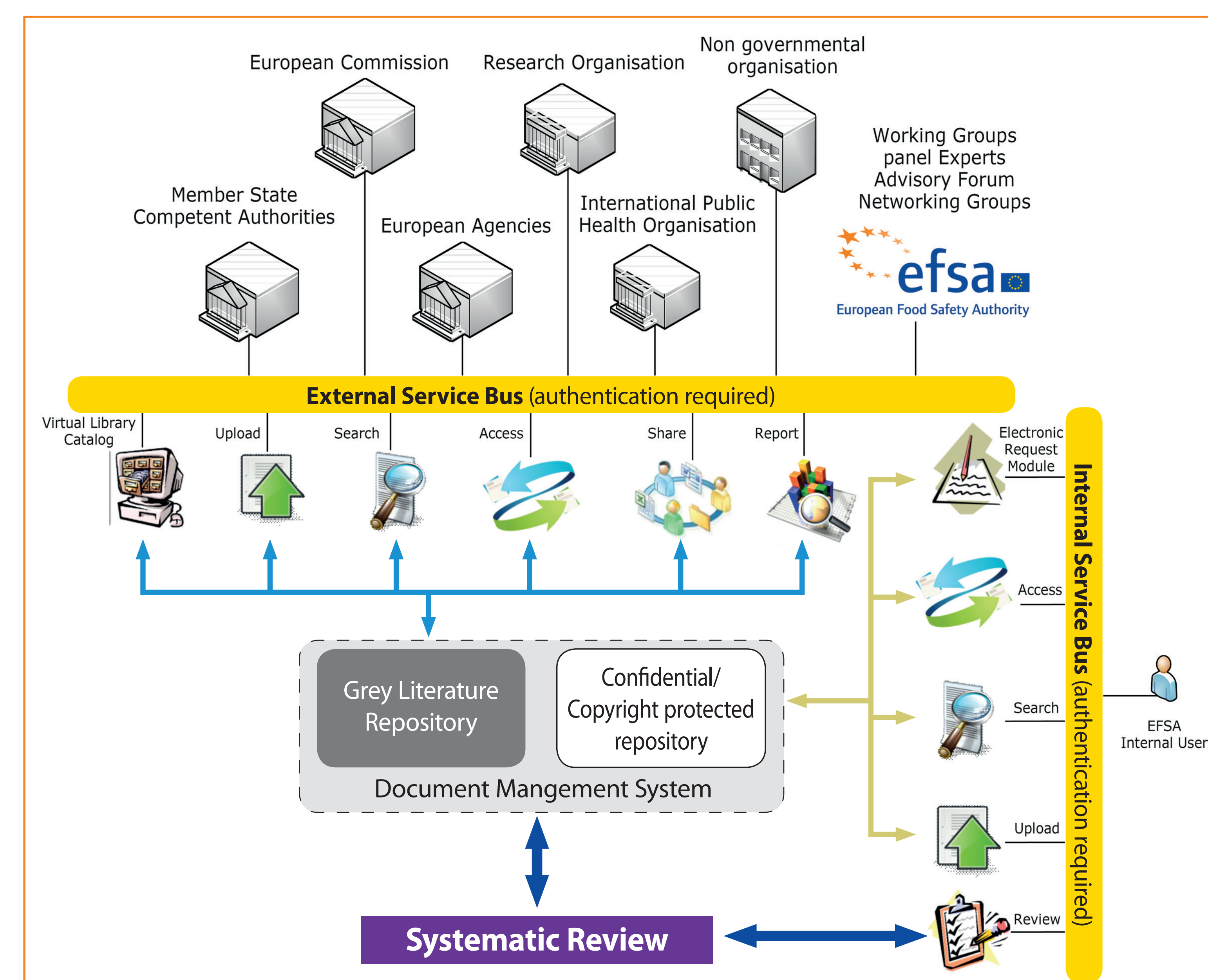
Stakeholders
EFSA working groups, panel experts, advisory forum and networking groups
European Commission
European Agencies
Member State Competent Authorities
Research Organisations
International Public Health Organisations
Non-Governmental Organisations

User functionalities
Upload of documents with required metadata
Advanced search functionalities including faceted and full text searches
Direct access to stored document
RSS feeds on latest submissions and document sharing function
Monthly risk assessments round-up report

System constraints
Users must register to obtain login credentials
Permissions according LDAP user groups
Management of document retention time

Relevant standards
Dublin core metadata
Open Archives Initiative
Web Accessibility Initiative
Resource Description Framework

References

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