

**TERM OF REFERENCE (TOR)**

**ASEAN RISK ASSESSMENT CENTRE  
FOR FOOD SAFETY (ARAC)**

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ARAC TOR (2025) endorsed by Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development, 5 May 2025

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## I. BACKGROUND

- 1) Risk assessment is an internationally recognised scientific tool in the development of food safety measures. It is becoming more important to support safe food production and facilitate regional and international trade. Under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement), WTO member countries may impose more stringent food safety measures than international standards namely Codex Alimentarius standards provided there is scientific evidence i.e. risk assessment.
- 2) Recognising risk assessment as an important tool in the area of food safety, many ASEAN Member States (AMS) are undertaking initiatives in building up risk assessment capacity in their countries. To date, the advancement of implementation of risk assessment in AMS varies. Fulfilling the capacity building needs is important to strengthen the competency of AMS officials and the ability to provide scientific input for science-based interventions and regulatory approaches to food safety.
- 3) At regional level, the Framework on Monitoring and Surveillance developed under the ASEAN Food Safety Improvement Plan (AFSIP) (2004-2008) and AFSIP II (2010-2015) of the ASEAN Expert Group on Food Safety (AEGFS) has identified AMS capacity building needs on risk assessment and has established a work plan. At the same time, the risk assessment activities are also being carried out by AMS individually.
- 4) Risk assessment is also undertaken in ASEAN by other related bodies reporting to different ASEAN Sectoral bodies namely the Experts Working Group on the Harmonisation of Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) of Pesticides, under the ASEAN Sectoral Working Group on Crops (ASWGC). These ASEAN bodies are under the purview of the Senior Officials Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (SOM AMAF).
- 5) Malaysia as the Lead Country for Monitoring and Surveillance Programme of the AEGFS's AFSIP I and II, with the support of the ASEAN Regional Integration Support by the European Union (ARISE) organized the "Inception Workshop on Initiating an Integrated ASEAN Risk Assessment Mechanism" in 2013 in Kuala Lumpur to address these needs.

- 6) The 10<sup>th</sup> AEGFS (2013) agreed on the establishment of ARAC to be hosted in Malaysia, and ARAC should serve as a coordinating centre on risk assessment in ASEAN and it will be located in Malaysia, which will also provide secretariat support to ARAC. AMSs commitment to build capacity for integrated ASEAN risk assessment through ARAC was highlighted in the 12<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting declaration in 2014-

*“We commit to strengthen national food control systems and work together to contribute towards safe and quality food in the ASEAN Community. We recognise risk assessment as an important tool to provide scientific input in developing evidence-based food safety measures, and shall build capacity for integrated ASEAN risk assessment through the ASEAN Risk Assessment Centre for Food Safety (ARAC).”*

- 7) ASEAN Food Safety Policy (AFSP) was adopted in 2015 by the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry, ASEAN Economic Ministers, and ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting. As ASEAN establishes an integrated market for food, the AFSP provides the basis for coordination and establishes a common purpose across the relevant ASEAN Sectoral Ministerial Bodies and their subsidiary bodies. The agreed principles of the ASEAN Food Safety Policy serve as guidance and facilitate the development of a sustainable and robust food safety regulatory framework within the region
- 8) The AFSP *Principle 3: Science-based, Independent Risk Assessment Process* underscores the importance of food safety risk assessments and that AMS should monitor potential food safety risks, as well as to fully participate in the ASEAN Risk Assessment Centre for Food Safety (ARAC) including share relevant data as needed for conducting food safety risk assessment.
- 9) Further, the ASEAN Food Safety Regulatory Framework Agreement provides for a coherent and integrated approach and links ASEAN initiatives in new legal framework, closing gaps and ensuring that food safety is implemented across the food chain. It includes principles, requirements and a coordinating mechanism for the implementation of the ASEAN Food Safety Policy. It mandates the AMSs to develop and apply food safety measures relating to the protection of consumers' health and to facilitate the free flow of safe food within ASEAN based on the policy.

- 10) The AFSRF Agreement, under *Article 4 Principles* mandates AMSs to ensure that all food safety measures implemented under the agreement are based on risk analysis and the food safety risk assessment shall be in accordance with Principle 3 of the AFSP. In this regard, the commitment of AMSs to ARAC are stipulated in both the AFSP and the AFSRF Agreement.

## II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 11) The ARAC shall embrace the following guiding principles in providing risk assessment output / scientific opinion to assist in the management of food safety issues of common interest to ASEAN:
- i. Being an independent scientific body;
  - ii. Pooling and utilising of scientific expertise across ASEAN;
  - iii. Promote exchange of scientific information and development of complementary capabilities and capacities through networking with AMS and international organisations on food safety risk assessment; and
  - iv. Promote common ASEAN position on food safety issues based on risk assessment.

### VISION

ARAC aims to be a regional coordinating centre for independent food safety risk assessment in enhancing the health of the ASEAN Community and facilitate its food trade.

### MISSION

ARAC's mission is to carry out independent food safety risk assessment in a timely and transparent manner utilising available scientific resources.

## III. OBJECTIVES

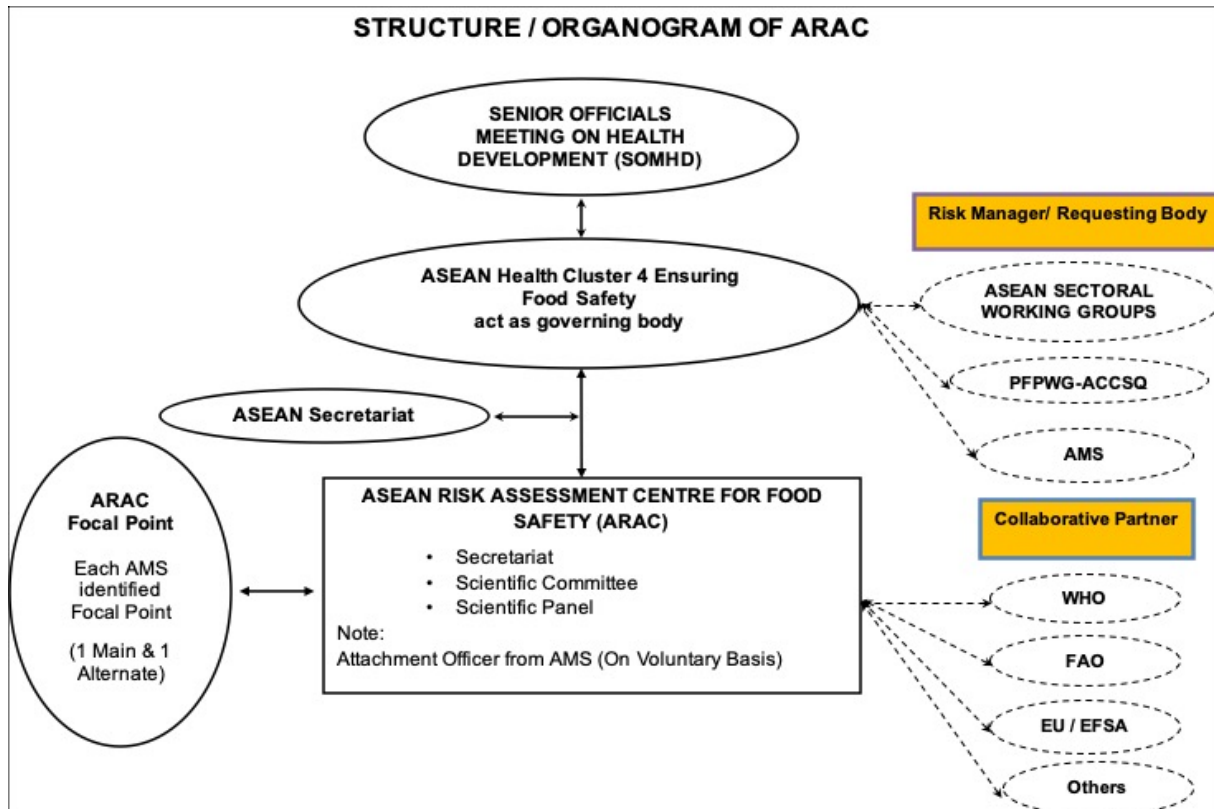
- 12) The objectives of ARAC are:
- i. Coordinate the implementation of food safety risk assessment in ASEAN;
  - ii. Strengthen the capacity on the risk assessment of AMS;
  - iii. Facilitate sharing of information and experiences on risk assessment;
  - iv. Provide a pool of qualified experts on risk assessment; and
  - v. Coordinate and communicate with relevant ASEAN Sectoral Bodies and collaborative partners.

#### **IV. MANDATE AND SCOPE OF WORK**

- 13) Mandate for ARAC is given by AHMM through its current structure in the SOM HD and AHC4 to:
- i. Provide risk assessment output / scientific opinion on food safety issue including during food safety emergency in AMS by using riskassessment approach; and
  - ii. Communicate the findings of risk assessment conducted by ARAC to the risk managers and other stakeholders.

#### **V. STRUCTURE / ORGANOGRAM OF ARAC**

- 14) The structure / organogram of ARAC is as shown in the diagram below, where:
- i. AHC4 will be acting as the governing body of ARAC.
  - ii. ARAC will be hosted in the Ministry of Health Malaysia and will consist of three (3) components:
    - a) Secretariat of ARAC, provided by the Ministry of Health Malaysia,
    - b) Scientific Committee, compose of top scientists, with a high level of scientific competence and expertise on food safety. Each AMS shall nominate one (1) scientist to be appointed by AHC4 into this committee; and
    - c) Scientific Panel will be convened at the discretion or direction of the Scientific Committee on a need basis and shall consist of qualified experts in the relevant field drawn from the ASEAN Risk Assessor database.
  - iii. Each AMS will identify one (1) main and one (1) alternate ARAC Focal Point to act as a link between national food safety authorities and national risk assessment organisation (if available) in the respective AMS with ARAC



Note: World Health Organisation (WHO); Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO); European Union (EU)

## ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

15) The details roles and functions of the main component in structure / organogram of ARAC are:

- i. **ASEAN Health Cluster 4 on Ensuring Food Safety**
  - a. Act as governing body that report annually to SOM HD;
  - b. Ensure effective and efficient functioning of ARAC by providing direction on management and risk assessment policy of ARAC in accordance with the international guidelines / principle;
  - c. Appoint members of Scientific Committee and ARAC Focal Point as proposed by AMS, through the Chairperson;
  - d. Coordinate, prioritise and commission risk assessment (including assessment questions) based on request from risk manager / requesting body (ASEAN Sectoral Working Group, ACCSQ- PFPWG and AMS) through the ASEAN Secretariat;
  - e. Provide ARAC risk assessment output / scientific opinion to risk manager / requesting body as well as disseminate the output / opinion to the relevant stakeholders;

- f. Establish the necessary networking with relevant / interested parties to facilitate the exchange of scientific information and capacity building; and
- g. Promote scientific visibility and outreach of ARAC.

## ii. Secretariat of ARAC

- a. Reporting of ARAC operational activities to the AHC4 as the governing body;
- b. Providing the needed support for the efficient functioning of the Scientific Committee and Scientific Panel;
- c. Develop work plan for endorsement by AHC4 as the governing body and implement the endorsed work plan;
- d. Work closely with ASEAN Secretariat to facilitate the coordination with AHC4 as ARAC's governing body and other sectoral bodies in ASEAN including the monitoring of ARAC Work Plan as part/annexed to the AHC4 Work Programme;
- e. Attend relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies to provide ARAC input as invited by the AHC4;
- f. Coordinate the development of relevant guidelines and procedures for the efficient operations and implementation of risk assessment by the Scientific Committee and Scientific Panel;
- g. Facilitate appointment and provide the necessary support for the functioning of Scientific Committee and Scientific Panel for risk assessment;
- h. Ensure adequacy of scientific information (e.g. concentration data and consumption data) and if necessary, collect these scientific data and information from ARAC Focal Point or relevant international bodies for scientific review and evaluation by Scientific Panel;
- i. Assist in the preparation of the risk assessment output / scientific opinion for endorsement of AHC 4 as the governing body;
- j. Assist and coordinate the publication of ARAC output for public access e.g risk assessment report, ARAC bulletin etc;
- k. Present published ARAC assessment work in conference or forum, and coordinate the presentation from the Scientific Committee / Scientific Panel in accordance with the relevant procedures
- l. Development and maintenance of necessary database to facilitate risk assessment including ASEAN Risk Assessor Directory and ASEAN Food Consumption Database;

- m. Identify and suggest assessment need for consideration of AHC4 as governing body , if any (ARAC self-initiated);
- n. Establish and maintain networking with ARAC Focal Points, intergovernmental organisation and collaborative partner such as WHO, FAO, EU and EFSA, including regulatory agencies, research institutes and academia, to exchange scientific information; and
- o. Promote scientific visibility and outreach of ARAC.

### **iii. Scientific Committee**

- a. Through governing body, AHC4 shall facilitate independent scientific and strategic opinions on food safety to support the policies and decisions of risk managers;
- b. Evaluate risk assessment request in terms of clarity, completeness and expected output based on available / provided data and information;
- c. Identify and appoint experts from the ASEAN Risk Assessor Directory; and if necessary external experts, into Scientific Panel for risk assessment;
- d. Responsible for general coordination to ensure consistency in the risk assessment procedure and working methods of the Scientific Panel;
- e. Address contentious issues and divergence of risk assessment output / scientific opinion from the Scientific Panel;
- f. Adopt of risk assessment output / scientific opinion from Scientific Panel to be forwarded to the governing body; and
- g. Convene a regular session of at least once a year.

### **iv. Scientific Panel**

- a. Conduct independent scientific assessment based on the food safety or assessment question mandated by the governing body through the Scientific Committee;
- b. Prepare risk assessment output / scientific opinion for adoption by the Scientific Committee;
- c. Recommend new directions for future assessment, if needed;and
- d. Convene a regular session of at least once a year.

**v. ARAC Focal Point**

- a. Identify and if necessary, update the national expert in the ASEAN Risk Assessor Directory, through the Secretariat of ARAC;
- b. Support in gathering and submission of scientific data and information such as concentration data and consumption data to ARAC when risk assessment is needed to be performed for the common issue of the AMS;
- c. Promote scientific cooperation in supporting ARAC's collaborative work at the national level;
- d. Facilitate communication on ARAC's risk assessment output / scientific opinion to relevant national risk managers;
- e. Promote scientific visibility and outreach of ARAC;
- f. Convene a regular session at least once a year prior to AHC 4 Meeting; and
- g. Consider possible collaboration with ARAC and to inform ASEAN Secretariat of any proposed collaboration for AHC4's consideration.

**vi. Trade and Agriculture Sectoral Bodies Relevant to Food Safety (Risk Manager/ Requesting Body)**

- a. Submit for ARAC food safety risk assessment request to AHC4 and facilitated by the ASEAN Secretariat; and
- b. Provide input and guidance as needed, to support the initiatives and activities of the ARAC.

**vii. ASEAN Secretariat**

- a. Circulation of letter requesting proposal for risk assessment / scientific opinion to all requesting bodies
- b. Facilitate AHC4 and ARAC in order to commission risk assessment in ASEAN
- c. Provide support and assist in all matters relating to the implementation of ARAC alongside ARAC Secretariat.

## **VI. ARAC WORK MECHANISM**

- 16) The Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) will be developed and maintained as needed and are subject to endorsement by AHC 4 as the governing body. The work mechanism is guided by relevant SOPs as follows:
- i. ARAC/SOP1 - [Priotisation and Commissioning of Risk Assessment](#)
  - ii. ARAC/SOP2 - [Establishment and Operations of Scientific Committee](#)
  - iii. ARAC/SOP3 - [Scientific Panel](#)
  - iv. ARAC/SOP4 - [Secondment of Officer from ASEAN Member States \(AMSs\) to ASEAN Risk Assessment Centre for Food Safety \(ARAC\)](#)

## **VIII. DATABASE**

- 17) Essential database required for the performance of risk assessment by ARAC will be maintained by the ARAC Secretariat, taking into consideration confidentiality of the information. Relevant data such as the concentration and food consumption data will be sourced from AMS through the ARAC Focal Points and other credible sources such as FAO and WHO. The information on the AMSs' publicly available food consumption data will be made accessible on the ARAC website including through a digital link.

## **IX. NETWORKING**

- 18) ARAC with the assistance from ASEAN Secretariat will act as a platform for regional and international networking with relevant sector and organisations including APEC, ASEAN Working Groups, WHO, FAO, EU, EFSA, etc. These networking will allow ARAC to tap scientific information and expertise for its risk assessment work.

## **X. FUNDING / BUDGET**

- 19) Malaysia will provide an office and secretariat staff to support the functions of ARAC.
- 20) ARAC activities will be supported through contributions of required resources from ASEAN Member States. Additional assistance will be sought from available ASEAN funding mechanism, international organisations and dialogue partners when required.

## **XI. OTHERS**

- 21) ARAC will provide progress report of the activities to the AHC4 annually.
- 22) This TOR can be periodically amended upon agreement of AHC4 and endorsed by SOM HD and AHMM.