



The role of social and human sciences in crisis prevention

Régine Boutrais

**Sociologist, in charge of developing relationships with stakeholders
Risks and Society Unit
Department of Information, Communication and Dialogue with Society
(DICODIS)**

ANSES core values

Independence, impartiality

A code of conduct and independent committees which stakeholders can solicit, collegial and multidisciplinary scientific panels, prevention of conflicts of interests, public funding, etc.

Transparency

Assessment process, minority opinions, publication of opinions, PDOIs, public calls for experts and research projects, etc.



Access to stakeholders

Excellence/scientific expertise
selection of experts through open calls for applications

Risk and society unit

4 major orientations to favor **a more comprehensive approach of risk**

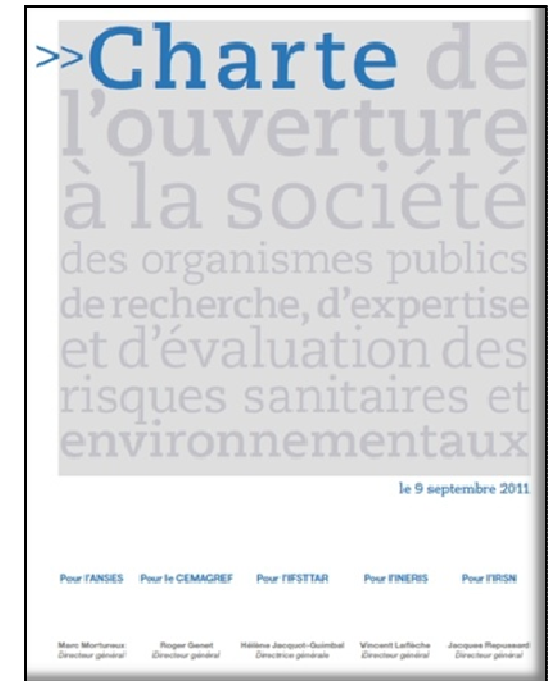
(Unit composed of 4 staff members : politist, sociologists, economist):

1. Implementing the opening up of expertise and establishing a dialogue with stakeholders
2. Developping knowledge about societal issues and involving social scientists in assessment committees
3. Carrying out a watch on the links between science and society
4. Contributing to public debate and to the promotion of the Agency's work (opinions and reports)

Opening up expertise to civil society

Charter signed in 2011 by 5 public organisations (involved in research and sanitary/environmental risk assessment) aiming at :

- Improving transparency on the results of expertise and methods used in risk assessment
- Sharing scientific knowledge and uncertainties, (divergences, minority positions and possible controversies among experts)
- Capacity-building among stakeholders for a better understanding and possible contribution to the assessment procedure (information, training, public debate, etc.)



The fields of expertise

Due to its origins, the French Agency for food, environmental and occupational health and safety

created **1st of July 2010** pursuant to a merger between AFSSA and AFSSET



A wide range of missions: a wide range of stakeholders

ANSES deals with stakeholders involved in many sectors of:

- **human health and safety** in the fields of **environment, work and food**



As well as:

- **animal health and welfare**
- **Plant** protection

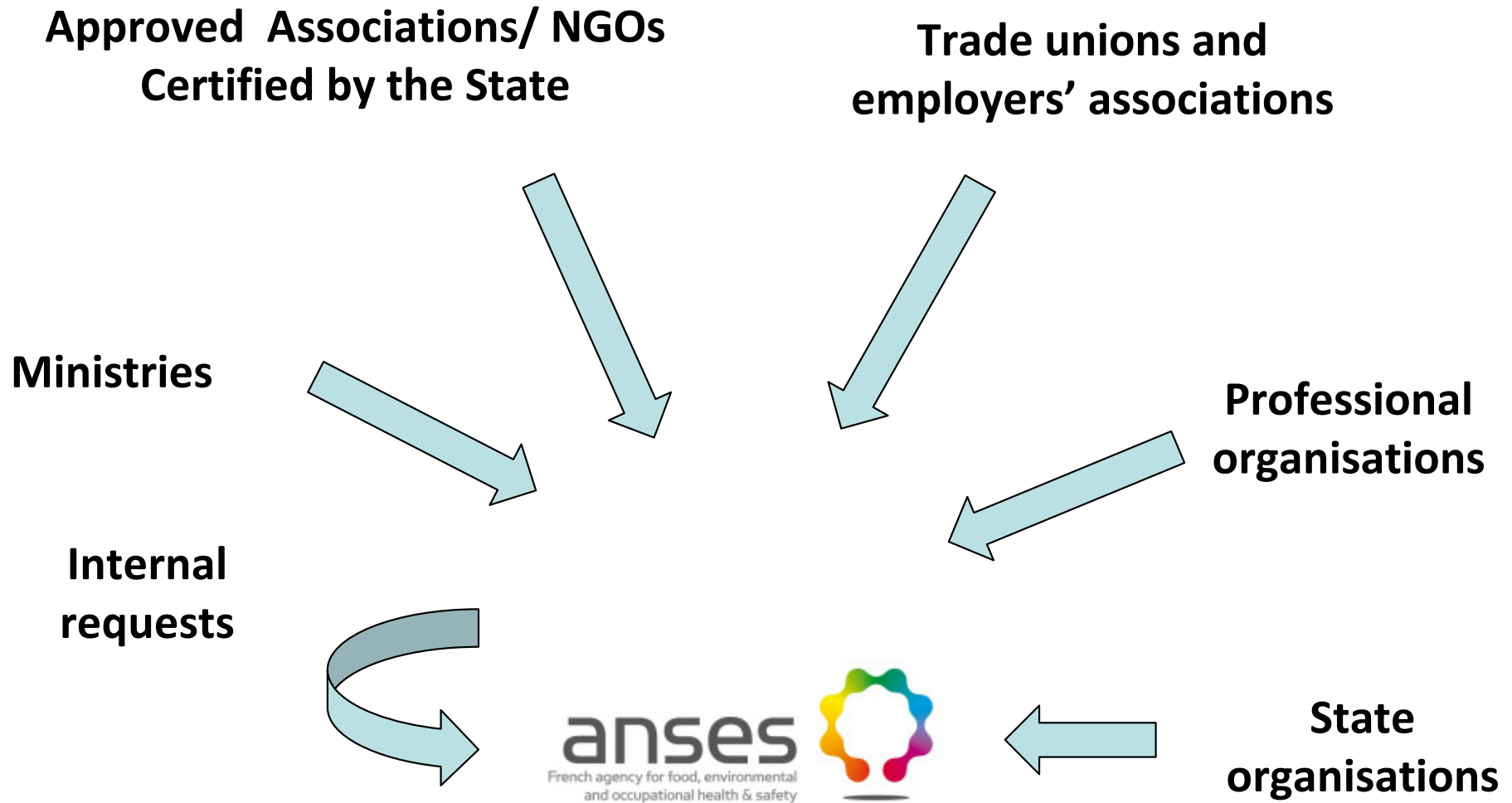
Developing relationships and dialogue with stakeholders 1/2

Following actions are being implemented
(either on legal or voluntary basis):

- Participation of stakeholders (industries, NGOs, etc.) to the **governance bodies** of the Agency :
 - Board of Directors,
 - 5 thematic orientation committees on food, environment, occupational health, animal health and welfare and plant health
- Set-up of thematic **dialogue committees** on emerging issues: « *Radiofrequencies & health* », « *Nanomaterials & health* »

Among other stakeholders NGOs are entitled to solicit risk assessment

from ANSES on specific matters of concern



Developping relationships and dialogue with stakeholders 2/2

- **Identification of stakeholders involved** in the topics of expertise : consumers, environmental NGOs, patients and victims' organisations, etc.), trade unions, industries
- **Establishing conditions for fruitful discussions** (from upstream engagement to downstream information along the assessment process) through :
 - Information meetings (twice a year on transversal themes such as pesticides, water quality, plastics in food packaging, nutrition, cancer and environment, microbial pathogens, antibiotic resistance, allergens, etc.)
 - Consultation, interviews, hearings (lay knowledge) and information
 - Current watch of networks and social movements at the national and international level

Developping knowledge about societal issues related to environmental health

1. Collaborations with external scholars/academic research centers (EHES and CSO) :

1.1 With the GSPR/EHES (specialised in socio-informatics) to study :

- Political/sociological context , actors involved
- Public preoccupations and fears, behaviours and practices, arguments
- Early warnings and critical points of expertise (ex. low-doses, interaction of chemical substances, etc.)
- Trajectory of alerts and crises
- Dynamics of collective actions (mobilisations and protest groups)
- On a large number of issues (ex. bees, BPA, GMOs, PCBs, dioxines, etc.)

Developping knowledge about societal issues related to environmental health

1. Collaborations with external scholars/academic research centers (EHES and CSO) :

1.2 With the CSO/SCIENCES-PO (Centre de Sociologie des Organisations)

- Formalisation of a table/questionnaire of sociological analysis to be used during the framing of risk assessment
- Project of building up an international network of SHS experts working in the field of environmental health

Promoting the contribution of SHS experts in risk assessment

2. Within ANSES:

- **Socio-economic analyses**, such as the burden of poor indoor air quality or the socio-economic determinants for the substitution of CMR chemical substances
- **Involvement of SHS experts in multidisciplinary working groups** (ex. endocrine disruptors, noise, pesticides, etc.)
- **Launch in fall 2012 of a SHS expert committee** (including various fields such as economy, sociology, law or philosophy, science studies)
Its missions: to make recommendations in the framing of expertise, to validate procedure and methodological tools, to run exploratory cases, to produce valuable knowledge for elaboration of opinions and reports.

Both initiatives (internal and external) are linked and interact for the production of societal knowledge

Establishing a watch on the links between science and society

- Follow-up of the evolution of critics of science and technologies
 - Watch on emerging issues such as unexplained syndroms (MCS, EHS, sick-building syndrom), synthetic biology, etc.
 - Watch on current cross-cutting themes (i.e. expertise processes, conflicts of interests, precautionary principle, public participation, etc.)
 - Scientific watch in SHS knowledge production
 - Reviews of litterature on particular issues of concern

Contributing to public debate and to the promotion of opinions and reports delivered by ANSES

- ❑ **Seminars of reflexion** (about 6 sessions/ year) for the Agency's staff and partners

Ex. Sociological impact of asbestos crisis, Comparison of nano-debates procedures in Europe, Analysis of public policies to prevent obesity, etc.

- ❑ Organisation of **prospective colloquia** open to the public in partnership with organisations like Sciences-Po or Ecole des Mines.

Ex. « Governing uncertainty », « Environmental justice and sanitary risks », « Reviewing the prevention of occupational risks: a challenge for sustainable development », « Internationalised food systems: new risks and new regulations »

The role of SHS in the prevention of crises

- **Improve the quality and robustness of scientific risk assessment** and of recommendations delivered to decision-makers
- **Diminish the degree of potential controversies** by involving stakeholders upstream (i.e. bottom-up public engagement that goes further than a top-down communication on risks)
Foster transparency **to redeem confidence in expertise** by informing on procedures and uncertainties
- **Anticipate crises** by bettering **public understanding of science**, detecting **early warnings** (« weak signals ») and addressing **emerging risks** (ex. nanomaterials, electromagnetic waves, etc.)
- **Enable a better management and communication of risks and uncertainty** thanks to a more accurate knowledge of rising societal issues in the field of environmental health



Thank you for your attention

Regine.Boutrais@anses.fr