

Providing scientific policy advice: ensuring integrity and independence

Dr. Lieve Herman, chair of the Commission on
Scientific Integrity at Flanders Research
Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and
Food (ILVO)

ILVO

ILVO

ILVO is an independent scientific research institute and service organisation of the Flemish Government oriented towards sustainable agriculture, fisheries and food.

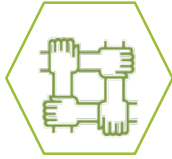
- 3 locations: Merelbeke, Melle, Ostend
- >600 employees
- 200 ha experimental fields with advanced phenotyping facilities
- >15,000 m² experimental greenhouses
- >20,000 m² experimental animal housing
- Pilot plant for the food industry
- More than 40 labs (accredited)



ILVO as an organisation



- Transdisciplinary
- Technology platforms
- Experimental design
- 8 research themes
- Living Labs
- Principles of 'tacit knowledge' and system thinking

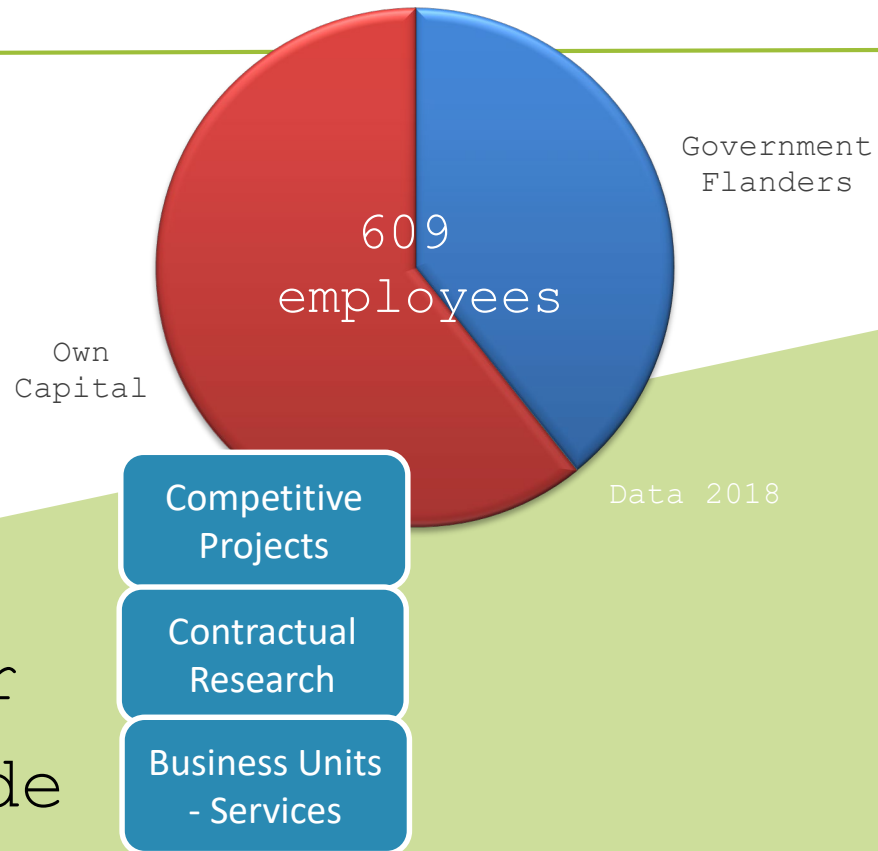


HUMAN RESOURCES

5 ILVO values



- o working together
- o positive attitude
- o professionalism
- o proactivity
- o being an example



ILVO Commission on Scientific Integrity (CWI)

Goals:

- 1) Preventing scientific integrity violations through increased awareness;
- 2) Providing internal guidance on scientific integrity;
- 3) Stimulating the correct registration of research data;
- 4) Advising the ILVO Management Board on how to handle possible violations of scientific integrity.

ILVO scientific advice from formal to informal

- Formal policy advice:
 - Scientific advice based on collective expertise
 - Follows a clearly defined protocol (e.g. rules for handling (conflict of) interests, well defined responsibilities etc.)
 - Example of Food Safety: EFSA Panels, SciCom FASFC
 - This is one way to organise scientific policy recommendations
- Informal policy advice: How to organise the process? How to communicate scientific uncertainties?
 - Ad hoc questions to individual scientists – how to handle?
 - Participation in ad hoc working groups of (mostly) Flemish policy departments with a clearly defined purpose
 - Review of policy documents
- Advice to private stakeholders, interviews, lectures to present scientific results

Actions of the Commission on Scientific Integrity related to scientific policy recommendations

- Conflicting situations are possible, especially regarding ad hoc requests for scientific advice
- Guidance is needed for all parties involved, the ILVO scientists, the colleagues from the policy areas and the private stakeholders involved
 - [The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity - \(allea.org\)](http://allea.org)
 - [Nederlandse vertaling van Europese gedragscode voor wetenschappelijke integriteit Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten \(kvab.be\)](http://kvab.be)

Conditions for maintaining scientific integrity when providing policy advice

- **Independence of scientific advice** (from the requestor and from a personal point of view)
- The requestor is clearly mentioned
- Possible (conflicts of) interest of scientists need to be managed properly and, if relevant, need to be mentioned
- Requestors and researchers/institutes make clear (contractual) **agreements on publication**
- The discussions are **limited to scientific arguments**
- Researchers **only give advice for topics in which they are qualified and supervise the input from less experienced (assistant) scientists**
- Possible mistakes are communicated transparently
- Sources need to be communicated transparently and need to be accessible
- **Available data need to be reported as a whole (no selective choice may be made)**
- **Uncertainty related to the conclusions needs to be mentioned clearly**
- Respect for confidentiality and anonymity during the process if requested
- Correct citation of the colleagues involved

ILVO guidelines for a formal request for policy advice

- **Step 1: Intake of the request for advice**
 - Informing hierarchy and appointing responsible colleague
- **Step 2: Written agreements concerning the advisory process and the responsibilities of ILVO**
 - Clear formulation of the terms of reference - as concrete as possible;
 - Formulation of the research questions and the evidence on which the advice will be based;
 - Indication of how the uncertainties will be treated and reported;
 - Decide how the recommendation will be communicated, by whom, in which format and under whose responsibility
- **Step 3: Transparency concerning possible interests of researchers – refusal of conflicts of interests**
- **Step 4: Provide advice based on the code of conduct for research integrity**
 - Independence and transparency
 - If in doubt, ask advice within ILVO (e.g. Commission on Scientific Integrity)
 - Formulation of clear conclusions and answers on the research questions in relation to the terms of reference
 - Indicate most important sources of uncertainties
- **Step 5: Communication of the recommendation e.g. by summarising, popularising, etc.**

Informal request for advice

- This form of advice also needs to be based on the principles of scientific integrity
- The Commission recommends keeping the principles of the formal advice roadmap in mind
- On a case by case basis, this roadmap could be simplified
 - Depending on the responsibilities of ILVO or the ILVO researcher for the final document, an aspect that should be clarified right from the start of the process

Work in progress

- Challenge to reconcile flexibility/speed with a well-defined roadmap
- Challenge to communicate about scientific uncertainties
- Challenge to safeguard the boundary between science and policy, between risk assessment and risk management
- European network for discussing this topic and elaborating protocols would be interesting

Thanks

- ILVO colleagues from the Commission on Scientific Integrity
 - Isabel Roldán-Ruiz
 - Sam De Campeneere
 - Sara Van Lembergen
 - Elke Rogge
 - Kurt Heungens
 - Laurence Desmet
 - Ilse Maertens
 - Cinzia Van Malderghem
 - David Nuyttens
 - Nicole Delforge
 - Bjorn Possé

Thank you

Dr. Lieve Herman

Lieve.Herman@ilvo.vlaanderen.be

00 32 499865024

Flanders Research Institute for
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Brusselsesteenweg 370

9090 Melle – Belgium

T + 32 (0)9 272 30 00

F +32 (0)9 272 30 01

t&v@ilvo.vlaanderen.be

www.ilvo.vlaanderen.be