

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

HEALTH & CONSUMER PROTECTION DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

Directorate C - Scientific Opinions

Unit C2 - Management of scientific committees; scientific co-operation and networks

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE MEETING OF THE
SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL HEALTH AND ANIMAL WELFARE

Held on 25 April 2001 in Brussels

Adopted 12 July 2001

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC
COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL HEALTH AND ANIMAL WELFARE

Held on 25 April 2001 in Brussels

List of Participants

MEMBERS

Dr. R. Ahl,
Dr H. Blokhuis
Prof. D. Broom
Dr. R. Dantzer
Dr. M. Gunn
Dr. P. Have
Prof. P. Jensen
Dr. P. Le Neindre, Chairman
Prof. J. Noordhuizen
Prof. G. Panina
Prof. A-L. Parodi
Dr. M. Sharp
Prof. Dr. J. van Oirschot
Dr. E. Vanopdenbosch
Prof. M.Verga
Dr. M. Wierup

COMMISSION

Mr. J. Moynagh

APOLOGIES

Dr. D. Alexander
Prof. Dr. V. Moennig
Dr. D. B. Morton

**SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL HEALTH
AND ANIMAL WELFARE**

Held on 25 April 2001 in Brussels

1. Welcome and apologies

Apologies and attendance are listed on page 2.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted as proposed.

3. Declarations of interest

No member reported any conflict of interest relating to matters under discussion at today's meeting.

4. Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee

The record of the meeting of 19 January 2001 was adopted with some minor amendments.

5. Report from the Sub-Committee on Animal Health (Dr. Ahl)

The subcommittee on animal health met on 27 March. The main item on the agenda was a report on *Brucella melitensis* (Malta fever in man). This is a serious zoonosis which is prevalent in sheep and goats in Mediterranean regions. Tests are available but vaccination is required in all except low incidence areas to reduce excretion and zoonotic spread. Vaccination interferes with the tests, making progress in eradication difficult with present technology. The draft report was approved by the subcommittee and will be on today's agenda for discussion and possible adoption.

The sub committee also agreed to establish an expert working group to respond to a new question on possible strategy towards psittacosis.

The subcommittee also discussed the current foot and mouth epidemic and other recent outbreaks of animal disease. Apart from the current outbreak large scale slaughtering had taken place in the Netherlands (classical swine fever) and Italy (avian influenza and Newcastle disease). The members noted that all Member States are at risk from the introduction of disease. Border controls, surveillance and information of travellers are important and these factors seem to be less visible in the EU than in the US or Australia.

Once introduced, spread is facilitated by animal movement, high animal density, poor biosecurity on farms, lack of animal identification and lack of a systematic surveillance for disease (the sheep show few if any clinical signs when infected with FMD virus).

6. Report from the Sub-Committee on Animal Welfare (Prof. Jensen)

The subcommittee on Animal Welfare met on 26 March and 3 April to discuss a comprehensive report on the welfare of cattle kept for beef production which had been prepared by a working group. Following amendments the draft was approved by the subcommittee and figures on today's agenda, for discussion with a view to its adoption.

At its meeting the sub-committee also established a working group to examine the welfare aspects of animal transportation. The question from the Commission covers transport in general and also some specific aspects such as transport of horses and welfare of animals on roll-on roll-off ferries. In the light of the current problems with foot and mouth disease, where extensive and multiple animal movements appears to have been a factor in the spread of the disease, the sub committee agreed on the possibility of splitting the question in two in order to complete the general aspects as rapidly as possible.

The sub committee also nominated Dr D. Morton as a member to the working group on xenotransplantation of the Scientific Committee on Medicinal Products and Medical Devices.

7. Discussion and possible adoption by the Committee of a report on the welfare of cattle kept for beef production (Rapporteur: Dr. P. Le Neindre)

The draft report was described in detail by Dr Le Neindre. The report covers all welfare aspects of the keeping of cattle for beef production. Unlike other species previously examined by the committee, there is considerable variation in farming systems for beef cattle throughout the EU. These systems have evolved because of the variety of climatic and topographical features. Other factors such as the availability of straw have affected developments in housing, for example. The report makes a large number of recommendations to improve the welfare of beef cattle, though in general serious problems were not widespread. Following detailed discussion the report was adopted unanimously by the committee.

8. Discussion and possible adoption by the Committee of a report on the eradication of Brucellosis in sheep and goats (Rapporteur: Dr. R. Ahl)

This report was introduced by Dr Ahl, though because of time limitations the detailed discussion was not completed. Brucellosis caused by *Brucella melitensis* occurs in sheep and goats in the mediterranean countries. It is a serious zoonotic disease which can be spread to man by direct contact or via products such as unpasteurised milk. Diagnostic tests are generally inadequate, especially in vaccinated animals. Eradication is extremely difficult to achieve using the currently available technology. Vaccination which renders

total eradication is difficult because of interference with test results, but may be the only option in a region where the disease is increasing in man.

Because of the time limitations, suggestions for amendments were made to the rapporteur. The possibility of placing the report in written procedure for adoption before the next meeting was agreed.

9. Review and possible amendment of the internal rules of procedure

At the previous meeting, members were asked to raise any items in the internal rules of procedure that they wished to discuss. No such points were raised. The chairman indicated that members could raise such points at future meetings, if they so wished.

10. Miscellaneous.

Foot and Mouth disease

Both sub committees have discussed the current outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in their respective meetings. The Committee held a wide ranging discussion on the matter, focussing on the future. As a result a position paper was drafted which was circulated to all members of the committee following the meeting. The Chairman undertook to raise this issue at the Scientific Steering Committee and to inform them of the position of the Committee. The statement is attached below.

Considerations of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare on Foot and Mouth Disease outbreaks

At its meeting on 25 April 2001, the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare discussed the future implications for animal welfare and animal health of the current outbreaks of foot and mouth disease (FMD) in the European Community. The following points are presented:

FMD is a highly contagious viral disease that causes significant distress and ill health to infected animals and hence leads to poor welfare. It also considerably decreases the productivity of infected animals and has major economic and social consequences for the affected regions. FMD virus must therefore be eradicated from the EU territory.

The eradication of FMD using a killing and disposal policy is expensive, but likely to be cost effective in the long term and to minimize poor welfare of animals providing that reintroductions of the virus are infrequent events. Such a policy is likely to be especially effective when outbreaks are restricted to a few cases in a small region. However, in addition to the short-term economic consequences, killing procedures may cause distress to the animals being killed and undoubtedly causes distress to the affected individual farmers, the whole farming community and the general public. It can be foreseen that the public resistance against massive killing of millions of animals, most of which are healthy, will increase. It is therefore appropriate to begin to plan now to reduce the likelihood that such measures will be required in the future. Concerning the first point, the committee draws attention to its report presenting the methods that are appropriate for emergency killing of farm animals (The Killing of Animals for Disease Control Purposes. XXIV/B3/ScVC/006/1997).

Efforts to limit the reintroduction of virus should be reinforced and strengthened, as the disease is endemic in many parts of the world, including the periphery of the EU. Multiple movements of animals can facilitate extremely rapid disease spread and should be restricted, both for this reason and because poor welfare may be caused by the transportation itself. All of this requires formal risk assessment procedures to be developed, implemented and continuously updated.

The European policy of non vaccination (as in other FMD free areas) has the objective of creating a herd without evidence of antibodies to FMD virus. However, the Committee agrees that the evidence available indicates that vaccination may have an important role in that it reduces the amount of virus excreted from infected animals and, as a consequence, the risk of rapid spread. Since antibodies to infections of FMD virus are indistinguishable from those that arise from currently available vaccines using conventional tests, vaccination for controlling the spread of infection does not allow the detection of infected animals within the vaccinated population. In this respect, the Committee draws attention to its report " Strategy for Emergency Vaccination against foot-and-mouth disease" (1999) that concerns the use of emergency vaccination and the possibility of tests for "non structural proteins" (NSP) to distinguish infected and vaccinated herds. Different tests have been developed within the framework of a European Community funded Concerted Action (Mackay, D., Vet. Quarterly, 1998, 20, suppl. 2). Providing they are appropriately validated, such tests offer more efficient ways to deal with outbreaks, avoiding many of the distressing consequences seen today with the killing and disposal policy. In order to improve the above eradication tools, an increased research effort associating the industry and the European Community is required and should be urgently pursued. It is recommended to put much emphasis on the development on vaccines that rapidly induce herd immunity and in diagnostics that accelerate the diagnosis of FMD (e.g. animal-side tests). Finally, research on the risk that carriers pose for virus transmission is needed.

The choice of tools to eradicate the disease is a matter of strategy to be selected by the risk manager in the light of the origin and evolution of the outbreak. Discussion about the best possible options for risk management should take into account not only their socio-economic consequences but also ethical concerns including the effect of the strategy on the welfare of the animals. The scientific expertise that exists within the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare is available to reflect on present and future tools for controlling infectious diseases such as FMD and to advise on promising research avenues.