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HEALTH and CONSUMER PROTECTION DIRECTORATE-GENERAL

Directorate C - Scientific Opinions

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

Review of the operation of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare

Report of the Scientific Committee on
Animal Health and Animal Welfare

Adopted on 24-25th April 2003

Introduction

The operation of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare (SCAHAW) will come to an end with the imminent establishment of the new Scientific Panels of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). The members of the Committee consider it useful to comment on the activity of the Committee and review its work since its establishment in 1997 in terms of output and operational procedures. This review prepared by the Committee members also draws the attention of the EFSA to some issues that may be relevant to the future operation of its corresponding Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare.

Activity of the committee

The SCAHAW was established in 1997 (Commission Decision 97/579/EC) with the mandate to advise the Commission on questions relating to animal health and welfare. The Committee comprises two sub-committees, one for Animal Health and the other dealing with Animal Welfare. The former's remit was to deal with "scientific and technical questions concerning all aspects of animal health, hygiene, animal diseases and therapies, including zoonoses of non-food origin and zootchnics". The latter was responsible for "scientific and technical questions concerning the protection of animals, notably in regard to animal husbandry, herd management, transport, slaughter and experimentation".

The SCAHAW produced a total of 33 papers of considerable detail, of which 24 were largely produced by the sub-committee on animal health (SCAH) and 9 were largely produced by the sub-committee on animal welfare (SCAW). Due to the issues presented, almost all reports prepared by the SCAH concentrated on transmissible diseases, although the remit as defined in 1997 was much broader. Although considerable progress was made in standardising the structure of reports, their length varied greatly, from a few pages to over one hundred pages. Due to the nature of the questions posed, the SCAH received a greater proportion of requests for opinions and the SCAW's output often involved very long and detailed reports. All reports adopted by the Committee are listed at the end of this review and are also available on the internet: http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/outcome_en.html#opinions

Both sub-committees of the SCAHAW (SCAH and SCAW) worked well in tandem, in the sense that the opinions that were elaborated by one sub-committee were scrutinised by the other, applying different and complementary scientific expertise, and thus adding to the quality of the final paper. For example, it is clear that animal health will affect animal welfare, and *vice versa*, and that several of the issues considered might also affect human health.

The mandates posed to both sub-committees were very broad and dealt with a diverse range of subjects. Consequently, for most of the requests from the Commission, working groups of external experts chaired by a committee member were established in order to provide the necessary expertise in the appropriate field under discussion. Scientists were occasionally reluctant to participate in working groups since the results of the work, i.e. a scientific review on the subject in question, were 'only' published on the internet instead of a specific peer-reviewed scientific journal.

‘Authorship’ is a key element of scientific credits for published material and working group members are not conventional ‘authors’ in the sense that they do not have full responsibility for the ultimate report: the Committee reviews and revises a draft report prepared by the working group members and is fully responsible for the final report adopted. This issue was discussed in the Committee and two alternative scenarios were considered:

- Future reports could be published, at least in part, in scientific journals and only the reports’ summaries would be published on the internet.
- As publication of scientific data on the internet becomes more common, the attitude of the scientific community may change with regard to this issue. For example, scientific reports published on the internet are likely to gain greater credence as scientific publications. Reports of scientific committees may be considered more acceptable and prestigious as credits for scientific work, especially if they are suitably promoted and disseminated.

Another important issue in relation to the establishment of working groups, composed of external experts chaired by a committee member, arose in cases where the opinions of the working groups and the committee differed substantially. This happened occasionally when sub-committee and plenary committee members amended the draft report with regard to issues considered critical by individual members of the working group. The SCAHAW considered that it was justified to revise drafts prepared by working groups, since it is the committee that bears the ultimate responsibility for the scientific opinion adopted. When these issues of differences in scientific views or issues of emphasis arose, they were discussed extensively in the SCAHAW as well as between the working group chairmen and the working group members. Unless a compromise solution was found, members of working groups or the Committee were free to express a minority opinion or remove their names from the final report. A final possible reason for ‘reluctance’ to participate in working groups is the time and effort involved in preparing contributions to draft documents, with payments of allowances and indemnities only applicable to actual attendance at meetings. That is especially true for scientific experts working for contract research organisations for whom it may become increasingly difficult to justify their involvement in this work to their managers.

In some instances there was feedback from third parties, when correspondence was received concerning published (or even unpublished) reports and the committee decided to deal with such external comments only if they were based on peer-reviewed, published scientific evidence. However, a clear and transparent procedure is needed to handle queries and external opinions received from third parties. Each paper produced by the committee identified areas in which further research was needed and contact with DG RTD allowed it to communicate the insights gained by the scientific reviews to the relevant authority involved in EU research funding. It was also considered important to have some feedback from the legislative services in order to gain an appreciation of the application of SCAHAW scientific opinions in the revision of Community legislation.

The opinions and reports adopted by the SCAHAW since its establishment in 1997 are listed in an Annex to this report.

The future of the Animal Health and Animal Welfare topic in the EFSA

It is apparent from the list of scientific advisory panels to be established under the EFSA that the panel on “animal health and welfare” differs from the other proposed panels in that food safety may not always be the primary interest in issues presented to this panel and some issues may relate to non-food producing animals. Several questions that have been considered under the mandate of the current scientific committee are not related to food safety. Such issues include, for example, the welfare of laboratory and companion animals and of animals kept for fur production, animal health issues associated with non-zoonotic diseases, zoonotic diseases not linked with food (for example rabies) etc. The mechanism to allow the panel to draw the authority’s attention to emerging issues and the possibility to deal with them would need to be defined.

The format of the reports should generally follow a standard format. For example, the question can be initially outlined and followed by an introductory section, chapters dealing with the question, an executive summary, sections on conclusions, recommendations and references and acknowledgements of the contribution of experts involved in preparing the report. However, due to the specificity of the expertise involved, the format of reports to be produced by the panel on animal health and welfare may differ compared to other panels. In particular, it may be necessary to explain certain principles of the assessment of animal health and animal welfare in an introductory chapter as these form the basis of the scientific evaluation of animal health and welfare.

As the report must be based on the best available scientific advice, the composition of working groups should be very carefully considered. Scientists contributing to the report need to vouch for having no conflicts of interest in the subject of the report and that they are in a position to offer independent scientific advice on the issue in question. Working group members are required to be familiar with the working principles of the panel on Animal Health and Welfare as well as the relative roles of the working groups and the scientific panels. Alternative options for the preparation of draft scientific reports could include ‘in-house’ preparation by EFSA scientific experts of a draft paper which panel members then review, preparation of drafts by members of the EFSA panel (or sub-groups, working groups) or the out-sourcing of preparatory work to scientific experts/ research organisations on the basis of a contract via an open tendering procedures.

Experts would need to be sourced from a wide variety of disciplines in order to provide the expertise required for the drafting of scientific reports. A database of experts which outlines the scientific disciplines and the appropriate specific expertise of the individuals dealing with various species would be beneficial. Such a database, which could include scientists from European but also non-European countries, could facilitate the selection of experts appropriate for specific working groups, taking account of the best expertise available in the field. Any database would need to be kept up-to-date and individuals could be approached to contribute to the report of a working group either as a member of the working group or as an *ad hoc* contributor to the group.

On completion of the report, members of the working group should be in a position to receive acknowledgement for their work from the scientific community. This may necessitate developing procedures, not presently available to SCAHAW, to ensure that this happens. For example the possibility for working group members to subsequently publish their individual inputs to the process in peer-reviewed scientific journals, as well as recognised authorship of individual chapters of reports could be considered.

With regard to risk evaluation, clarification of the nature and extent of the risk evaluation required would need to be determined. The facilities for development of the risk assessment need to be outlined. The reports on the harmonization of risk assessment procedures of the Scientific Steering Committee of 26-27 October 2000 and its overview report on harmonising risk assessment approaches of 10 April 2003 may be valuable tools in this regard. These reports are available at the website http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/ssc/outcome_en.html

In this regard, it may be necessary to include specialists in such assessment in relevant working groups where required. Assessment of risks may identify gaps in available information and should record thresholds that are given as best available values which should be identified as such. The possibility of performing a cost-benefit analysis should be raised, including the socio-economic consequences of the alternative risk-management options. Identified risks could be classified as to whether they refer to risks to human health, to animal health, to the environment or to socio-economic activities. However performing associated risk management analyses may fall outside the remit and expertise of the Scientific Committee or Panel, and indeed the role of the EFSA (risk assessment and risk communication rather than risk management). Inputs in the working group of individuals with special expertise in modelling and quantitative data analysis would be important where appropriate.

Reports could highlight uncertainties and knowledge gaps identified by the scientific experts. They should make recommendations to address the absence of knowledge and explain how the uncertainties have been handled. Any assumptions that have been made would also need to be outlined. It should be explained that sometimes thresholds are given as “best estimates” based on available data and not necessarily as “true values”. Links between the other scientific panels and scientific advisory committees or organisations such as OIE, FAO, WHO etc. are also important, whether through being formally involved in working groups or as observers to meetings.

Other issues

To facilitate consideration of the views of interested parties, comments could be invited via a public consultation when appropriate, e.g. some Scientific Committees have placed preliminary scientific reports on the internet to facilitate a public consultation and have sought comments and opinions from third parties within given deadlines. The committee feels that a careful monitoring of the transition from the existing scientific committee to the scientific panel is necessary to facilitate the completion of work in-progress.

All means to facilitate communication between the experts involved in the preparation of reports should be used. In particular the use of a web design tool for the exchange of information and documents may be a powerful tool for that purpose, to assist cooperation and collaboration between experts in the preparation of scientific reports.

Annex

Reports of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare are substantially based on draft reports prepared by working groups. These working groups are established by the Committee and chaired by a Committee member. The working group draft the reports, which are then reviewed and revised by the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Animal Welfare. The Scientific Committee is solely responsible for the final text, including the conclusions and recommendation and in all reports adopted the work of working group members is acknowledged and their names listed.

The first meeting of the Scientific Committee took place on 17 November 1997 and was composed of the following members:

Dr. F. Garrido-Abellan (Chairman), Dr. R. Ahl, Dr. D. Alexander, Prof. S. Alexandersen, Prof. J. Badiola Diez, Prof. D. Broom, Dr. R. Dantzer, Prof. Dr. A. Dijkhuizen, Dr. M. Gunn, Prof. J. Hartung, Prof. P. Jensen, Prof. Dr. V. Moennig, Dr. D.B. Morton, Dr. P. Le Neindre, Prof. G. Panina, Prof. Dr. J. van Oirschot, Dr. E. Vanopdenbosch, Prof. M. Verga.

The first meeting of the Committee under its new mandate took place on 19 January 2001 and was composed of the following members:

Dr. P. Le Neindre (Chairman), Dr. R. Ahl, Dr. D. Alexander, Prof. D. Broom, Dr. R. Dantzer, Dr. M. Gunn, Dr. P. Have, Prof. P. Jensen, Prof. Dr. V. Moennig, Dr. D.B. Morton, Prof. J. Noordhuizen, Prof. G. Panina, Prof. A-L. Parodi, Dr. M. Sharp, Prof. Dr. J. van Oirschot, Dr. E. Vanopdenbosch, Prof. M. Verga and Dr. M. Wierup.

The reports adopted by the Committee are accessible on the internet and for each of the following papers the appropriate website reference is given at which the report may be downloaded. Names of members of working groups involved in the preparation of draft reports are acknowledged in each report.

Agendas of meetings of the Committee and adopted minutes of Sub-Committee and Committee meetings are also accessible on the internet via the following website address:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/index_en.html

Opinions and reports adopted by the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare

- The Definition of Newcastle Disease- adopted 24th March 1998. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out04_en.html
- Standards for EC funding of Eradication Programmes for Scrapie- adopted 23rd June 1998. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out07_en.html
- The use of mixtures of the gases CO₂, O₂, and N₂ for stunning or killing poultry- adopted 23rd June 1998. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out08_en.html
- Swine Vesicular Disease- adopted 10th August 1998. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out10_en.html
- Criteria for definition of geographical areas in Australia which can be considered as low risk areas as regards importation of species susceptible to Bluetongue Virus (BTV) and Epizootic Haemorrhagic Disease Virus (EHDV) into the European Union- adopted 21st October 1998. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out14_en.html
- Suggested protocol for the importation of live animals from Bluetongue Virus (BTV) and Epizootic Haemorrhagic Disease Virus (EHDV) endemic areas- adopted 21st October 1998. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out15_en.html
- Welfare aspects of the production of foie gras in ducks and geese- adopted 16th December 1998. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out17_en.pdf
- Animal welfare aspects of the use of Bovine Somatotrophin- adopted 10th March 1999. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out21_en.pdf
- Strategy for emergency vaccination against Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD)- adopted 10th March 1999. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out22_en.pdf

- Classical Swine Fever in wild boar- adopted 10th August 1999.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out24_en.pdf
- Diagnostic tests for Crimean Congo Haemorrhagic Fever (CCHF) in ruminants- adopted 11th October 1999. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out30_en.pdf
- The modification of Technical Annexes of Council Directive 64/432/EEC to take account of scientific developments regarding Tuberculosis, Brucellosis and Enzootic Bovine Leucosis- adopted 11th October 1999.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out33_en.pdf
- Estimations of the Infective Period for Bluetongue in cattle- adopted 8th December 1999. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out34_en.pdf
- Standards for the microclimate inside animal transport road vehicles- adopted 8th December 1999. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out35_en.pdf
- Bacterial Kidney Disease- adopted 8th December 1999.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out36_en.pdf
- Possible links between Crohn's disease and Paratuberculosis- adopted 21st March 2000. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out38_en.pdf
- The welfare of chickens kept for meat production (broilers)- adopted 21st March 2000. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out39_en.pdf
- Assessment of zoonotic risk from Infectious Salmon Anaemia virus- adopted 27th June 2000. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out44_en.pdf
- The definition of Avian Influenza. The use of vaccination against Avian Influenza- adopted 27th June 2000. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out45_en.pdf
- Possible use of vaccination against Bluetongue in Europe- adopted 27th June 2000.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out47_en.pdf

- Virus inactivation in bovine blood and blood products- adopted 25th October 2000.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out50_en.pdf
- Bovine Herpesvirus 1 (BHV 1) marker vaccines and accompanying diagnostic tests- adopted 25th October 2000. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out49_en.pdf
- The welfare of cattle kept for beef production- adopted 25th April 2001.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out54_en.pdf
- Brucellosis in sheep and goats (*Brucella melitensis*) – adopted 12th July 2001.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out59_en.pdf
- ‘Chronic Wasting in cattle’- adopted 12th July 2001.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out60_en.pdf
- Diagnostic tests for Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP)– adopted 17th October 2001. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out63_en.pdf
- The welfare of animals kept for fur production- adopted 12th-13th December 2001.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out67_en.pdf
- Erratum to report http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out67_erratum_en.pdf
- The welfare of animals during transport (details for horses, pigs, sheep and cattle)– adopted 11th March 2002. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out71_en.pdf
- Avian Chlamydiosis as a zoonotic disease and risk reduction strategies– adopted 16th April 2002. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out73_en.pdf
- The oral vaccination of foxes against rabies- adopted 23rd October 2002.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out80_en.pdf
- The welfare of non-human primates used in research- adopted 17th December 2002.
http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out83_en.pdf

- The use of fish by-products used in aquaculture- adopted 26th February 2003. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out87_en.pdf
- Diagnostic techniques and vaccines for Foot-and-Mouth Disease, Classical Swine Fever, Avian Influenza and some other important OIE List A diseases- adopted 24-25th April 2003. http://europa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/sc/scah/out93_en.pdf

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