



Brussels, 11 June 2024

Minutes

Meeting of the Animal Health Advisory Committee, the sub-group of the Advisory group on the food chain and animal and plant health held on June 11th, 2024.

1. Introduction, opening: Francisco REVIRIEGO GORDEJO – Head of Unit G2 Animal Health

The Commission welcomed the Members of the Animal Health Advisory Committee and the Members of the Council of the European Union Presidency Trio – Spain, Belgium and Hungary and briefly explained the purpose of the meeting and then proceeded with the approved agenda.

2. Update on animal diseases (Unit G2 Animal Health)

- **Latest state of play on African swine fever (ASF)**

The Commission provided an update on the ASF epidemiological situation at global level and in the EU and reported about 14 EU Member States (MS) affected by ASF. The disease continues to be mainly present in wild boar, with some spill over to domestic pigs especially during the so called ‘ASF high season’.

The ASF situation in 2024 evolved in several EU MS such as: Bulgaria and Greece, where outbreaks were notified at the borders in wild boar, and in some domestic pig establishments; Italy, where the Northern cluster is still worrying and where an EUVET mission will be deployed in July 2024; Poland where several outbreaks in domestic pigs were notified in the Northern, Western and Eastern cluster in 2024.

The disease was notified in June and September 2023 for the first time in Croatia (pigs) and Sweden (wild boar), and situation seems currently to be under control.

The Commission presented some of the tools at its disposal for preventing, controlling, and eradicating ASF, amongst them the Scientific Opinions and Technical Reports of the European Food Safety Authority. The EU Veterinary Emergency Team (EUVET) missions allow the harmonised and tailored implementation the ASF management best practices. The Commission has been funding for two decades including under the recent Horizon Europe programme, the research for an ASF safe and effective ASF vaccine, that is currently not yet available worldwide.

In discussion, **FESASS** asked if the Commission has any information from Belarus that does not notify any outbreaks of ASF. COM replied that in the past it was in contact with Belarus during the meetings of the Standing Group of Experts on ASF under GF-TADs and requested information on the ASF situation in Belarus, without getting any information. **ECVC**, asked if farmers could be invited to the EUVET mission that will be deployed in July 2024 in Italy, and if the wild boar population was somehow under control in the EU. COM replied that in the programme of the EUVET missions the competent authority of the Member States may include meetings of the experts with farmer representatives. Regarding the wild boar population control, in Annex IV of the ASF Regulation (Implementing

Regulation (EU) 2023/594) there is a legal obligation for all the MS to draft and implement a plan for the wild boar management. The MS are requested to regularly report to the Commission and to other MS on that action plan at the meeting of the Committee for plants, animals, food, and feed (PAFF Committee).

- **Latest state of play on avian influenza (including zoonotic avian influenza) (HPAI)**

The Commission presented an update of the HPAI disease situation in the EU and worldwide. It also informed on the possible zoonotic risk of the currently circulating HPAI H5N1 viruses and on the EU rules that apply for surveillance of HPAI in non-listed species (animals of mammalian species) and when virus is detected in such animals.

FESASS appreciated the robust system EU has in place for surveillance, prevention and control of HPAI. COM was asked on the actions made to ensure that third countries are also contributing to the global effort to monitor and manage HPAI. COM informed that compliance of member countries to the WOAAH standards is checked with the Observatory instrument. In addition, Global Framework for the Progressive Control against transboundary Animal Diseases (GFTADs) supports the countries to put in place strategies to prevent and control HPAI. A new updated global strategy to prevent and control avian Influenza was presented at the WOAAH General Session in May this year. The level of transparency of EU's main trading partners, in particular the US as regards recent incidents in cattle is excellent and can be followed on a public website. EU follows developments of the HPAI situation in the US and globally with a One Health approach. FESASS asked as well about the reduction of co-financing of disease control measures. COM replied that budget for EU co-financing of veterinary measures under the SMP programme has not been reduced but due to high level of expenses following increased number of HPAI and ASF outbreaks in the EU in the last years, changing in the co-financing rate, and the prioritisation had to be done. If the situation improves, a new reflection shall follow.

IFOAM Organics Europe and **ECVC** informed that their members are concerned about HPAI and ASF and the impact of biosecurity measures on animal welfare. Especially for small scale poultry farmers, and pig rearing projects with pasturing. They asked if the Commission is exploring alternatives for outdoor livestock farming. COM replied that from the view of animal health prevention and control, there is no room to downgrade biosecurity. The current epidemiological situation does not leave room for low biosecurity levels. **ECVC** mentioned that there are ongoing studies in certain Member States for testing some adapted biosecurity measures that would be appropriate for free range farmed animals.

Animal Health Europe advocates for early involvement of stakeholders in the prevention and control activities, trying to improve this through the CVO's, to coordinate and collaborate more.

3. Update on HPAI poultry vaccination including EFSA outcomes (Unit G2 Animal Health)

- The Commission provided updates on the vaccination plans and trials in the Member States and presented the outcomes of the recent EFSA scientific opinions.

AVEC asks if the current experience in the EU with vaccination and the new EFSA scientific opinion help in convincing third countries to lift the bans imposed on countries that apply vaccination against HPAI. COM replied that it is engaging with every occasion to share to third countries the experience and scientific knowledge EU has but this does not guarantee immediate reaction/acceptance from those countries.

4. Ongoing work under Animal Health Law (Unit G2 Animal Health)

- **Update of the state of play regarding rules for approval and recognition of disease-free status of compartments keeping terrestrial animals**

The Commission informed about the updated state of play of rules as regards approval and recognition of disease-free compartments for terrestrial animals, specifically for poultry. A detailed presentation on this draft was provided at the November 2023 AHAC meeting. The draft has been subject to public feedback from 30 April to 28 May 2024 and is in translation. Following its adoption, it will be sent to the European Parliament and the Council. The Commission expects its publication in official journal and entry into force before the end of 2024. **AVEC** and **COPA COGECA** acknowledged the COM and for considering provided comments.

- **Information on bluetongue and epizootic haemorrhagic disease, and amendment to Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/688 – animal health requirements for movements of animals in the EU.**

The Commission explained the epidemiological situation of both diseases, the policy approach and how these diseases are regulated under the framework of Regulation (EU) 2016/429. Also, the Commission presented the ongoing work to update the rules laid down in Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/688 which are applicable to the movements of certain animals originating from areas affected by epizootic haemorrhagic disease.

During the discussion, **FESASS** asked when vaccines against bluetongue could be considered as a risk mitigating measure that enables movement of animals to other Member States. COM replied that vaccinated animals can be moved to other Member States in accordance with the provisions of Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/688 only when they are within the immunity period guaranteed in the specifications of the vaccine.

As regards the epizootic haemorrhagic disease, **FESASS** also requested some clarifications about rules laid down in Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/688 and if the Commission has received substantial epidemiological data from Member States for further assessment. COM clarified the rules and replied that no substantial data was received from Member States.

Animal Health Europe asked if the Commission has the intention to create a vaccine bank for both diseases. The Commission replied that there are other priorities at this stage.

5. Evaluation of the Animal Health Law (Unit G2 Animal Health)

- The Commission informed the members on the AHL evaluation, the scope of the evaluation, the process, and the timeline. A study, carried out by a contractor (Ecorys), will be carried out to, amongst other tasks, gather the views of stakeholders. After the summer break, the contractor will reach out to AHAC members with request for surveys and interviews.

In discussion, **FESASS** asked if late changes of national legislation in some MSs will also be assessed and if detailed technical questions will also be subject of this evaluation. COM replied that the evaluation will follow robust evaluation standards under better regulation. Other detailed technical questions are discussed and solved on a regular basis. Finally, COM reiterated the importance of stakeholders' involvement in this evaluation and thanked in advance for the support.

6. Commission proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of animals during transport (COM/2023/770), and its supporting Impact Assessment (SWD/2023/401) (Unit G3 Animal Welfare)

The Commission presented its proposal, and supporting impact assessment, for a revised EU legislation on the protection of animals during transport. **FESASS**, **UECBV** and **COPA COGECA** referred to the substantial costs that the proposal would entail, in particular due to the new provisions on journey times, space allowance temperatures, stricter conditions at export and other. **EPO-OFI** and **EAZA** both deplored not being members of the EU Animal Welfare Platform where the public feedback on the proposal will be discussed and reiterated their willingness to cooperate with the Commission on these matters. **IFOAM** referred to the limited availability of slaughterhouses certified for organic production, for which the proposed maximum journey times could cause practical problems. **CIWF** asked about the exclusion from the scope of aquatic animals delivered directly to the final consumer. The Commission took good note of all comments made by the stakeholders and clarified some of the provisions in the proposal. As regards aquatic animals the Commission replied that the matter will be further discussed by the co-legislators in the upcoming negotiations. A presentation on the received feedback on the animal transport proposal will be presented by the Commission during the forthcoming meeting of the EU Platform on Animal Welfare on 17-18 June 2024.

7. Commission proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the welfare of dogs and cats and their traceability (COM/2023/769), and its supporting Staff Working Document (SWD/2024/88) (Unit G3 Animal Welfare)

The Commission presented its proposal, and supporting analysis, for a new EU legislation on the welfare and traceability of dogs and cats. **EPO-OFI** asked about the relationship between the proposal and the EU Animal Health Law (AHL), to which the Commission replied by referring to its supporting Staff Working Document where the different ways that the proposal complements the AHL are explained. **ECVC** asked about the current situation as regards the identification and registration of dogs and cats in the EU, to which the Commission replied by referring to the common rules under the AHL and the differing requirements in Member States national legislation. **CIWF** asked whether there was a drafting mistake in Article 20 of the proposal (“previous year”), which the Commission confirmed and explained that this is being rectified in the discussions with the Council. **Slowfood** asked whether any explicit reference to “mirror clauses” was considered in the proposal, to which the Commission replied that this was not the case, but that the proposal requires that only dogs and cats that have been reared in accordance with the requirements for establishments laid down in this Regulation, or equivalent, could be imported into the EU.

END