

Statement of the Chief Veterinary Officers of the EU and of the European Commission on the Schmallenberg Virus Situation

Since the appearance of the infection, the Member States and the Commission have worked in close coordination and ensured that the EU Member States applied a policy of full transparency vis-à-vis stakeholders and third countries' partners.

The response has included several initiatives: i) the immediate notifications to the OIE made by the eight affected EU Member States¹ in the context of the procedure foreseen for emerging diseases, ii) the creation of a specific website with all the relevant information on SBV², iii) the organisation of a one-day scientific seminar on the "Management of the Schmallenberg Virus"³, iv) numerous bilateral discussions with our trading partners, v) the sharing of the latest scientific findings with the OIE, vi) the three scientific reports issued by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and vii) the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) risk assessment.

It needs to be underlined that in the past few months additional substantial evidence has been gathered confirming that SBV has very a minor impact on livestock production (around four thousand cases in newborn ruminants in the EU that counts for less than 0,002% of the susceptible ruminant population in the EU). The EFSA reports on the epidemiology⁴ of this virus and its impact⁵ show a clear decline in the number of malformed SBV-positive newborn animals after February 2012 and conclude that the impact on the 2012-2013 calving season should be low in the regions already affected by this virus.

The ECDC latest assessment, based on scientific studies performed in Germany and the Netherlands, concludes that the risk of infection of humans exposed to SBV is absent or extremely low and that it is very unlikely that SBV poses a risk to humans⁶.

The new scientific findings allowed the OIE to develop and update a technical factsheet⁷ which was the basis for a constructive discussion at the 80th OIE General Session on 20-26 May in Paris. On this issue, the World Assembly of Delegates concluded that: i) the risk posed by commodities such as meat, milk, semen and embryos is negligible, ii) the conditions to consider this infection as an emerging disease are not any longer met, iii) the disease does not meet the criteria for listing by the OIE.

All this is based on scientific evidence and it clearly supports the EU's view that as regards the management of the risk that trade of animals and products may represent, the SBV virus deserves the same approach as for the other viruses of the Simbu serogroup (e.g Sathuperi, Shamonda, Douglas and Akabane).

¹ Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Luxembourg and Spain

² <http://ec.europa.eu/food/sbv>

³ http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/diseases/schmallenberg_virus/scientific_seminar_en.htm

⁴ <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/supporting/doc/277e.pdf>

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/food/committees/regulatory/scfcah/animal_health/presentations/0405062012_schmallenberg_efasa.pdf

⁶ <http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/healthtopics/schmallenberg-virus/Pages/index.aspx>

⁷ http://www.oie.int/fileadmin/Home/eng/Our_scientific_expertise/docs/pdf/A_Schmallenberg_virus.pdf

In the light of these developments, the eight EU Member States that notified the occurrence of SBV to the OIE in their territory have informed the OIE and its members, via WAHIS, that the SBV would no longer be considered as an emerging disease in the EU and the events were resolved.

Nevertheless, the appropriate investigations and scientific research are ongoing in the affected countries with the financial support of the EU. EFSA will continue to monitor developments and update its reports. The EU remains committed to inform third country partners of significant scientific or epidemiological new developments in a timely manner.

Taking into account the situation of SBV infection in EU, all the scientific knowledge that has been accumulated and made available to the scientific community and the position adopted by the OIE, the EU urges third countries that have adopted restrictive measures on imports of meat, milk, semen and embryos from the EU to remove those restrictions, as they are not scientifically justified nor proportionate due to the negligible risk posed by these commodities.

The EU also considers that any measures adopted on imports of live ruminants from the EU should be in compliance with the World Trade Organization Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) basic principles of scientific justification, proportionality and non-discrimination, namely third countries applying those measures should be able to demonstrate that they are free from SBV and that similar measures are also applied vis-a-vis other viruses of the Simbu serogroup in their own territory and when dealing with other trading partners.