Statement on the Schmallenberg Virus Situation Issued by the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH) – 11 January 2012

The information presented by Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium at the meeting of 11 January 2012 shows that a newly detected virus has circulated in the second semester 2011 amongst livestock ruminants causing non-specific clinical signs in cattle and congenital malformations, mainly in sheep and more seldom in cattle and goats.

The Member States and the Commission acknowledge the efforts made by these three Member States to provide the best possible scientific information on the risks posed by this virus, in full transparency.

The virus in question belongs to the *Bunyaviridae* family, genus *Orthobunyavirus* and has been tentatively named "Schmallenberg virus". This virus belongs to a vector-transmitted group of viruses making direct transmission from animal to animal unlikely. However, vertical transmission from dam to newborn via the intrauterine route does occur as with other similar viruses. This group of viruses very often are associated with mild clinical signs of disease or with subclinical infection in ruminants.

So far, cases of disease have been detected in 20 farms in Germany (in cattle and sheep), in 52 farms in the Netherlands (in sheep, and one case in goat), and in 14 farms in Belgium (in sheep, only). No clear geographical clusters of these cases has been shown, so far. This may suggest that the undetected subclinical cases of infection in ruminants may be many more, but the current lack of serological tests renders epidemiological investigations difficult. Although the congenital malformation in newborn animals have been detected recently and are still being detected in these days, they are most likely caused by transmission of virus by insect vectors that occurred in summer and early autumn, during pregnancy.

There is no evidence that the Schmallenberg virus could cause illness in humans. The Member States and the Commission took note of the preliminary assessment carried out by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) on the zoonotic risks of the Schmallenberg virus which indicates that "it is unlikely that this virus can cause disease in humans, but it cannot be completely excluded at this stage[1]".

The Member States and the Commission recognise that the information on the Schmallenberg virus is still fragmented and mostly extrapolated from data available on genetically similar viruses in the *Orthobunyaviridae* genus (Simbu serogroup, like the Akabane virus). The situation needs to be reassessed once new data will be available. Awareness should be improved amongst veterinary services and stakeholders in order to better understand and address the possible risks associated with this virus.

Given that this virus is likely transmitted by means of insect vectors, further virus circulation in the current winter is unlikely to occur. This will allow Member States time to gather further data and to plan further actions in view of a possible reoccurrence of disease in spring and summer.

The Member States and the Commission consider that it is therefore necessary to continue field investigations and surveys on this virus that would generate data on which the possible disease control measures should be based. They therefore agree to develop a guidance document on surveillance as a matter of urgency.

The Member States also invited the Commission to identify possible ways to provide financial support to the above investigations.

[1] http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/231112_TER_Risk_assessment_Schmallenberg_virus.pdf