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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Working Party of Chief Veterinary Officers (21-23 June 2017)
- Partial outcome of proceedings

1. Emergency Preparedness for Transmissible Animal Diseases – Final Session

On 21-23 June 2017, the Working Party of Chief Veterinary Officers (CVOs) discussed suggestions for a common way forward on emergency preparedness for transmissible animal disease prepared by the Presidency on the basis of the outcomes of questionnaires and surveys addressed to Member States' competent authorities¹ and previous discussions in the Working Party.

CVOs agreed at their level on the suggestions set out in the Annex, emphasising that these were a contribution ahead of the discussions related to the development of the tertiary legislation on the new Regulation (EU) 2016/429 on transmissible animal diseases ('Animal Health Law'). The Commission representative welcomed and supported the suggestions highlighting the good work carried out.

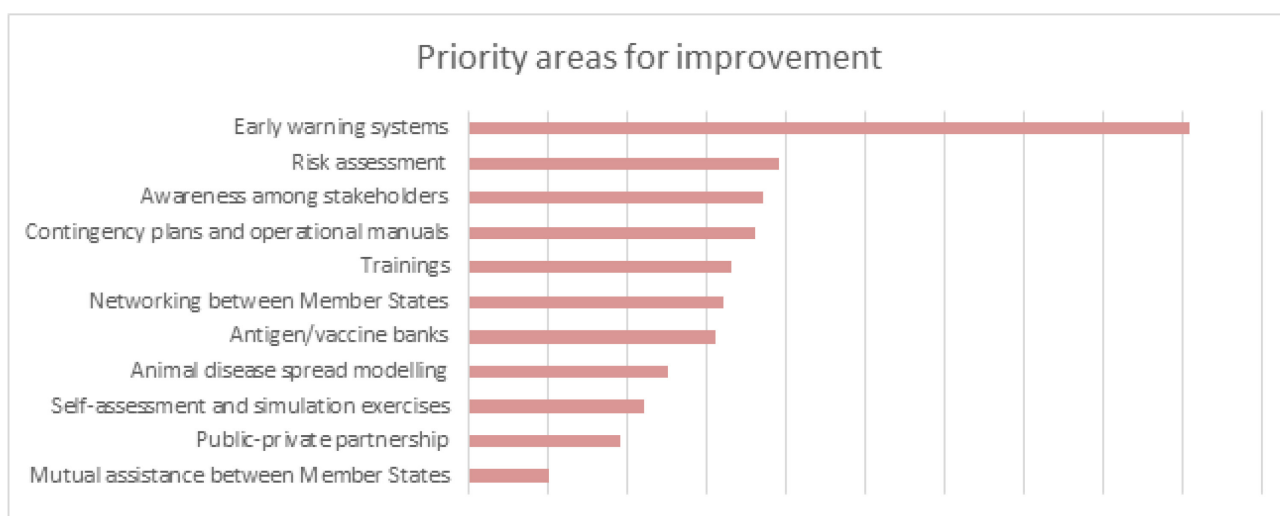
¹ WK 2901/17 + ADD1, WK 5526/17 ADD1

Common way forward on Emergency Preparedness

The Presidency has organised a Workshop during the CVO Working Party in Malta to finalise the suggestions for a common way forward on emergency preparedness and identify the priority actions to improve Early Warning Systems to be considered by the CVOs.

The suggestions were developed on the basis of the surveys carried out in accordance with the Presidency programme (WK 2901/17 & ADD1, WK 5526/17 ADD 1), the discussions and workshop held during CVO meetings and the written comments received. The role of stakeholders was also considered in the light of the outcome of the event co-organised with the FESASS (WK 6455/2017).

The elements of emergency preparedness are presented according to the outcome of the prioritization exercise carried out among Member States.



Graph: Outcome of the prioritization exercise

Early warning systems

Early warning systems improve the capacity to predict, prevent and respond to transboundary animal disease incursions.

1 - To achieve strong and reliable early warning systems a strong and clear message on the importance of these systems and the key role of stakeholders is necessary. The Commission, Member States and international players, such as GF-TADs, FAO and OIE, could address this by developing a Strategy on Awareness Raising on transboundary animal diseases that would include common key messages and indicate clear responsibilities on early warning systems. The strategy would provide the framework for the development and open exchange of educational material on disease detection and reporting, including best practices, building on ongoing initiatives, such as BTSF.

2 - The Member States should continue to pursue awareness raising activities to maintain effective early warning systems. In particular, they should ensure that backyard holdings and other operators, such as rendering plants, play an active role in disease detection and notification.

3 - To ensure effective early warning systems are in place there should be the opportunity for regular exchanges on surveillance, impact and evolution of epidemics of high risk transboundary animal diseases between the Member States, Commission and relevant stakeholders. The Commission could facilitate this through existing initiatives such as PAFF Standing Committee or Working groups of the Animal Health Advisory Committee, or through new initiatives, such as the establishment of a dedicated group of relevant experts to review early warning systems, improve emergency preparedness of the Union vis-a-vis specific high risk diseases and produce and disseminate material for raising awareness. The convening of these groups could be facilitated through online meetings.

4 - The establishment of a surveillance programme for transboundary animal diseases is more effective when a regional approach based on the risk is adopted and is actively supported by stakeholders. The Commission may continue to support and promote the establishment of regional and cross-border surveillance programmes based on risk and to improve the active contribution of stakeholders, such as farmers and private practitioners, in the primary surveillance (passive surveillance). The establishment of a reference centre on epidemiological surveillance could facilitate the implementation and analysis of cross border surveillance. The Member States should broaden and revise primary surveillance of high risk transboundary animal diseases to optimise and improve early detection. The development of a proper definition of such surveillance that captures the essential and active role of stakeholders would facilitate the common understanding by and better involvement of key actors. In addition, in order to ensure effective surveillance it would be essential that proper identification and registration of all susceptible species is in place.

5 - To improve early warning capacity based on Member States experiences and best practices the Commission may promote the develop of BTSF programmes, study visits, real time training, e-learning courses and joint-training opportunities on early warning systems. In doing so, the Commission and Member States may encourage the participation of the private sector.

Risk assessment

Risk assessment is essential to prioritize the risk associated with transboundary animal diseases and to assess the resources to plan Member States preparedness. Member States regularly carried out risk assessment for Transboundary animal diseases and possible improvements have been primarily identified in the availability of data and information from EU and neighbouring countries and in the development of models and epi-analysis tools.

1 - To enhance the outcome of risk assessments, the availability of data related to the movement of animals and products, the presence and spread of animal diseases and the results of surveillance programmes should be improved. To this end, Member States should enhance and facilitate the rapid and correct exchange of information from public and private sources to the European Commission and other Member States. In carrying out risk assessment, the social economic impact of transboundary animal diseases should also be considered.

2 - The European Commission could, where necessary and on the basis of proportionality and risk, define a common set of information to be shared between Member States on a specific disease outbreak, in addition to that required by the Animal Disease Notification System (ADNS).

3 – To ensure reliable and strong results from the risk assessments Member States should in particular promote and improve the cross-border surveillance of vector borne diseases and wildlife diseases.

4 – The European Commission could consider the need to develop common tools for assessing the animal health risks that enable combined analysis with data from different sources (e.g. TRACES, ADNS, WAHIS). Furthermore, the European Commission could encourage EFSA to continue to provide timely and relevant information connected to the risk of introduction of animal diseases and on the evolution of the epidemics.

Awareness

Awareness helps to maintain adequate level of vigilance against transboundary animal diseases and is therefore considered an important element to ensure early detection, biosecurity and heightened level of preparedness by all Member States. The need for further improvements to national initiatives has been highlighted.

1 - In order to maintain an active role for stakeholders Member States should be encouraged to hold regular meetings and trainings with all relevant stakeholders in the context of a National emergency preparedness plan or disease control programme.

2 - To ensure the effective dissemination of information on the risks of disease incursions and measures to reduce these risks Member States should ensure its key messages are communicated regularly, complemented with adequate resources and tailored to different target audiences, including farmers, local media and the general public.

3 - To improve the trust and participation of stakeholders Member States are strongly encouraged to promote close collaboration with them in the implementation of emergency plans and their active participation in conducting simulation exercises.

Contingency planning and operational procedures

Adequate contingency plans are essential for an effective response to transboundary animal disease incursions. Member States indicated general common priorities for improving contingency plans and operational procedures across Europe.

1 - The Member States should improve their contingency planning capacity, in particular, with regard to the *control measures in the restriction zones, outbreak investigation, emergency vaccination, epidemiological analysis and culling*, where priority for improvement was highlighted.

2 - To meet this end, Member States should promote trainings and other initiatives to share knowledge, experiences and expertise on the operational aspect of implementation of contingency plans.

3 - To ensure a clear understanding of public and private sectors on the contingency planning procedures and operations Member States should work with the stakeholders during *'peace time'* when assessing the various control options, including emergency vaccination.

4 - To address the risk of transboundary animal disease incursions the European Commission and Member States could continue to work together to promote common strategies for the control of these diseases with neighbouring third countries.

5 - The Member States are encouraged to consider and facilitate participation of private partners in the operational procedures of contingency plans, where possible, in the context of a framework agreement to implement emergency operations.

Training

Training helps to maintain a sufficiently prepared staff and to improve stakeholders and other participants level of knowledge or skill. The specific training needs and methodologies, such as e-learning, have been identified by Member States to improve the preparedness among competent authorities and stakeholders.

1 - The European Commission and Member States could promote the organisation of technical training on *outbreak investigation, epidemiological analysis, risk assessment, biosecurity, depopulation and carcasses disposal*. The Commission could consider addressing these needs through the trainings provided under the ‘*Better Training for Safer Food*’ programme.

2 - To improve the learning outcome in training programmes the European Commission and Member States could promote the development of learning formats that allow more interaction between participants and trainers, such as webinars and study visits, and more tailored courses to address audience specificities.

3 - To ensure wide access to training opportunities the development of e-learning initiatives, such as webinars and on-line courses, on emergency preparedness should be promoted by Member States, in particular, with the participation and support of public and private veterinarians and in collaboration with international training providers.

4 - To ensure mainstreaming of emergency preparedness in the ongoing training of official veterinarians and other stakeholders Member States should promote this concept in their programmes on continuous professional development and lifelong learning.

5 - To support the private sector’s engagement on early detection, biosecurity, and implementation of control measures the Member States should provide, where possible, tailored training for farmers/farmer associations and private veterinarians, among others.

Networking

Networking supports the exchange of information on early warning, as well as tools, best practices, and experiences to control transboundary animal diseases. Member States consider that networking is essential for improving emergency preparedness and further opportunities for improvement have been identified.

1 - The European Commission and Member States could enhance the opportunities for networking between contingency planners, epidemiologists and modellers with a view to improve coordination of their initiatives. Based on this need the European Commission may consider a common terminology on the emergency preparedness and simulation exercises.

2 - The European Commission could maintain and improve current EU training initiatives to promote joint multi-country simulation exercises and enhance study visits and working groups.

3 - Regular meetings should be organized by Member States with neighbouring countries and with countries with similar geographical and climate conditions, common husbandry systems and trade links in order to improve the exchange of data related to animal disease occurrence and spread or to any increased risk.

Antigen/Vaccine banks and diagnostic banks

Antigen/Vaccine banks contribute to the contingency planning by making available the necessary type and quantities of vaccine at an early stage. The availability of EU vaccine banks is considered of great importance by Member States and the need for improvements have been indicated to ensure adequate quantity of doses and for defining rules for prioritizing their delivery. On the other hand, the potential benefits and use of common diagnostic banks are not clearly indicated.

1 - The European Commission could promote an approach based on risk analysis to determine the availability of vaccines in EU vaccine/antigen banks and the allocation of doses to Member States and Third Countries.

2 - When planning the availability of vaccines for EU vaccine/antigen banks the European Commission could consider the outcomes of EU risk assessment and modelling studies and the vaccination strategy for that disease.

3 - When planning the allocation of vaccines for Member States and third countries the European Commission could consider National risk based vaccination strategies, epidemiological factors (size, density and location of susceptible populations, animal husbandry systems, biosecurity standards, trade of live animals, attitude of sectors towards vaccination and possible need for preventive vaccination), the current and expected availability of national vaccine stocks, national preparedness to effectively implement vaccination programmes, capacity to apply culling and other control measures and the impact of the disease.

4 - To facilitate the availability of vaccines in addition to those of the EU vaccine banks the European Commission may play an important role, in particular, by providing market information on vaccines availability and related manufacturers, negotiating with manufacturers to ensure timely and cost-effective vaccine supply, facilitating the sharing of unutilised vaccines in National stocks and reaching agreements with other international vaccine banks.

5 - Where National vaccine stocks are available Member States should support the use of bilateral agreements to facilitate the quick exchange of vaccines, relevant expertise and to support the interoperability of National vaccine banks.

6 - To ensure that Competent authorities are able to implement effective emergency vaccination Member States should ensure there is adequate capacity to develop policies and strategies necessary to plan, implement and evaluate emergency vaccination plans.

7 - Where EU legislation places trade restrictions on areas where vaccination is conducted, the European Commission could ensure the provisions in place are sufficiently flexible to facilitate the implementation of emergency or preventive vaccination in response to any change of the epidemiological situation (e.g. Lumpy Skin Disease).

8 - The Commission and Member States could assess the benefits and costs of establishing diagnostic banks for major transboundary animal diseases (such as LSD, FMD, BT, ASF, CSF, AI) with the support of EU reference laboratories.

Modelling (Animal disease spread models)

Animal disease spread models contribute to the definition of control policies for transboundary animal diseases. Most of the Member States consider these models a practical and effective instrument for comparing possible strategies, assessing the necessary resources and evaluating possible outbreaks scenario, however such tools are not widely used.

1 - To work towards developing the use of modelling in risk assessment, in addition to other sources of information, the Commission and Member States could consider a common European approach, in particular to develop disease spread scenario.

2 - The European Commission and Member States could support opportunities for EU research funding that promote the development of European and National animal disease spread models and common understanding on modelling

3 - To mainstream the use of disease spread models the European Commission may conduct an independent review of models' availability, applicability, relevance and limitation across EU with the support of EFSA.

4 - Building on this exercise the European Commission may promote the development of flexible models applicable in all Member States with the support of EFSA and/or other institutions, while providing guidance and training opportunities to facilitate their use.

5 - The European Commission and Member States could promote the sharing and exchange of technical expertise and cutting edge methodologies on modelling across national and regional boundaries and between veterinary agencies and individuals/institutions with technical expertise

Simulation exercises

Simulation exercises are necessary to improve the capacity and practical skills of the competent authorities and stakeholders which are required during outbreaks management. The participant's commitment, including stakeholders, and the capacity to implement proper corrective actions have been highlighted by Member States, together with the lack of human and financial resources, as main challenges for the implementation of simulation exercises.

1 - In order to improve the effectiveness of contingency plans Member States should promote the implementation of simulation exercises through the adequate allocation of financial and human resources.

2 - The European Commission could establish an EU expert group to provide support and guidance for improving EU expertise in developing simulation exercises at different scale and in evaluating the level of preparedness (e.g. post-crisis evaluation, evaluation of exercises outputs, etc.).

3 - To improve the National capacity to conduct simulation exercise the European Commission could develop specific learning opportunities to assist National experts in the design, implementation and evaluation of simulation exercises that building on the experiences already developed (e.g. EuFMD) and to exchange best practices and exercise experiences

4 - To strengthen the regional capacities to respond to disease outbreaks, Member States should promote the implementation of joint multi-country simulation exercises, including those foreseeing the participation of neighbouring third countries, where possible based on a centralized programme of regular cross-border exercises.

Mutual assistance and Partnership

The participation of stakeholders in emergency preparedness and good cooperation between countries improve the success of prevention and control of transboundary animal diseases. The promotion of collaboration with private sectors and the cooperation between countries on outbreak investigation, epidemiological analysis, culling and disposal of carcasses and the collaboration between laboratories have been indicated by Member States as recommended areas for improvement.

1 - To ensure the active contributions by the private sector the Member States should define the positive role of stakeholders in the decision-making process when implementing prevention and control measures, in particular to ensure feedback on the situation in the field, maintaining and promoting disease field vigilance, stimulating early warning systems and promoting biosecurity.

2 - To meet this end, Member States should reach agreement on the role and responsibilities of the private sector and coordination with it in advance of an emergency and, where possible, formalise these through contracts or memorandum of understanding with the Competent Authority.

3 - To secure the necessary expertise and resources in emergency situations cooperation between Member States should be encouraged through the exchange of expertise, equipment, personnel and diagnostics, especially on outbreak investigation, epidemiological analysis, culling and disposal of carcasses.

4 - To meet this end, Member States should consider the potential contribution of an '*Emergency reserve of vets and technical staff*' that could be requested by Member States to improve the human resources available to support the response to major transboundary animal diseases, in addition to the support provided by the Community Veterinary Emergency Team.