Council of the European Union

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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Working Party on Animals and Veterinary Questions (Chief Veterinary Officers) of 25-26 January 2023.

1. Presentation of Swedish Presidency programme

The Working Party took note of the presentation by the Presidency on its programme[1]. In the veterinary field, an overarching theme will be sustainable production of food of animal origin, with a focus on aspects related to animal welfare, preventive animal health measures promoting responsible use of antimicrobials, biosecurity and the One Health approach, among other.

2. The World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) – preparation for the upcoming General Session 21-25 May 2023

The Working Party received information on topics relevant for the preparation of the next WOAH General Session.

The Chief Veterinary Officer of the Netherlands shared information on the last WOAH Council meeting held in September 2022. The topics discussed in that meeting had included the preparation for the next WOAH general session (physical meeting in Paris, with a technical item on Avian Influenza), WAHIS platform (how to improve its usability), WOAH Observatory (the first annual report was published after the meeting, see further down), processes and applications for WOAH

[1] WK 1207/2023.

Reference Laboratories and Collaboration Centres, and implementation of the 7th Strategic Plan of WOAH.

The Commission representative explained that the high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) would indeed be the main item of the General Assembly, starting with a high level panel on the first day of the meeting and followed by several sessions of discussions and a technical item, which was likely to be prepared with a questionnaire. Regarding the resolutions to be adopted by the General Assembly, he explained that some of them would be presented for adoption electronically starting in April. He added that a meeting of the Regional Commission for Europe was scheduled for 17 May in a virtual format, but it was still unknown whether there would also be a meeting of the Regional Core Group.

The Chairperson reminded delegations that the elections of the WOAH Specialist Commissions would be held on 2024, and the candidates would need to apply already this year (deadline August-September). She invited delegations to verify and inform the Presidency if their current experts in those Commissions were willing to continue, and if they were aware of new candidates, so that the Working Party could eventually agree on candidates to be supported jointly in the elections[2].

The Commission representative informed the Working Party on the meeting of the Consultation group for the WOAH Observatory. The meeting had concluded that the data used by the Observatory should be interpreted very carefully, and that there were still questions about meaningfulness and relevance. He encouraged delegations to study the first annual report of the Observatory which had been released in early January, adding that WOAH was looking for feedback. Such feedback could be provided:

– directly to the WOAH observatory team;

– via the Presidency and/or Commission through the Consultation group; or

– during the regional webinar announced for the second half of March.

The Presidency shared with delegations a list of meeting dates relevant for the preparation of the WOAH general session[3].

[2] A list of follow-up items with deadlines was circulated by the Presidency after the meeting in document WK 1391/2023 REV 1.

[3] WK 1233/2022.

3. The European Commission for the control of Foot and Mouth Disease (EuFMD) – preparation for the upcoming General Session 4-5 May 2023

In preparation of the upcoming EuFMD General Session 4-5 May 2023, the Working Party took note of a presentation by the delegate of Hungary, Chairperson of the EuFMD Executive Committee, including information on the new EuFMD strategy for 2023-2027 and members' contributions[4]. Regarding the elections for the Executive Committee which will be held during the upcoming General Session, he suggested that current representatives of the EU Member States, appointed in 2022, could continue for the next mandate of two years. In order to verify if this suggestion was agreeable, the Presidency invited delegations to inform it if any changes wished to suggest changes to their regional group[5]. The Presidency further informed delegations that the preparation for the EuFMD would continue in the next meeting of the Working Party on 13 March, and if necessary, at its meeting of the last week of April in Sweden.

4. Animal welfare - loose farrowing of sows

The Working Party took note of the presentation by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) on the farrowing of sows and the impact on animal welfare in relation to keeping sows in crates or loose housed[6], as well as presentations by the Swedish, Danish, and German delegations on their experience in this field[7]. Following the presentations, several delegations took the floor to share their experiences, challenges and best practices at national level. In particular, aspects such as the need for a transitional period and financial support were covered.

[4] WK 1235/2022.
[5] By the deadline of 28 February, the Presidency didn't receive any suggestions for changes to the representation of the EU Member States in the EuFMD Executive Committee (WK 1391/2023 REV 1 ADD 1).
[6] WK 1264/2023
[7] WK 1237/2023

The Presidency concluded that several delegations welcomed the work carried out by EFSA. The transition to loose farrowing of sows is possible, but can be financially difficult for pig production in the EU. Sufficient time and adequate financial support should therefore be provided to adapt. It is also necessary to set clear objectives in the short and long term. Other important aspects to address are the labelling for animal welfare and the reluctance of consumers to spend more.

5. Antimicrobial resistance

a) The role of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) in the process of implementation of Regulation (EU) 2019/6 and AMR related activities

The Working Party took note of a presentation by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) on EMA's role in the global response to the threat of antimicrobial resistance through the One Health -approach, on its activities to support the Member States in their implementation of the requirements in the Regulations on Veterinary Medicinal Products and on Medicated feed aiming to reduce antimicrobial resistance, and on the European Surveillance of Veterinary Antimicrobial Consumption (ESVAC) -project[8].

The Commission representative reminded delegations on the EU grants available via the European Health and Digital Executive Agency (HaDEA) to support the fight against antimicrobial resistance, and encouraged Member States to apply for those grants.

b) Animal husbandry and preventive animal health measures promoting responsible use of antimicrobials

The Working Party took note of presentations by the Swedish, French and Austrian delegations on measures and approaches in place in their countries to reduce the need for antimicrobials at farm level[9]. These were the first in a series of presentations to share best practices to promote the prudent use of antimicrobials at farm level, and in particular to meet the requirement in Article 107(1) of the Regulation on Veterinary Medicinal Products, which states that antimicrobial medicinal products shall not be applied routinely nor used to compensate for poor hygiene, inadequate animal husbandry or lack of care or to compensate for poor farm management[10].

[8] WK 1238/2023.
[9] WK 1239/2023.
[10] See Presidency concept note: WK 490/2023.

The described activities included, among other, improved hygiene measures, monitoring of the use of antimicrobials, training and awareness raising, health visits, use of vaccines (including autogenous vaccines at herd level), and research.

Following the presentations, a number of delegations took the floor to thank the Presidency for raising the important but challenging topic and/ or to share information on their national activities. While some of them reported having good experiences with health visits, awareness raising, guidelines and monitoring of the use of antimicrobials, some of them recalled that there were still challenges in particular related to certain types of production which involved high density of animals and/or mixing of animals from different farms of origin. It was also pointed out that the overall aim announced in the Farm to Fork strategy to half the use of antimicrobials was ambitious, and that the aim to reduce the use of antimicrobials could risk in some cases to result in the other extremity, i.e. not giving the animals the necessary treatment.

The Chairperson concluded that a lot had been done to reduce the need to use antimicrobials but that further actions were still required. Highlighting the importance of good diagnostic, farm hygiene and awareness, among other, she informed delegations that the Presidency intended to revisit this topic.

6. Highly pathogenic avian influenza – how can we improve biosecurity?

The Working Party took note of presentations by the delegations of Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany on measures in place in their countries to protect farms against highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) by improved biosecurity[11].The aim of the presentations was to share experiences in order to help identify possible common breaches/weak points in biosecurity and possible further actions that could be taken to prevent the introduction and spread of HPAI by biosecurity measures, and also to better understand the epidemiology of HPAI, including its routes of introduction[12].

The presentations described various risk factors and sources of infection, which were similar in all three Member States, but their combination often specific to individual farms. Delegations generally considered then very informative and useful, and some of them decided to be in bilateral contacts to encourage and facilitate joint work and information sharing by their respective experts.

11 WK 1244/2023.
12 See Presidency concept note: WK 491/2023.

The Commission representative recalled that the last and ongoing seasons were crucial for the development of the HPAI epidemics also globally. Referring to the presentations, he pointed out that at this stage important knowledge and data were being generated, but it was still too early to identify which precise questions could be focussed in a scientific advice from EFSA related to biosecurity. He added that the Commission was available and willing to work on this matter together with experts and had already agreed to convene an expert meeting.

The Chairperson informed the Working Party that the Presidency intended to continue the discussion on this topic. She concluded that delegations considered the discussions useful to identify loopholes, risk factors and introduction pathways, and that it would also be important to facilitate research to better understand the epidemics. Thanking the Commission for its intention to organise an expert meeting, she added that it could be still too early to ask EFSA for a scientific assessment, but that this discussion could feed into such a request in the future.

7. Any other business

a) Epizootic haemorrhagic fever – information by the Spanish delegation

The Working Party took note of information presented by the Spanish delegation on the re-introduction of Epizootic Haemorrhagic Disease (EHD) which had been absent from the EU territory since 2002[13]. It also took note of several interventions supporting the Spanish view that the EU control measures for that disease would need to be rediscussed, and of the response by the Commission representative.

b) African Swine Fever (ASF)

The Working Party took note of oral information by the Greek delegation on a case of ASF detected in Northern Greece on a dead wild boar.

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[13] WK 915/2023

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