



Food and Agriculture
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european commission for the
control of foot-and-mouth disease



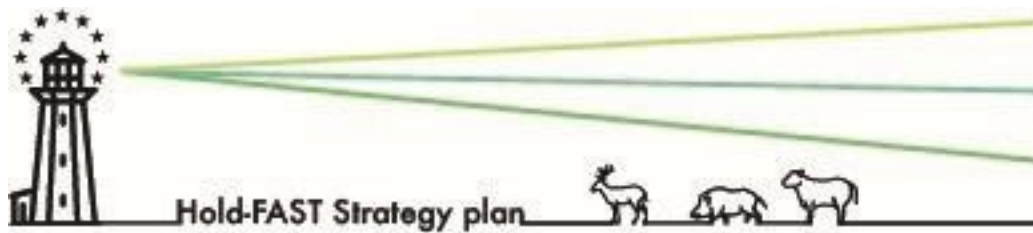
Executive Committee

Informal meeting Report 1 March 2021

European Commission
for the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease

ONLINE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE EUFMD 1st MARCH 2021

Report



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Summary

An informal meeting of the Executive Committee was held online on the 1st March 2021, attended by the three officers and six members of the Executive, Observers, experts from the WRL-FMD and EU-RL, and members of the Secretariat.

Present: Martin Blake (MB), Chairman; Lajos Bogнар (LB), Vice-Chairperson; Hendrik-Jan Roest (HR), Chysoula Dile (CD), Olev Kalda (OK); Alf-Eckbert Füssel (AF), DG-SANTE; Francesco Berlingieri (FB), DG-SANTE; Neo Mapitse (NM), OIE; Don King (DK), WRL-FMD, Labib-Bakkali Kassimi (LBK), EU-RL FMD, and Stephan Zientara (SZ), Chair of the Standing Technical Committee (STC). Members of the Secretariat were Keith Sumption (KS), Fabrizio Rosso (FR), Cecile Carraz (CC) and Nadia Rumich (NR).

Jean-Luc Angot, Nihat Pakdil, Zoran Atanasov, and Valentin Almansa Lara were unable to participate.

Conclusions and action points

1. The Secretariat will aim to strengthen the collaboration with Libya to facilitate collection and shipment of isolates from FMD outbreaks and will bring the issue to the attention of the REMESA Secretariat for discussion at the REMESA JPC meeting.
2. The TPI and the Secretariat will identify a form of assistance to countries to improve sample submission in order to overcome difficulties in shipment due to Covid-19 pandemic, especially from regions considered at highest risk or not submitting samples regularly.
3. The Secretariat will amend the text of the Constitution and Rules of Procedure to address the points raised during the discussion concerning the criteria for the inclusion of diseases in the list of FAST (FMD and similar transboundary) diseases, the procedures to prioritize FAST diseases and the obligations for FMD and similar TADs respectively.
4. The amended text will be circulated to the Executive Committee members and shared with the FAO Legal Service. The proposed amendments will be then sent to Member Nations in order to facilitate the first round of consultation during the 44th General Session in April 2021. Following the consultation, further amendments may be circulated before an Extraordinary General Session that could be called in autumn for the adoption of the amended text.
5. The Secretariat will check with the FAO Legal Service, if a written procedure to accept the amended constitution can be considered should a physical meeting not be possible in autumn.
6. The 44th General Session will be carried out over three half-days with the first day proposed as pre- session, focused on items for information only, and with optional attendance. The following two days will be on items for decisions or items for essential information linked to decisions.
7. The proposal for the establishment of a Standing Technical Committee on Pre-qualification for vaccines has been agreed and will be made at the Session. The Secretariat will prepare the Terms of Reference and define the profile of Member Nation experts to be proposed as member of the committee.
8. The Secretariat will check if the Chair and current Executive Committee members may keep ad interim their position until new elections are carried out in a physical meeting, or virtually should new FAO rules allow virtual elections, or should elections be allowed at the next Session, suspending the current Rules of Procedure.

Item 1 - Opening and Agenda

Martin Blake, Chairperson, opened the meeting and welcomed the members, observers, technical experts and the Secretariat.

He clarified that it is an informal meeting of the Executive Committee focused on the revision of the outcomes of the activities over the last six months and on the preparation for the 44th General Session, therefore a quorum of Executive Committee members is not required.

The Agenda (**Appendix 1**) was agreed.

Alf Füssel introduced Francesco Berlingieri, who will be taking over DG-SANTE's observer status in the EuFMD Committees from the end of 2021.

Item 2 - Reports of actions since extraordinary session in Oct 2020

Fabrizio Rosso, Deputy Executive Secretary, provided a report (**Appendix 2**) of the last semester, indicating that the reporting period was characterized by a continuous and increased requests for training and events delivered in virtual format due to the persistence of the Covid-19 restriction measures. The need to deliver virtual events provided an opportunity to improve the EuFMD's team capacities to adapt activities, organize online events and use new technologies (e.g. virtual reality) that could be useful for the further implementation of the work programme in the next years. He also indicated that the increased requests for assistance sent by countries and other organizations make it necessary to provide specific attention to priorities defined in the workplan in order to avoid dispersion of resources.

The smart working modality adopted since March 2020, was challenging as increased coordination was required, as well as ensuring team wellbeing, and avoiding staff feeling isolated. Health problems affected directly or indirectly the performance of some key consultants, slowing the progress of some activities (e.g. system for pre-qualification of vaccines).

The Open Session 2020 was delivered entirely online with five live sessions, with over 3.000 participants, 46 presentations and 76 posters displayed. Four workshops involving more than 100 experts were also organized in connection to the OS20 and two conferences of the GFRA are planned in March for Asia and America with EuFMD support and the use of the OS20 platform.

The v-learning platform has been upgraded with new functionalities and the possibility to host the Training Management System (a tool developed in the last months to assist monitoring the improvement of capacities of veterinarians and Veterinary Services). Numerous virtual training courses have been developed/delivered through the platform, in compliance with the current Training Quality Management System, for which an external evaluation will take place in the next month.

The Virtual Learning Centres in the SADC and RAP region continue to progress in developing skills and delivery of new courses. In this context, and considering the increased demand of v-events, FAO has proposed a dedicated project for the establishment of VLCs in five regions, requesting support to EuFMD.

Activities in support to risk assessment and forecasting continue, particularly with initiatives to improve mapping of risk areas in North Africa and the Middle East. The FMD and FAST quarterly

reports were published regularly, to inform risk managers. Activities in support to the Statement of Intention (SOI) agreement between Transcaucasia and neighbouring countries continued, with engagement of Pakistan and Iraq in the regular exchange of risk information.

A Support Unit has been suggested to the FMD Working Group, to provide secretariat assistance such as organization of meetings, monitoring plans submission, development of SOPs for communication, monitoring the website, support organization of regional events, PCP training, and PSO network.

New personnel has been recruited in order to improve the workforce dedicated to v-training and v-events. An instructional designer, a data analyst and a software engineer were recruited on short-term contracts via a collaboration with CodeOp, an international coding school for women that provided some of the profiles needed, while contributing to SDG 5 against gender disparity.

Most of the previous recommendations issued at previous Executive Committee meetings were addressed. Only a few of the priority actions identified remain partially addressed such as the training on risk analysis and international trade; the review of the model of diagnostic bank to wider Member needs and extended studies on risk for vector-borne diseases.

Discussion

Alf Füssel requested clarification on the involvement of Pakistan and Iraq in the activities delivered under Pillar II, as the two countries are core to the epidemiological situation in the region but not part of the risk reduction programme conducted in the European neighbourhood.

The deputy explained that the involvement of the two countries is related to the risk information sharing (outbreaks, vaccination, and surveillance) in the context of the SOI agreement between Transcaucasia and neighbouring countries. During the latest JPC meeting, countries mentioned the opportunity to involve Pakistan in some of the activities and particularly in the sharing of risk information. Pakistan will also participate in a virtual risk assessment and safe trade workshop in March, with the involvement of Turkey and the I.R of Iran, at no additional cost.

Keith Sumption clarified that dedicated funding has been allocated by FAO for the support requested to EuFMD in the development of VLCs in five regions.

Item 3 - FMD Global and Regional Situation

Don King, from the World Reference Laboratory, reported on the Global and Regional FMD situation (**Appendix 3**). He highlighted that sample submission was very low during 2020, dropping from an average of 400-700 sample from more than 20 countries to 202 samples from nine countries (genotyping reports were issued for Cambodia, Israel, Laos, Pakistan, Thailand, Uganda, and Vietnam) and shipments / testing in progress for isolates from DRC (not yet received), Israel, Kenya, Zambia and Nigeria. Samples received from Nigeria through Sciensano will be used for vaccine matching testing for serotype A [A/AFRICA/G-IV], in order to improve the assessment of the level of protection of vaccines included in the EU vaccine banks.

The reduced activities in the field as well as the difficulties in shipment due to Covid-19 are the main reasons for the reduced sample submission, and is a matter of concern. Discussions are ongoing with EuFMD in order to identify possibilities to increase sample submission making use of the unspent budget allocated for testing in 2020.

A new publication has been released, describing the history of serotype C, origins, historical distribution and disappearance of this serotype.

As previously reported, a different virus lineage, O/MESA/SA-2018, with 92% homology only with Indian sub-continent strains was detected in Sri Lanka. Sequence data collected by laboratories in Asia confirmed the identification of further cases of this lineage in the region (India and Sri Lanka) with the possibility that the new lineage has been established in the region.

The Pirbright Institute (TPI) agreement with Biogenesis Bago now allows to include Biogenesis vaccines in the routine vaccine matching that is undertaken by WRLFMD. Results will be included in the Pragmatist.

Some difficulties and additional costs to arrange the shipment of PT panels have been reported. A new scoring system has been established considering a) the performance of individual tests and b) the capability of laboratories based on range of tests performed in relation to: the different PCP stages or their role as FMD reference laboratory.

Discussion

Alf Füssel reported that a small quantity of FMD vaccines for serotype C has been included in the new order for the EU vaccine bank and enquired if serotype C will be considered eradicated in a few years. He also asked about vaccine matching results for the lineage detected in Sri Lanka O/MESA/SA-2018 with particular reference to the matching of vaccines available in the EU bank.

According to Don King, there is good evidence that serotype C is not circulating anymore, although there is no formal process in place to review the risk. At latest General Session of the OIE, a recommendation was issued to remove serotype C strains from vaccine production and not use it in laboratories for potency studies. At present serotype C is used in the formulation of vaccines in South America and might be still used in East Africa. Keith Sumption indicated that GfTADs should consider to look into actions towards serotype C eradication.

With regards to the vaccine matching with O/MESA/SA-2018, DK indicated that all vaccine matching results of vaccines O-3039, O-Manisa, O/TUR/5/2009 showed r-value >0.3, indicative of an antigenic match.

Francesco Berlingieri, DG-SANTE, asked if the scoring system used for the proficiency tests is public or private and how to follow up with countries with low score and was informed that reports are confidential but metrics can be public, indicating the percentage of laboratories falling in the different four categories established. Laboratories included in lower categories are followed-up by TPI with different actions, according to the availability of resources.

Neo Mapitse, OIE, mentioned the usefulness of the Virtual Learning Centres (VLC) as a repository of training material used in courses or events. He also highlighted the importance of proficiency tests with regards to annual reconfirmation of status and endorsement of official control programmes.

Don King underlined the gaps in information related to the lineage circulating in Libya (serotype A) as samples had not been received to perform genotyping tests and AF suggested to raise the issue of the lack of sampling in North Africa through the REMESA JPC meetings.

Conclusions

1. The Secretariat will aim to strengthen the collaboration with Libya to facilitate proper collection and shipment of isolates from FMD outbreaks and will bring the issue to the attention of the REMESA Secretariat, for discussion at the REMESA JPC meeting.
2. The TPI and the Secretariat will identify form of assistance to countries to improve sample

submission, in order to overcome difficulties in shipment due to the Covid-19 pandemic, especially from regions considered at highest risk or not submitting samples regularly.

Item 4 - Significant achievements of the programme

Fabrizio Rosso presented the progress made within each Pillar of the work programme. Highlights and issues for the attention of the Executive Committee members were presented (**Appendix 4**). Significant progress have been reported on the programme for improved preparedness of Member Nations (capacity building, EuFMDiS, GET Prepared, simulation exercises, diagnostic bank in the Balkans), on the risk reduction programme in the European neighbourhood (training, risk mapping, animal mobility, risk information sharing, vaccination guidance), and on the activities to sustain the global FMD control strategy (PSO system, assistance to the FMD-working group, PCP tools global surveillance, trainings, and vaccine demand modelling).

The only activity that reported some delay with respect to the workplan is the Pre-Qualification procedure for vaccines against FAST diseases. The technical Advisory Group on Pre-Qualification of Vaccines (PQTAG) prepared the 'Proposal on the Technical Requirements for Submission and Evaluation of Applications for Pre-Qualification' which was published for consultation. Unfortunately, for reasons beyond the control of the Secretariat, it was not possible to hold the planned workshop with the stakeholder to discuss and validate the proposal.

Cecile Carraz provided a summary of the administrative funds, the financial position, the Member Nations contribution report and the report of EU Funded Activities.

Item 5 - EuFMD Constitution

Martin Blake introduced the item, indicating that amendments to the Constitution are proposed in the context of the extended mandate to similar TADs given to the EuFMD at the 43rd General Session. The Rules of Procedure should be also be aligned to the new mandate and should incorporate previously proposed changes that, although endorsed by the Member Nations at the 41st General Session, had not yet been officially adopted. The intention is not to approve the new text of the Constitution at the next General Session, but to propose the amendments for information and discussion. Upon agreement of the Member Nations, an extraordinary General Session could be organized in autumn for the adoption of the amended text.

Fabrizio Rosso presented the proposed amendments to the constitution (**Appendix 5**) as discussed in a previous meeting between the Secretariat, Chair, Vice-Chairs and the FAO Legal service. Comments were received ahead of the meeting from Hendrick Roest, highlighting the need to better define the term FAST and the obligations requested for FMD compared to other Transboundary Animal Diseases.

Discussion

Hendrick Roest raised two main points related to the need to better define the other FAST diseases and to better clarify what is applicable to FMD and to other FAST diseases.

Francesco Berlingieri made the point that the extended scope to other FAST diseases could dilute the resources, impacting the prior mandate of EuFMD. Keith Sumption explained that this is mitigated by

regular controls via the Sessions and the Executive Committee meetings. The FAO legal service may be concerned by additional obligations to Members. Within the proposed text, these additional obligations are few but it is important to ensure that there are no financial implications or further obligations, and keep the changes to the minimum of what is required.

Alf Füssel suggested to better indicate and outline the other “FAST diseases” and the Executive Secretary proposed to make a reference in the constitution, indicating that the diseases will be defined according to priorities agreed at the Regular sessions, in line with the Rules of Procedure (as per amended text). This should be checked with the FAO legal services to avoid including obligations for diseases for which priorities may change.

Hendrick Roest asked to define FAST diseases in order to avoid discussion on whether a disease is FAST or not, giving Member Nations the chance to, during the Session, include priority diseases in the work programme accordingly.

Alf Füssel suggested to define criteria to include diseases in the list of FAST. Prioritization is needed for the workplan and the process can be defined under the Rules of Procedure as not all the diseases currently in the Hold FAST programme, have the same level of priorities. It was therefore suggested to have reference to the methodology for categorization in the Constitution and the criteria for listing the diseases and for their prioritization in the rules of procedure.

The Chair reminded the Committee that the justification for changes is needed to ensure progress within the FAO process. This would also ensure a better explanation of the reasons for the changes proposed to Member Nations.

Keith Sumption concluded by reminding all that it is not solely the Secretariat who needs to propose amendments and, according to the Constitution, the amendments should be proposed by a Member Nation.

It was agreed that an amended text will be circulated ahead of the 44th General Session, where it may be discussed in a first round of consultations. Comments and proposals will then be addressed in subsequent versions, with the possibility to have continued consultations if needed, and to organize an extraordinary session in autumn 2021 to adopt the amended text (the new text should be proposed to the FAO Director General and circulated 120 days before the Session). Should the Extraordinary Session not be held in person, it is relevant to ensure that the voting can be done virtually or if a letter of acceptance can be legally relevant.

The amended text of the Rules of Procedure was also revised and it was agreed to keep the Point 3 of rule XIV (nomination of new member of the Executive Committee in case of permanent unavailability of a member) and to propose including the possibility of holding virtual meetings and sessions only if and when, the same possibility is contemplated under the RoP of the FAO.

Conclusions

3. The Secretariat will amend the text of the Constitution and Rules of Procedure to address the points raised during the discussion with regards to the criteria for the inclusion of diseases in the list of FAST diseases, the procedures to prioritize FAST diseases and the obligations for FMD and similar TADs respectively.
4. The amended text will be circulated among the Executive Committee members and shared with the FAO Legal Service. The proposed amendments will be then circulated among the Member Nations in order to facilitate the first round of consultation during the 44th General Session. Following the consultation, further amendments will be circulated before a possible Extraordinary Session that can be organized in autumn, to adopt the amended text.
5. The Secretariat will check with the FAO Legal Service, if a written procedure to accept the amended constitution can be considered should a physical meeting not be held in autumn.

Item 6 - Agenda General Session 2021- technical items

Fabrizio Rosso presented a draft agenda for the virtual 44th General Session, which is proposed to be organized over three afternoons, as indicated by Chair and Vice-chairs in a previous meeting, with five technical items and other items for information proposed in the first two days and items for decision proposed in the third day (**Appendix 4**).

He indicated that members of the Standing and Special Committees expressed interest in continuing their activity and that two new members from Israel and Turkey will be proposed for the Special Committee on Biorisk Management in order to address the need to update biorisk minimum standards for Tier A and B laboratories in endemic countries. A new Standing Committee on vaccine Pre-Qualification system is also proposed, with the aim to formally adopt guidance documents and procedures on the PQ system proposed by the Technical Advisory group, endorse procedures by which vaccines are evaluated and by which the evaluation team makes recommendations, and endorse inclusion in the list of PQ vaccines.

Discussion

Considering that the session will be held virtually, Keith Sumption proposed to reduce its length keeping the focus on the essential part (decision items and elections) with technical items for information to be provided in writing only. Nadia Rumich informed that the invitations were already sent through the official protocol within the timeframe indicated in the Constitution (50 days ahead of the Session), with an agenda over three half-days. Therefore, the suggestion was to keep the three days focusing the first day on items for information and the following two days on decision items or essential information linked with decisions (e.g. Pre-qualification system and proposal to establish a Standing technical committee on Pre-qualification).

Keith Sumption highlighted the importance of creating the Committee on Pre-qualification and the need to identify suitable qualify candidates that can be proposed as members. He suggested to work with EMA and D. Mackay for definition of profile of members and identify them from Member Nations

ahead of the General Session.

Neo Mapitse requested clarification on how the Minimum Biorisk Management Standards for laboratory containment are managed in the context of the Standards on biosafety and biosecurity established by OIE. He was told that the OIE Standards give a set of principles whereas the MBRMS provide a set of checklists that enable countries to implement them according to the OIE principles and to assess if such standards are applied. There has never been a conflict with the OIE Standards and the reference to MBRMS has been included for a long time in the Directive 2003/85/EC.

Conclusions

6. The General Session will be carried out over three half-days with the first day proposed as pre-session focused on items for information only and optional attendance. The following two days will be instead focused on items for decisions or item for essential information linked with decisions.
7. The proposal for establishment of a Standing Technical Committee on Pre-qualification for vaccines has been agreed and will be proposed at the Session. The Secretariat will prepare the Terms of Reference and define the profile of experts of Member Nations to be proposed as Member of the Committee.

Item 7 - Election Executive committee and Special Committees

Martin Blake introduced the item indicating that elections of the Executive Committee regularly take place at General Sessions and agreement was normally achieved through informal discussions among representative of Member Nations. As these informal conversations will not be possible in a virtual format, a secret ballot may be needed. This does lead to potential concern on how to ensure the geographical representative groupings are properly kept.

Keith Sumption asked if a change is needed, considering that the General Session will be held virtually and there is the need to suspend the Rules of Procedure of the FAO (as all Members are not in the same place) in order to have elections carried out virtually. The election can be probably proposed in autumn at the extraordinary Session or at the next physical session. If there is a quorum of elected Members, there is not a strong case to have the election at the next virtual session.

The Chair considered the Brexit topic and therefore the UK might be included in seats of Executive Committee normally taken by non-EU countries. Keith Sumption explained that the representative of non-EU countries were traditionally grouped in clusters as Balkan countries and South East Europe (Tukey, Georgia), which are two areas of specific interest for the Europe. All other geographical representation can remain the same, with UK part of the same geographical group. Members could revise the geographical representation considering all free countries generally represent their interest based on their trading in international market rather than geographic position.

The Chair could take ad interim the position until new elections, without the need to suspend the RoP at the next regular session, but this needs to be confirmed by the FAO Legal Service.

Conclusions

8. The Secretariat will check if the Chair and current Executive Committee members may take ad interim their positions until new elections are carried out in a physical meeting or virtually, should new Rules of Procedure of FAO allow virtual elections, or else if elections have to be done at the next Session, suspending the current Rules of Procedure.

Martin Blake closed the meeting acknowledging the work done by the Secretariat in the past semester in the three pillars, with particular reference to the Open Session.



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Hold-FAST tools

GET PREPARED, V-learning, FMD-PCP, EuFMDiS, Pragmatist, Impact Risk Calculator, Virtual Learning Center, SMS Disease reporting, Global Vaccine Security, Outbreak Investigation app, PCP-Support Officers, PCP Self-Evaluation tool, AESOP, Telegram, Global Monthly Reports, Real Time Training.

EuFMD Committees

Executive Committee, Standing Technical Committee, Special Committee for Surveillance and Applied Research (SCSAR), Special Committee on Biorisk Management (SCBRM), Tripartite Groups.

