

DISCLAIMER

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Self-declaration of the recovery of freedom from infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses (HPAI) in poultry in Finland

Declaration sent to the OIE on 12 May 2021 by Dr Taina Aaltonen, OIE Delegate for Finland, Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland.

Introduction

In accordance with the OIE procedure for publication of self-declaration of freedom from a disease and Chapter 1.6. of the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code)*, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is submitting the following documentation for publication by the OIE, attesting that Finland has regained disease freedom status from *infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses (HPAI)* for the entire territory of Finland from 12 May 2021 in accordance with Article 10.4.6. of the *Terrestrial Code on infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses* after a single outbreak of HPAI was confirmed in a game bird farm on 10 February 2021.

Evidence that Avian Influenza is a notifiable disease in Finland

HPAI was a notifiable disease in Finland in accordance with the [Animal Disease Act \(441/2013\)](#)¹ and the [Decree of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry 1010/2013](#)¹ until 20 April 2021. Since 21 April 2021, avian influenza is a notifiable disease in accordance with the [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/429](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council [and the Animal Disease Act 76/2021](#)¹. HPAI had never been detected in poultry in Finland before 2021². Vaccination against avian influenza is prohibited in Finland.

¹ Available only in Finnish.

² In 2016 infection with influenza A viruses of high pathogenicity in birds other than poultry including wild birds was not yet listed by the OIE and the outbreaks in wild birds and captive birds were notified as HPAI.

According to the statistics database of the Natural Resources Institute Finland, there were 1201 poultry farms in Finland in 2020 and the number of poultry was 13,576,880.

All animal keepers and holdings of poultry, pigeons and peacocks must be registered on a central holding data base, regardless of the number of birds ([Decree of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry 867/2010](#)). Hatcheries must be registered with the Finnish Food Authority.

Control measures for HPAI in poultry and other captive birds are laid down in the following European Union legislation and national legislation in Finland:

Until 20 April 2021

- [Council Directive 2005/94/EC](#)
- [Animal Disease Act 441/2013](#)
- [Decree of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry 15/14](#)

Since 21 April 2021

- [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and of The Council](#)
- [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/687](#)
- [Animal Disease Act 76/2021](#)

Control measures implemented in case of an outbreak in poultry are in accordance with the Chapter 10.4. of the OIE *Terrestrial Code*:

- All suspected cases of avian influenza are investigated immediately by the veterinary authorities.
- All poultry in infected holding are culled and the carcasses are disposed of.
- Cleaning and disinfection after the culling.
- An epidemiological investigation is conducted, and all contacts are traced and investigated.
- A protection zone of at least 3 km radius and a surveillance zone of at least 10 km radius are established

Control measures for HPAI outbreaks

A single outbreak of HPAI subtype H5N8 was confirmed in farmed pheasants in one farm in Janakkala in the South of Finland on 10 February 2021.

The farm had released pheasants for hunting in the summer 2020 and those pheasants were being fed in the vicinity of the farm. In mid-January, the owner noticed that several wild pheasants that were released earlier had died, and five carcasses were sent to the national reference laboratory (the Finnish Food Authority) in Helsinki for testing for HPAI. The result came out as positive and the outbreak was confirmed as infection with highly pathogenic influenza A virus subtype H5N8 in wild birds on 21 January 2021. A secondary case of highly pathogenic influenza A virus subtype H5N8 in the same population of wild pheasants was notified on 5 February 2021. Most of those wild pheasants in the vicinity of the farm have been shot by the farm owner later during January and February 2021 as the wild population had turned out to be infected.

In the farm, there were breeding pheasants kept in captivity, which according to the *Terrestrial Code* are considered as poultry. The farm was placed under restrictions due to infection with highly pathogenic influenza A virus in wild birds on 20 January 2021 and measures were taken to protect the farmed birds from wild birds. Samples from the same farm tested negative for avian influenza on 21 January and on 2 February. However, on 8 February 2021, increased mortality in the farmed pheasants were reported and samples tested

positive to HPAI subtype H5N8 on 10 February 2021. HPAI outbreak in poultry was reported to the OIE via WAHIS on 10 February 2021.

Altogether, there were 1335 captive pheasants on the farm, of which, 107 died. The pheasants were kept in three separate units and mortality was reported only from one of the units. All the captive pheasants on the holding were culled and the carcasses were disposed of. Disinfection was carried out on 12 February 2021.

The origin of the disease in the area was probably other wild birds. Epidemiological investigations of the infected holding identified no contact holdings.

A protection zone of 3 km radius and a surveillance zone of 10 km radius were established on 10 February 2021. There were no other poultry holdings in the protection zone and 40 establishments with hobby birds in the surveillance zone. The Regional State Administrative Agency informed all the holdings located in the surveillance zone about the establishment of the zone. There have been no suspicions of AI on the hobby bird holdings.

Maps on the protection and surveillance zones in Janakkala, Loppi and Hämeenlinna municipalities are in figure 1 and 2. The single outbreak in farmed pheasants confirmed on 10 February is located in the centre of the protection zone.

The measures in the restriction zone were in accordance with the above-mentioned legislation and included for example a ban on transport of poultry and other captive birds, eggs, meat and manure, enhanced biosecurity measures in poultry and other captive bird holdings and requirements for cleaning and disinfection.

As there were no further outbreaks of HPAI detected in the restriction zone, the measures were lifted on 15 March 2021.

Awareness campaign and risk mitigation measures

Information of the epidemiological situation related to avian influenza and recommendations and guidance to keepers of poultry and other captive birds, hunters, veterinarians and general public have been published on the websites of the Finnish Food Authority and shared via social media and press releases. Information has also been sent by e-mails to official veterinarians and poultry organisations and other stakeholders. Several meetings of the avian influenza expert group have been held.

The keeping of poultry and other captive birds in open air was prohibited from 8 February to 31 May 2021, unless the birds were protected against contact with wild birds with nets and roofs. The prohibition did not apply to zoos, racing pigeons and ratites. Requirements are in force in the whole country of Finland. The gathering of poultry and other captive birds at shows, exhibitions, competitions and other similar events is prohibited from 8 February to 31 May 2021.

Figure 1. Map showing the single outbreak in farmed pheasants

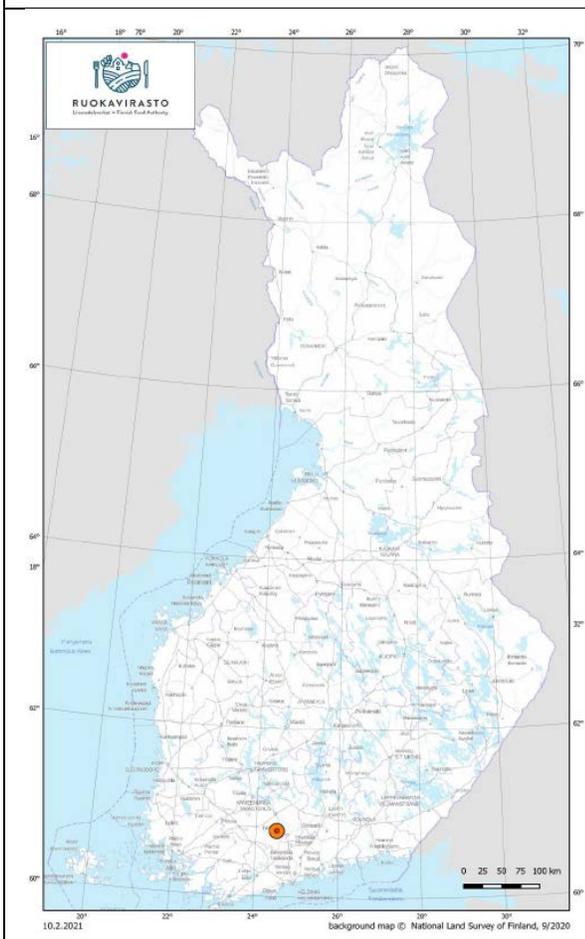
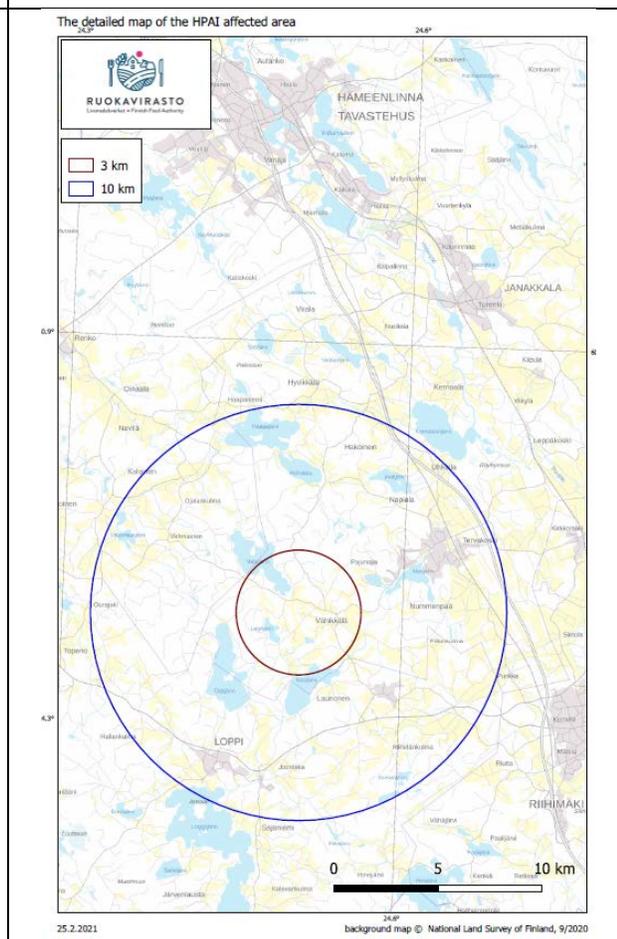


Figure 2. A map on the protection and surveillance zones



The following requirements have been in force in the whole country (Decrees of Ministry of Agriculture [814/2017](#) and [369/2021](#)):

- The supply of feed and drinking water for poultry shall be arranged indoors or in a place where wild waterfowl or raptors cannot reach.
- Where water reservoirs necessary for the welfare of poultry are in place at the site, the entry of wild waterfowl and raptors shall be prevented.
- Water to poultry shall not originate in surface waters from a place where there is a large number of wild waterfowl, unless before administration to poultry, the water is heated or disinfected in such a way that possible avian influenza virus is destroyed in treatment.
- The feed for poultry shall be stored protected from wild birds and other animals.

Import of poultry and poultry products

All imports and intra-Community trade of poultry, poultry products and hatching eggs are subject to veterinary certification and controls in accordance with the EU legislation and in accordance with the requirements of the Chapter 10.4. of the OIE *Terrestrial Code*. When poultry and other birds, hatching eggs, poultry meat, table eggs and products thereof are imported from non-EU-countries, consignments must be accompanied by an

animal health certificate. The animal health rules for import and controls of imports are laid down by the legislation, listed in the Annex 2.

Introduction of live poultry or hatching eggs from the EU Member States

When poultry and hatching eggs are moved between EU Member States, consignments must be accompanied by an animal health certificate. Until 20.4.2021, the rules for movements were laid down by Directive 2009/158/EC, which had been implemented in Finland by [MAF Decree 1036/2013](#). New legislation, Regulation (EU) 2016/429 (“Animal Health Law”), entered into force on 21.4.2021 and is directly applicable in all EU Member States. In the case of health certificates, the transitional period shall run until 17.10.2021, until which date health certificates complying with the old legislation shall be used.

Movements of poultry and hatching eggs between EU Member States shall comply with the requirements set out in Chapter 8 of part II of [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/688](#) supplementing Regulation (EU) 2016/429. The consignments must come from approved establishments where disease monitoring is carried out. Moreover, general requirements regarding means of transport and containers in which animals and hatching eggs are transported are set out in Chapter 1 of part II of the same regulation. The animal health requirements, the certificate accompanying the transport and the requirements for transport containers comply with Chapter 10.4. of the OIE *Terrestrial Code*.

Surveillance and early warning system for HPAI in Finland

HPAI surveillance is carried out in accordance with Chapter 1.4. on Animal Health Surveillance and Articles 10.4.26. to 10.4.30. of the *Terrestrial Code*.

Any suspicion of HPAI must be reported to the veterinary authority without delay. In addition, any major disease event or mass death among animals or any essential change in the behaviour or productivity of animals that may indicate the occurrence of HPAI, must be reported. All suspected cases of avian influenza are investigated immediately by the veterinary authorities. When an official veterinarian inspects a holding where an outbreak is suspected, the following measures are carried out: a check of the production and health records of the holding, a clinical inspection of the birds and sampling in accordance with the guidance of the European Union Reference Laboratory for Avian Influenza and Newcastle Disease: Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie (IZSve), Padua, Italy. The testing of samples is carried out at the National Reference Laboratory for AI (the Finnish Food Authority).

The Finnish Food Authority draws up an annual plan of surveillance programmes for animal diseases. HPAI surveillance programme is carried out in accordance with the [Commission Decision 2010/367/EU](#) on the implementation by Member States of surveillance programmes for HPAI in poultry and wild birds as explained below.

Surveillance programme in poultry

Sampling and serological testing in poultry holdings is carried out in order to detect the presence of H5 and H7 antibodies to avian influenza. Sampling of the following poultry species and production categories are included in the surveillance programme in Finland: chicken (*Gallus gallus*) breeders, laying hens, organic and free-range laying hens, organic broilers, turkey breeders, fattening turkeys, ducks, geese, farmed game birds (pheasants and mallards) and ratites. The samples can be taken either at the farm or at the slaughterhouse. When sampling is done on the farms, the municipal veterinary officers are responsible for sampling. At the slaughterhouses, the official veterinarians employed by the Finnish Food Authority are responsible for sampling. For each poultry production category, except those of ducks, geese and mallards, the number of poultry holdings to be sampled is defined to ensure the identification of at least one infected poultry holding

where the prevalence of infected poultry holdings is at least 5 %, with a 95 % confidence interval. The number of ducks, goose and mallard holdings to be sampled is defined to ensure the identification of at least one infected poultry holding where the prevalence of infected poultry holdings is at least 5 %, with a 99 % confidence interval. Blood samples for serological examination are collected from at least 10 birds (except ducks, geese and mallards) per poultry holding, and in case of several sheds, samples are taken from at least five birds per shed. In ducks, geese and mallard holdings, twenty blood samples are taken for serological testing from each selected poultry holding. Sampling covers the whole of Finland.

The testing of samples is carried out at the Finnish Food Authority. The samples are examined by haemagglutination-inhibition (HI) test for H5- and H7- subtypes. Samples of ducks, geese and mallards are tested also with an additional third antigen H5N8 as recommended by the European Commission. The HI test is used as a screening test. All positive serological findings are followed up at the poultry holding by epidemiological investigations and further sampling for testing by virological methods in order to determine, if active infection of avian influenza virus is present on the poultry holding. Samples are tested with M-gene RT-PCR. In case of a positive finding H5- and H7-RT-PCRs and subsequent sequence analysis of the cleavage site are undertaken. Virus isolation may be needed in some cases.

In 2020, a total of 1719 samples were examined from a total of 162 poultry holdings. Holdings sampled were: 33 chicken breeders, 1 mallard holding, 7 pheasant holdings, 35 free range laying hen holdings, 38 laying hen holdings, 5 turkey breeders, 38 fattening turkey holdings, 2 ostrich holdings, 2 organic broiler holdings and 1 goose holding. One poultry holding was positive for H5 antibodies, but no virus was detected.

Surveillance in 2021

Active surveillance in poultry holdings has been carried out in 2021 as described above. Between 1 January and 12 May 2021, a total of 443 samples have been examined from a total of 43 poultry holdings. All results have been negative. None of them were epidemiologically linked with the outbreak of captive pheasants.

In addition to serological surveillance, all suspected cases of HPAI have been investigated by the veterinary authorities. No further HPAI outbreaks have been detected.

Epidemiological investigations of the infected holding identified no epidemiologically linked holdings. There were no other poultry holdings in the protection zone of 3 km radius. Within the surveillance zone, there were only small hobby bird farms. No commercial poultry farms were located within these zones. There have been no suspicions of avian influenza in the hobby farms located in the surveillance zone. Inspections and sampling of the birds on the hobby bird holdings would have been conducted in case there would have been a suspicion of avian influenza.

Surveillance programme in wild birds

Surveillance for HPAI in wild bird is implemented as a passive surveillance system by laboratory investigation of moribund wild birds or birds found dead. Surveillance is specifically directed towards target species listed by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Cloacal and tracheal/oropharyngeal swabs and/or tissues from wild birds are taken for molecular detection (PCR) and/or virus isolation. The virological surveillance in wild birds is carried out individually by M-gene RT-PCR. Two M-gene RT-PCR tests are done for each wild bird. In case of a positive finding H5- and H7-RT-PCRs and subsequent sequence analysis of the cleavage site are undertaken. Virus isolation may be needed in some cases.

The laboratory responsible for the testing is the Finnish Food Authority.

The number of wild birds tested in Finland in 2020 was 222. HPAI was not detected. Non-H5/H7 avian influenza virus was detected in three wild birds which were found in two locations.

In 2021, a total of 172 wild birds have been examined between 1 January and 12 May 2021. In 2021, a total of 15 outbreaks of highly pathogenic influenza A virus in wild birds have been detected in Finland. So far highly pathogenic influenza A virus has been detected in the following species: pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*), mute swan (*Cygnus olor*), northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), mallard (*Arias platyrhynchos*), Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*), whooper swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) and common gull (*Larus canus*). The virus detected has been highly pathogenic influenza A virus subtype H5N8 in 11 outbreaks and highly pathogenic influenza A virus H5 in 4 outbreaks. Most of the outbreaks have been detected in Southern Finland in the coastal area.

Conclusions

Considering that:

- Avian influenza is a notifiable disease in Finland;
- Stamping-out policy was applied to the single HPAI outbreak in poultry and completed on 12 February 2021;
- Prior to the HPAI outbreak in captive farmed pheasants HPAI had never been detected in poultry in Finland²;
- Surveillance has been carried out in accordance with Articles 10.4.26. to 10.4.30 of the *Terrestrial Code*;
- Ongoing avian influenza awareness programme and national rules for biosecurity measures have been in place;

The OIE Delegate of Finland declares that the country complies with the requirements to declare freedom from infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza viruses in poultry as of 12 May 2021, in accordance with Chapters 1.4. and 1.6. and Article 10.4.6. of the OIE *Terrestrial Code* (2021 edition) and consistent with the information provided to the OIE-WAHIS.

Annex 1

I, the undersigned, Taina Aaltonen, Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the Delegate of Finland

to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), takes responsibility for the self-declaration of freedom from Highly pathogenic avian influenza

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Drawn up on 12/5/2021.

Signature of the Delegate:



Annex 2

- [Council Directive 2009/158/EC](#) of 30 November 2009 on animal health conditions governing intra-Community trade in, and imports from third countries of, poultry and hatching eggs
- [Commission Regulation \(EC\) No 798/2008](#) laying down a list of third countries, territories, zones or compartments from which poultry and poultry products may be imported into and transit through the Community and the veterinary certification requirements
- [Commission Regulation \(EC\) No 318/2007](#) laying down animal health conditions for imports of certain birds into the Community and the quarantine conditions thereof
- [Commission Decision 2007/25/EC](#) as regards certain protection measures in relation to highly pathogenic avian influenza and movements of pet birds accompanying their owners into the Community
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1069/2009](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 October 2009 laying down health rules as regards animal by-products and derived products not intended for human consumption and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1774/2002 (Animal by-products Regulation)
- [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No 142/2011](#) of 25 February 2011 implementing Regulation (EC) No 1069/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down health rules as regards animal by-products and derived products not intended for human consumption and implementing Council Directive 97/78/EC as regards certain samples and items exempt from veterinary checks at the border under that

The Directive and Commission Decision were implemented in Finland by [MAF Decree 867/2008](#), the Regulations were directly applicable.

New legislation, [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/429](#) (“Animal Health Law”), entered into force on 12 April 2021 and is directly applicable in all EU Member States. In the case of health certificates, the transitional period shall run until 17 October 2021, until which date health certificates complying with the old legislation may be used.

By the new legislation, the following pieces of legislation which were mentioned above were repealed: Council [Directive 2009/158/EC](#), [Commission Regulation \(EC\) No 798/2008](#) and [Commission Regulation \(EC\) No 318/2007](#). [Commission Decision 2007/25/EC](#), [Regulation \(EC\) No 1069/2009](#) and [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No 142/2011](#) are still in force. On the basis of Regulation (EU) 2016/429 the following pieces of new legislation has been laid down in relation to import of poultry and other birds, hatching eggs, poultry meat, table eggs and products thereof from non-EU-countries:

- [Commission Delegated Regulation \(EU\) 2020/692](#) of 30 January 2020 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards rules for entry into the Union, and the movement and handling after entry of consignments of certain animals, germinal products and products of animal origin
 - o Part II, Title 3, Articles 36-62: Animal health requirements for poultry and captive birds
 - o Part III, Title 2, Articles 98-116: Animal health requirements for hatching eggs of poultry and captive birds

- Part IV, Articles 120-128, 140-151, 158-161: Animal health requirements for products of animal origin incl. fresh poultry meat, fresh meat of game birds, meat products, eggs and egg products
- [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2021/404](#) of 24 March 2021 laying down the lists of third countries, territories or zones thereof from which the entry into the Union of animals, germinal products and products of animal origin is permitted in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/429 of the European Parliament and the Council
- [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2020/2235](#) of 16 December 2020 laying down rules for the application of Regulations (EU) 2016/429 and (EU) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards model animal health certificates, model official certificates and model animal health/official certificates, for the entry into the Union and movements within the Union of consignments of certain categories of animals and goods, official certification regarding such certificates and repealing Regulation (EC) No 599/2004, Implementing Regulations (EU) No 636/2014 and (EU) 2019/628, Directive 98/68/EC and Decisions 2000/572/EC, 2003/779/EC and 2007/240/EC
- [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2021/403](#) of 24 March 2021 laying down rules for the application of Regulations (EU) 2016/429 and (EU) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards model animal health certificates and model animal health/official certificates, for the entry into the Union and movements between Member States of consignments of certain categories of terrestrial animals and germinal products thereof, official certification regarding such certificates and repealing Decision 2010/470/EU

Controls of poultry and other birds, hatching eggs, poultry meat, table eggs and products imported thereof from non-EU-countries are carried out in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2017/625 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on official controls and other official activities performed to ensure the application of food and feed law, rules on animal health and welfare, plant health and plant protection products, amending Regulations (EC) No 999/2001, (EC) No 396/2005, (EC) No 1069/2009, (EC) No 1107/2009, (EU) No 1151/2012, (EU) No 652/2014, (EU) 2016/429 and (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Regulations (EC) No 1/2005 and (EC) No 1099/2009 and Council Directives 98/58/EC, 1999/74/EC, 2007/43/EC, 2008/119/EC and 2008/120/EC, and repealing Regulations (EC) No 854/2004 and (EC) No 882/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Directives 89/608/EEC, 89/662/EEC, 90/425/EEC, 91/496/EEC, 96/23/EC, 96/93/EC and 97/78/EC and Council Decision 92/438/EEC (Official Controls Regulation). The import control system applied to live animals and animal products has been implemented by the [Act on Import Controls of Animals and Certain Goods 1277/2019](#).