

**REPORT OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE OIE AD HOC GROUP ON THE EVALUATION
OF AFRICAN HORSE SICKNESS (AHS) STATUS OF MEMBERS
5 - 7 October 2021**

A virtual meeting of the OIE *ad hoc* Group on the Evaluation of African Horse Sickness (AHS) Status of Members (hereafter the Group) was held from 5 to 7 October 2021.

1. Opening

Dr Montserrat Arroyo, Deputy Director General for International Standards and Science of the OIE, welcomed and thanked the Group for its commitment and the extensive support towards the OIE mandates. She extended her appreciation to the institutions that kindly allowed the experts to participate in the meeting. She highlighted that the official recognition of animal health status was an important activity for the OIE and acknowledged the amount of work before, during and after the *ad hoc* Group meeting in reviewing the dossiers and documenting the Group's assessment in the report.

Dr Arroyo reminded the Group of the confidentiality of the dossiers received for official recognition and thanked the experts for abiding by the undertaking of confidentiality. She mentioned that the OIE has recently updated the confidentiality agreement forms and kindly asked the experts to submit the updated forms. She underlined the OIE procedures for protecting the confidentiality of information and for declaring potential conflicts of interest; the experts would withdraw themselves from the discussion and conclusion in case of a potential conflict of interest.

Dr Arroyo also highlighted the importance of the quality of the report which would be scrutinised by Members before the proposal of the list of Members free from AHS to be adopted by the World Assembly. She also encouraged the Group to provide detailed feedback to Members with a negative outcome to support them in identifying the main gaps and points for improvement, as well as providing informative recommendations to those Members with positive outcomes for further improvement in maintenance of their AHS free status.

2. Adoption of the agenda and appointment of chairperson and rapporteur

The Group was chaired by Dr Beverley Parker and Dr James MacLachlan acted as rapporteur, with the support of the OIE Secretariat. The Group endorsed the proposed agenda.

The terms of reference, agenda and list of participants are presented as Appendices I, II, and III, respectively.

3. Evaluation of applications from Members for official recognition of AHS free status

a) Bahrain

In August 2021, Bahrain submitted a dossier for the official recognition of its AHS free status based on historical grounds. The Group requested additional information and received clarifications from Bahrain.

i) Animal disease reporting

The Group acknowledged that Bahrain has a record of regular and prompt animal disease reporting and that AHS is a notifiable disease for at least the past ten years.

ii) *Veterinary Services*

The Group acknowledged that Bahrain had relevant legislation in place with regard to AHS. The Group also acknowledged that equestrian sport, especially endurance and racing, is an essential part of the country's heritage and is supported by many members of the royal families and the horse industry. Bahrain described that the Horse Welfare Affaire provides and operates the equine services in the country. Furthermore, an emergency Equine Disease Control Committee trains veterinarians on reporting equine diseases including AHS as part of continuing professional development. Bahrain also described the responsibilities of private veterinarians in notifying AHS as well as in contingency planning activities in emergency situations. The Horse Welfare Affaire, in coordination with the Animal Wealth Resources in Bahrain, publishes and distributes updated awareness material on horse diseases, including on AHS, based on the publicly available reports and information provided by the OIE. Whilst the Group noted the distribution of information on horse diseases by Bahrain, the Group encouraged Bahrain to develop AHS and equine infectious disease related educational materials that are locally significant and continue to conduct training sessions for all veterinarians and veterinary paraprofessionals to enhance the early detection and diagnosis of the disease.

The Group considered that the Horse Welfare Affaire in Bahrain had current knowledge of, and authority over equids in the country.

iii) *Situation of AHS in the past 24 months*

The Group noted that AHS has never been reported in the country and that this is consistent with the information in OIE-World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS) and in the public domain.

iv) *Absence of systematic vaccination in the past 12 months:*

The Group noted that systematic vaccination against AHS was never carried out in the country and acknowledged the regulatory framework on the prohibition of AHS vaccination.

v) *Importation of equids and their semen, oocytes or embryos in accordance with Articles 12.1.6. to 12.1.9.*

The Group took note that all imported equids are kept in isolation in vector-protected facilities at the Equine Veterinary Quarantine and under official veterinary supervision. Horses in isolation are allocated specific time slots for training without coming into contact with local equids. The Group noted that Kingdom of Bahrain Horse Welfare Authority Order No (1) of 2021 lists the countries Bahrain may import horses from and the list includes two countries of undetermined AHS status. Import conditions from these two countries include a minimum 30-day pre-export quarantine with AHS testing as well as post arrival quarantine and testing. The Group encouraged Bahrain to pay particular attention to ensuring import conditions for equids from countries of undetermined AHS status is in strict compliance with Article 12.1.7. of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code)*.

The Group noted that Bahrain does not import equine oocytes or embryos and the importation of equine semen is only permitted from countries officially recognised free from AHS by the OIE.

The Group noted a discrepancy between a statement in Bahrain's dossier that import of vaccinated horses against AHS into Bahrain is not allowed, and the additional information provided by Bahrain regarding seropositive equids which were investigated, and it was concluded that they were previously vaccinated horses imported into Bahrain. The Group strongly encouraged reconciling the underlying legislation with current import practices.

The Group agreed that the regulations in place for importation of equids and equine semen are compliant with Articles 12.1.6. and 12.1.8. of the *Terrestrial Code*.

vi) *Surveillance if adjacent to an AHS infected country or zone if relevant*

The Group acknowledged that Bahrain does not share land borders with any other country, and that there is a border inspection post at King Fahad Causeway that links Bahrain to Saudi Arabia.

vii) *Surveillance in accordance with Articles 12.1.11. to 12.1.13.*

The Group noted that passive clinical surveillance was in place, and serological surveillance is only carried out on horses prior to exportation. Bahrain described that between 300-400 samples are tested annually for export purposes using an enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) test performed at the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory (CVRL), in United Arab Emirates. A small percentage of animals tested positive, all of which up to now have been described as having a history of previous vaccination.

The Group noted the relatively small population of equids in Bahrain (approximately 5,000 equids) and the absence of wild equids (except for a very small number of captive wild equids). Bahrain stated that identification and registration of all equids are mandatory by law. Bahrain indicated that the Animal Wealth Resources monitors private veterinary clinics and hospitals, and the Horse Welfare Affaire inspects the stables periodically.

The Group acknowledged that the majority of horses and properties are registered, and horses are individually identified with microchips and passports.

viii) *Regulatory measures for the prevention and early detection and control of AHS*

Regarding the prevention of AHS introduction, a regulatory framework was in place and no illegal import of equids was reported in Bahrain.

Considering the naïve equid population, and identification of all horses in Bahrain, the Group considered that introduction of AHS would be easily and promptly detected by the authorities and prompt actions for follow-up could be undertaken.

ix) *Compliance with the questionnaire in Article 1.7.1*

The Group agreed that Bahrain's dossier was compliant with the questionnaire in Article 1.7.1. of the *Terrestrial Code*.

Conclusion

Considering the information submitted in the dossier and the answers received from Bahrain to the questions raised, the Group concluded that the application was compliant with the requirements of Chapter 12.1., as well as with Article 1.4.6. and the questionnaire in Article 1.7.1. of the *Terrestrial Code*. Therefore, the Group recommended the official recognition of Bahrain as a country free from AHS.

The Group would draw the attention of Bahrain to the following recommendations and to provide updates when Bahrain reconfirms its AHS free status in 2022:

- Whilst the Group commended the transparency of Bahrain in providing information on the sero-reactors and interpretation of the source, it noted the discrepancy with Bahrain's statement under item 9. b) of the core dossier stating that import of vaccinated horses against AHS into Bahrain is not allowed. In this regard, the Group strongly encouraged reconciling the underlying legislation with current import practices and subsequently informing the OIE of the actions taken.
- The Group encouraged Bahrain to develop AHS educational material that is locally relevant and conduct training sessions for all veterinarians and veterinary paraprofessionals to enhance the early detection and diagnosis of the disease.

Please also consider the following recommendations based on the assessment of the information provided:

- The Group took note that imported horses are sprayed with an approved insect repellent prior to leaving and re-entering the quarantine station. The Group highlighted the fact that the chemical substance used

does not have repellent properties against *Culicoides* vectors and advised Bahrain to reconsider the selection of adequate repellent for use.

- The Group encouraged Bahrain to include horses other than those destined for trade purposes, as part of the surveillance programme, e.g., a suspect case where a horse with a fever was investigated.
- The Group recommended using the appropriate serological tests (e.g., virus neutralisation test-VNT) for ensuring the absence of an increased in antibody titre in a paired test as recommended by Chapter 3.6.1 of the *Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines for Terrestrial Animals (Terrestrial Manual)*.
- The Group recommended Bahrain to amend relevant plans and policy documents specifying that tissue sampling for AHS diagnosis should include samples from lung, spleen, and lymph nodes.

b) Other applications

The Group assessed two other requests from Members for the official recognition of AHS free status. The Group concluded that the applications did not meet the requirements of the *Terrestrial Code*.

4. Adoption of report

The Group reviewed the draft report and agreed to circulate it electronically for comments before the final adoption. Upon circulation, the Group agreed that the report captured the discussions.

Appendix I**VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE OIE AD HOC GROUP ON THE EVALUATION
OF AFRICAN HORSE SICKNESS (AHS) STATUS OF MEMBERS**

5 - 7 October 2021

TERMS OF REFERENCE**Purpose**

The purpose of the *ad hoc* Group on the evaluation of African Horse Sickness (AHS) of Members is to evaluate applications for official recognition of AHS free status of Members.

Background

In accordance with the [OIE procedure for official recognition of animal health status](#), OIE Members can be officially recognised by the OIE as having a AHS free status through the adoption of a resolution by the World Assembly of Delegates of the OIE (the Assembly) in May every year. A Member wishing to apply for the official recognition of its AHS free status should complete and submit the [questionnaire](#) laid out in Chapter 1.7 of the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code)* and comply with all requirements specified in the *Terrestrial Code*. The OIE Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases ([Scientific Commission](#)) is responsible for undertaking, on behalf of the Assembly, the assessment of OIE Members' applications for their compliance with OIE standards. The assessment carried out by the Scientific Commission is based on the recommendations formulated by a relevant *ad hoc* Group. *Ad hoc* groups are convened under the authority of and report to the OIE Director General.

Specific issues to be addressed

The Group will evaluate Members' applications in detail on their compliance with the requirements specified in the *Terrestrial Code* for AHS. Based on the evaluations, the Group will provide its conclusions and recommendations to the Scientific Commission.

Prerequisites

The Group members should:

- Sign the OIE Undertaking on Confidentiality of information (if not done already);
- Complete the Declaration of Interest Form;
- Understand that the membership of the Group may be retained between its meetings to ensure continuity of the work.

Actions to deliverBefore the meeting

Upon reception of an application from a Member, the Status Department (SD) conducts a preliminary screening to check the conformity of the dossier (structure of the dossier in accordance with the SOP and with the questionnaire under Chapter 1.7 of the *Terrestrial Code*, main sections of the questionnaire, regular notification to the OIE, payment of the fee, OIE Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) report, etc.). If an information gap is identified, the SD requests additional information from the Member.

As the PVS reports are bound by the OIE rules on confidentiality of information, the SD and experts will consider for the evaluation the available PVS report(s) if not obsolete (PVS reports from more than five years ago) or confidential.

The SD will send the working documents to the Group, including the dossiers received from applicant Members, at least one month before the Group meeting (i.e., **03 September 2021**).

The experts can request support from the SD at any time.

The SD suggests the nomination of a Chair and Rapporteur for the Group's consideration.

The SD can suggest a preparatory meeting with the Chair, the Rapporteur or all experts to address specific points in advance, if needed.

The experts are expected to:

- Be familiar with Chapters [1.7](#) and [12.1](#) of the *Terrestrial Code*;
- Evaluate and study in detail all dossiers provided by the OIE;
- Take into account any other information available in the public domain that is considered pertinent for the evaluation of the dossiers;
- Summarise the dossiers according to the *Terrestrial Code* requirements by completing the summary tables provided by the SD (the summary tables will be provided at a later stage along with the working documents for the meeting). Experts are expected to capture and summarise in each corresponding section of the summary table the main gaps as well as strengths identified during the assessment of the dossiers, using extracted texts or reference to pages/annexes from the application;
- Draft questions to the applicant Members whenever the analysis of the dossiers identifies incomplete or unclear information;
- Submit to the SD the completed summary tables for each application together with possible questions for the applicant Members at least 10 days before the teleconference and preferably by **24 September 2021**;

The SD will compile the summary tables and the questions to be forwarded to the applicant Members before the teleconference. All subsequent information and material provided by a Member will be forwarded to the Group.

During the meeting

- Agree on the appointment of the Chair and Rapporteur of the meeting (the Chair will lead the discussion and the Rapporteur will ensure that the report reflects the discussion and captures the detailed assessment of the dossiers);
- Mention any potential conflict of interest and, if relevant, withdraw him/herself from the discussion;
- Contribute to the discussions;
- Provide a detailed report in order to recommend, to the Scientific Commission, the Member(s) to be recognised (or not) as free from AHS and to indicate any information gaps or specific areas that should be addressed in the future by the applicant Members.

If during the teleconference the Group decides that additional information should be requested from an applicant Member before an informed conclusion can be drawn, the SD can request it and forward the additional information to the Group at a later date. The Chair is responsible for coordinating the finalisation of the assessment and for ensuring that the views of all members of the Group are taken into consideration.

Should the Group not be able to complete its Terms of Reference during this meeting, experts' contributions will be solicited after the meeting, including by teleconference if needed.

After the meeting

The SD will circulate the draft report after the teleconference is over. Experts are expected to contribute to the finalisation of the report within approximately one week.

The SD will circulate the final version of the report to the Group once endorsed by the Scientific Commission and is published online.

Deliverables

A detailed report to recommend to the Scientific Commission whether an applicant Member(s) should be (or not) recognised with an official AHS free status. The report should indicate any information gaps or specific areas that should be addressed in the future by the Members.

Reporting / timeline

The OIE will circulate the draft report no more than seven days after the teleconference (no later than 15 October 2021) and the Group will finalise its report within ten days (indicative deadline: 22 October 2021).

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AGENDA

1. Opening
2. Adoption of the agenda and appointment of chairperson and rapporteur
3. Evaluation of applications from Members for official recognition of AHS free status
 - a. Bahrain
 - b. Other applications
4. Adoption of report

Appendix III

**OIE AD HOC GROUP ON THE EVALUATION
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5 - 7 October 2021**

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