

Ad hoc Group on Veterinary Emergencies Incident Management Systems

Original: English

6 - 9 March 2023
Paris, France



**World Organisation
for Animal Health**
Founded as OIE

Preparedness and Resilience
Department

12, rue de Prony
75017 Paris, France

T. +33 (0)1 44 15 18 88
F. +33 (0)1 42 67 09 87
woah@woah.org
www.woah.org

Table of Contents

1. Opening	3
2. Adoption of agenda and Terms of Reference	3
3. Discussion.....	3
3.1. <i>Background</i>	3
3.2. Overview of IMS experience	4
3.3 Why WOAHA needs an IMS.....	4
3.4 IMS Components for WOAHA	5
3.5 WOAHA Landscape for IMS	5
3.6 IMS Structure	5
3.7 Simulation Exercise	5
4 Recommendations for WOAHA.....	5
Appendix I Terms of Reference.....	7
Appendix II Agenda	9
Appendix III List of Participants.....	9
Appendix IV WOAHA Network Components and Links.....	10
Appendix V Proposed IMS Structured for WOAHA.....	12

The first meeting of the *ad hoc* group on Veterinary Emergencies – Incident Management Systems (IMS), hereafter referred to as the Group, was held at WOAAH headquarters in Paris from 6 to 9 March 2023.

1. Opening

Dr Keith Hamilton, Head of the Preparedness and Resilience Department at WOAAH welcomed the Group on behalf of the WOAAH Director General. The Group was convened to support WOAAH in the development of an IMS to support its response to regional and international emergencies. The Group's composition included international partners, national level emergency management specialists, and private industry. Dr Graeme Cooke, Chief Veterinary Officer for Victoria, Australia was appointed as chair of the group. The Working Group discussed opportunities for WOAAH to play a leadership role in wildlife health in line with its existing mandate and mission.

2. Adoption of agenda and Terms of Reference

The agenda and terms of reference for the Group were reviewed and agreed on without modifications. The terms of reference, agenda and the list of participants are provided as Appendices I, II and III respectively.

3. Discussion

The discussion was structured to understand WOAAH as an organisation and to contextualise the need for an IMS. The Group reflected on the effects an IMS should have, the existing assets and capabilities that WOAAH can call upon to deliver those effects, and the type of controls which should be in place to measure its performance.

3.1. Background

WOAH's structure and mandate was presented, including its internal structure and roles and capabilities of the departments at HQ, the Regional and Sub Regional Representations, and the network of partners (i.e. Collaborating Centres, Reference laboratories, and experts). The Group noted that WOAAH's strengths lie in its mandate, its close contact with Members through the Delegates and its Regional and Sub-Regional Representations, its strong relationships with other intergovernmental and international organisations as well as and its strong network of experts and partnerships. These attributes would accelerate decisions made through the IMS.

Dr Daniel Donachie, Programme Manager, WOAAH Preparedness and Resilience Department, explained the increased frequency of complex emergencies and thus the increased importance of WOAAH's emergency management programme, highlighting the Fortifying Institutional Resilience against Biological Threats project under which the IMS falls. He highlighted that the creation of an IMS was recommended by the Technical Item¹ and its accompanying Resolution of the 89th General Session. He noted that this activity follows the recommendations from WOAAH's COVID-19 After-Action Review. WOAAH's experiences of responding to COVID-19 and to the introduction of African swine fever into the Americas in 2021, where strong coordination was required, identified communication and coordination challenges. These emergencies demonstrated the need for an adaptable IMS that allows WOAAH to deliver the desired effects for both regional and international emergencies.

The Group noted that, unlike some UN agencies (e.g. WHO) and NGOs, and given WOAAH's mandate, structure and scope, its response in emergencies could not be very tactical or operational in that it does not deliver responses on the ground. Rather, it functions as a convening and influencing body which receives, processes and shares information and develops and disseminates science-based guidance and recommendations to inform risk management. The Group highlighted that WOAAH Regional and Sub-Regional Representations play an important role but noted that there appeared to be gaps in communication and coordination, especially during emergencies of varying scales and during complex situations. The potential ability of WOAAH to gather information globally to create actionable intelligence is nevertheless high.

Additional WOAAH staff were invited to present to the Group on topics relevant to a WOAAH IMS. Dr Alexandre Fediaevsky, the Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs) Regional Coordinator, presented the GF-TADs framework, highlighting that it is a governance structure, with focus at regional level on specific TADs. The Group noted that coordination with this mechanism would be critical for an IMS, and that regional systems should not be replicated or replaced by an HQ IMS.

¹ <https://www.woah.org/app/uploads/2023/03/89sg-8-3394-a.pdf>

Mr Gerrit Berger, Head of the Communications Department, presented an overview of WOAAH's corporate communication strategy, and the efforts to build WOAAH's brand recognition since the launch the rebranding. He highlighted that they could target specific audiences and that presence on social media is necessary to achieving influence. The Group noted that WOAAH is a leader in animal health and can use its communications, especially during crises, to both influence action and inform decision-making. It was identified that risk communication would be a necessary component of the IMS and given that it is not currently an active activity, WOAAH should consider how to source this expertise. The Group noted that communication externally and internally during an IMS activation is vital, and a regular rhythm of situation reports can help ensure effective information flow. As well, the Group noted that WOAAH should consider a process on how to keep the internal communication team engaged and aware of growing problems.

Dr Paolo Tizzani, veterinary epidemiologist, Data Integration Department, explained the role of epidemic intelligence for WOAAH, both how it is collected and currently used. The Group noted that WOAAH has good systems for collection of information but lacks processes for analysis and flagging of suspicions related to events in areas relevant to WOAAH's mandate. They recommended that WOAAH should define which events warrant further investigation for activation of the IMS, and that any epidemic intelligence process should be sustainable and configured to provide the necessary support.

Dr Montserrat Arroyo, Deputy Director General - International Standards and Science, highlighted the role of WOAAH as a global leader and its need to be able to respond well to emergencies involving or impacting animal health. She underlined the importance of sustainability in the design and maintenance of the IMS. The Group noted the importance of buy-in and support from across the directorate for both the development of the IMS and for the sustainability of the system.

3.2. Overview of IMS experience

Each Group member presented their own organisations' IMS approach. These presentations were made available to WOAAH for future reference. Common threads were identified in each IMS such as the necessity for a defined structure and reporting lines, importance of communication, scalability, triggers for activation, and the importance of exercising. It was also important for an IMS to be interoperable with other relevant systems within and external to the organisation. The WHO model for rapid risk assessments as part of an IMS initiation was identified to be of interest, and adaptable to the context of WOAAH to aid in decision-making for IMS activation.

After discussion, the Group noted that for WOAAH the IMS must support Members and Regional and Sub Regional Representations and allow for effective collaboration with partners. There should be strong intelligence sharing, understanding of how that is best obtained, and a culture of preparedness and response.

3.3 Why WOAAH needs an IMS

The Chair directed the Group to reflect on why WOAAH needs an IMS and what this IMS could do for the Organisation (including its Members). The discussion fell under four broad categories:

a. Fulfil Mandate

Not only has development of an IMS been mandated to WOAAH by its Members at the 89th General Session, but it would allow WOAAH to better support Members and Partners during emergencies and maintain its expected leadership and credibility in global animal health.

b. Coordinate

An IMS would help WOAAH to better coordinate its response to emergencies through a standardised and structured disciplined mechanism, acting as a bridge between the Regions and HQ, and ensuring effective allocation of scarce resources, ultimately enabling WOAAH to move forward through complex situations. It would also support efficient and effective coordination between other partner institutions and organisations.

c. Clarify

The process of developing an IMS will help WOAAH to clarify roles of all its stakeholders, as well as internal roles. During an emergency, an IMS provides structure to clarify roles and responsibilities of actors, which is crucial during complex situations. This will also ensure that clear and transparent information is provided to Members during the emergency, maintaining WOAAH's position amongst an increasingly crowded information space.

d. Address Gaps

An emergency management mentality and culture does not yet exist at WOAAH, and an IMS mindset can help start to change perspectives. WOAAH needs to learn from the gaps identified during previous emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and act on the lessons identified, since responding to major emergencies on an ad hoc basis is not sustainable, nor best uses the substantial assets available to WOAAH.

3.4 IMS Components for WOAAH

Dr Cooke asked the Group to consider the effects an IMS should have for WOAAH. The Group discussed the major effects and considered how they would apply at each stage of an IMS activation. They noted that during peacetime when the organisation is in a preparatory phase, an IMS provides **structure** and **standardises** process so that there is awareness of roles before an emergency occurs. When an alert is flagged, an IMS enables **coordination** and **communication** to verify the significance of suspicions, allowing for risk assessments to identify if the triggers are present for IMS activation. After activation, the Group noted that the existence of an IMS **promotes** the important role of the organisation, provides an efficient means of **liaising** with partners and ensures **alignment** with all actors. After the emergency is declared over or else the IMS is deactivated, the structure should provide the opportunity to **learn** from the response and embed the lessons for the next activation.

3.5 WOAAH Landscape for IMS

The Group discussed the complex landscape in which WOAAH operates, and the necessary connections and interoperability to be considered when developing an IMS. These included WOAAH HQ and Regions, collaborating centres, laboratories (i.e. Reference laboratories), and key global partners, highlighting the coordinating role of WOAAH. A diagram of these connections is included in Appendix IV.

3.6 IMS Structure

Given the landscape and WOAAH's organisational structure, the Group took time to discuss the structure of an IMS for WOAAH. It was agreed that a structure using defined subject areas for situation management and reporting (e.g. pillars) would be well suited to WOAAH. This structure would direct the reporting lines, with an appointed Incident Controller managing the information flow from the pillars to the Deputy Director General and Director General. Importantly, given the structure of WOAAH operations, pillars for liaising with Regional and Sub-Regional Representations and key global partners would be crucial to response success. The importance of setting an operational rhythm for the IMS of meetings, communications products, situation reports and strategic discussions was heavily emphasised by the working group. The proposed structure is included in Appendix V.

3.7 Simulation Exercise

The Chair led the Group through three basic scenarios as an informal tabletop exercise to test the proposed structure of the IMS and to identify any specific challenges or omissions to the pillars. The Group agreed that the proposed IMS structure contained all the relevant parties. It was noted that WOAAH needs to build additional partnerships and consider its role in emergencies outside its usual remit (e.g., nuclear). Additionally, WOAAH should consider how the IMS would interact with partner organisations that also had IMS structures that may be activated in given situations (e.g. WHO, FAO and INTERPOL). These exercises also exposed potential gaps in an all-hazards response which should be further explored through longer follow-up internal tabletop exercises. Follow-up exercises would also help to introduce IMS concepts to WOAAH staff.

4 Recommendations for WOAAH

Over the course of the 4 days, through discussions on the identified effects that an IMS should achieve, the existing gaps, lessons identified, challenges, and available opportunities, the Group identified key recommendations for WOAAH to consider when building an IMS.

- a) Recognise and use its strengths when developing the IMS (e.g. expert network, agility to make decisions, scientific convening power, structure of organisation which allows the DG to have full authority).
- b) The Regional and Sub-Regional Representations must be a key component of any IMS WOAAH develops and the influence that it exerts.
- c) Conduct further light tabletop internal simulation exercises to further explore gaps in all-hazards preparedness and to highlight the importance of IMS principles to WOAAH staff.
- d) Develop and deliver training on its IMS for all staff to raise awareness and develop knowledge and skills and ensure smooth activation of the IMS when needed and ensuring that the required teams are prepared to

contribute when required. Adopting a train-the-trainer approach will also help with sustainability for the IMS. The IMS should also be validated through simulation exercises.

- e) Define triggers for activation, including identifying risks if nothing is done (e.g. reputational risk). This should include addressing the current use of epidemic intelligence, as well as considering the system of grading emergencies. Data management and the use of analysed information is a core function of the IMS and WOAAH should consider information flow, what is actionable, and where information is stored.
- f) Consider how it will take an all-hazards approach to emergency response and management. It will require discussions on WOAAH's role in emergencies outside of WOAAH's regular business. It may require taking a secondary role, rather than being a leader. A formalised liaison positioned with other agencies may be required.
- g) Develop a generic set of objectives for the IMS, which are then specified for a situation, so that it is always clear what the role of the IMS is in any given crisis.
- h) The IMS should be scalable to the size of the crisis and take into account the role and responsibility of WOAAH in the specific situation.
- i) Clear intent description by the Director General and Deputy Director General should be translated into objectives by the Incident Controller and agreed.
- j) Consider how data will be collected and managed in the IMS (e.g., online tool). This is crucial to ensure smooth information flow and coordination between pillars.
- k) There should be a way to track actions within the IMS and continually register the risks to avoid maintaining the wrong direction of response. Learning should also be a key component of the continuous improvement process of the IMS and include learning from exercises, the experiences of IMSs and real events.

Final, additional topics for consideration from the Group included that WOAAH develop a position paper to quickly inform WOAAH staff and delegates about the utility of the IMS, ensure the call for tender for a service provider to develop the IMS is fit for purpose, how the concept would be rolled out and exercised and to consider how wildlife emergencies would also be included. There may also be value in exploring topics such as improved decision-making cycles (e.g. maintaining OODA loops), and structures for assigning roles and responsibilities (e.g. RACI matrix) to help embed the culture of IMS into the Organisation and deliver effective training and create an effective intelligence cycle.

.../Appendices

Appendix I.

Terms of Reference

MEETING OF THE WOA *AD HOC* GROUP ON VETERINARY EMERGENCIES

– INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Paris (France), 6 to 9 March 2023

Purpose

The purpose of the *ad hoc* Group on Veterinary Emergencies (Incident Management Systems) is to develop high level recommendations on incident management systems (IMS) for WOA.

Ad hoc groups are convened under the authority of and report to the WOA Director General.

Background

The need to be well prepared to manage risks from all kinds of hazards, which may be of accidental or deliberate natures, is becoming increasingly important for national and international entities. The drivers and root-causes of some emergencies are trending upwards, meaning emergencies requiring the engagement of WOA and its Members are generally expected to increase in frequency, severity, and complexity. Evidence of this can be seen over the last number of years, for example increased frequency of major disease events including emerging infectious diseases (e.g. SARS, pandemic H1N1, MERS, SARS-CoV-2), and major transboundary disease outbreaks (e.g. ASF and HPAI), and extreme weather-related events (wildfires, floods, droughts). These events have exposed gaps and vulnerabilities in the emergency preparedness and response of the national and international communities.

Applying the principles of emergency management, which is the process of risk analysis and reduction, readiness and response, and recovery and learning, can help fill these gaps. The importance of this discipline is increasingly recognised as important by WOA, as evidenced by various publications including volume 39(2) of the Scientific and Technical Review dedicated to Disaster Prevention and Preparedness¹, a 2020 issue of Panorama² which provided a selection of national and international work programmes on Emergency Management, and the Technical Item from the 89th General Session³ and other projects of WOA's emergency management programme.

Specific issues to be addressed

Emergency preparedness and response is most effective when coordinated through established emergency management systems. To maximise coordination, effectiveness, and efficiency, the command-and-control functions for emergency management can be centralised in an incident management system (IMS).

During the COVID-19 pandemic WOA established a bespoke IMS to coordinate the Organisation's technical and scientific response to the pandemic. This experience and the findings of two COVID-19 After Action Reviews (undertaken by WOA during and after the pandemic) identified the need for the Organisation to develop a robust and sustainable IMS. This need was further highlighted when coordinating institutional response to ASF outbreaks in the Dominican Republic.

Following the adoption of Resolution 28 of the 89th General Assembly of WOA Delegates, WOA was advised by its membership to develop an IMS, building on past experiences and learnings, to respond to international emergencies. It is essential that WOA, as an institution, has a system that covers the principles, structures and processes that can be used for all hazards including for the animal health-security function in case of a deliberate biological event.

The Group will be tasked with supporting the development of an IMS for WOA.

Future work in this workstream will include developing recommendations for IMS in the National Veterinary Services, at which point the composition of the group will be adjusted accordingly.

Actions to Deliver

The *ad hoc* Group will be asked to:

1. Take time to understand the general landscape in which WOAAH operates in the context of managing emergencies.
2. Share relevant experiences of the use of IMS or other relevant emergency management processes, including the structure of such processes used.
3. Take an all-hazards approach to discuss the triggers for a WOAAH IMS
4. Develop high-level guidance on the core principles of an all-hazards IMS for WOAAH. The Group should:
 - a. Come to a common understanding of what an IMS is
 - b. Define and describe the general core functions of an IMS
5. Provide high level guidance and recommendations for designing an all-hazards IMS:
 - a. For WOAAH, taking into consideration its immediate network and relevant parallel strategies i.e., Headquarters, regional and sub-regional offices, Specialist Commissions and Working Groups, Reference Centre Network, GF-TADs and ad hoc experts
 - b. Produce a template visual organisational structure of an IMS for WOAAH

At a future remote meeting in 2023, the Group will also be asked to review the call for tender for a service provider to develop an IMS for WOAAH to ensure the call is appropriate and covers the required skillset and tasks. The Group may also be asked to assist in the selection of the service provider as well as periodically reviewing their contract outputs in developing an IMS for WOAAH.

Expectations

Ad hoc Group members should:

- Sign the WOAAH Undertaking on Confidentiality of information
- Complete the declaration of Interest Form
- Read and study written materials provided by the WOAAH prior to the meeting
- Agree on the appointment of the chair and rapporteur of the meeting
- Contribute to discussions
- Contribute to drafting text for the recommendations
- Understand that the membership of the Group may be retained between ad hoc group meetings to ensure continuity of the work

Deliverables

By the end of the meeting, the Group will have developed high-level guidance and recommendations on IMS for WOAAH, as well as a concise summary report of the meeting.

Reporting / timeline

WOAH will circulate the draft meeting report for comment no more than 7 days after the meeting. WOAAH will also circulate the draft guidance for comment and review which will be required to be finalised by the end of March 2023 on a date agreed with the Group.

Appendix II.

Adopted Agenda

MEETING OF THE WOA *AD HOC* GROUP ON VETERINARY EMERGENCIES

– INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Paris (France), 6 to 9 March 2023

- 1. Opening & adoption of agenda and ToRs**
- 2. Overview of WOA**
- 3. Overview of FIRABioT project**
- 4. Sharing experience using IMS**
- 5. Discussion**
 - a. Understanding needs from WOA, the environment and experiences, the structure of WOA and where it sits on the global stage**
 - b. Discuss the problem – the reason(s) WOA has been mandated to establish an IMS**
 - c. Discuss triggers of all-hazard IMS**
 - d. Discuss the solution to the above problems -core principles and functions of all-hazard IMS**
 - e. Recommendations for WOA for an IMS**
 - f. Organisational chart of IMS for WOA**

Appendix III.

List of Participants

MEETING OF THE WOA *AD HOC* GROUP ON VETERINARY EMERGENCIES

– INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Paris (France), 6 to 9 March 2023

MEMBERS

Dr Pastor Alfonso

Epidemiologist
National Center for Animal &
Plant Health (CENSA)
San José de las Lajas
CUBA

Michael Ansong

Global Incident Management
Lead
Cargill
Minneapolis
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Dr Graeme Cooke (Chair)

Chief Veterinary Officer
Agriculture Victoria
Attwood
AUSTRALIA

Dr Ian Dacre

Emergency Management
Specialist
Food and Agriculture
Organisation of the United
Nations
Rome
ITALY

Dr Sophie loos

Technical Officer
World Health Organisation
Geneva
SWITZERLAND

Simon Kyazze

Head of Operations
Public Health Emergency
Operations Center
Kampala
UGANDA

WOAH HEADQUARTERS

Keith Hamilton

WOAH
Head of Preparedness and
Resilience Department
Paris
FRANCE

Daniel Donachie

WOAH
Programme Manager
Paris
FRANCE

Madison Wimmers

WOAH
Project Officer
Paris
FRANCE

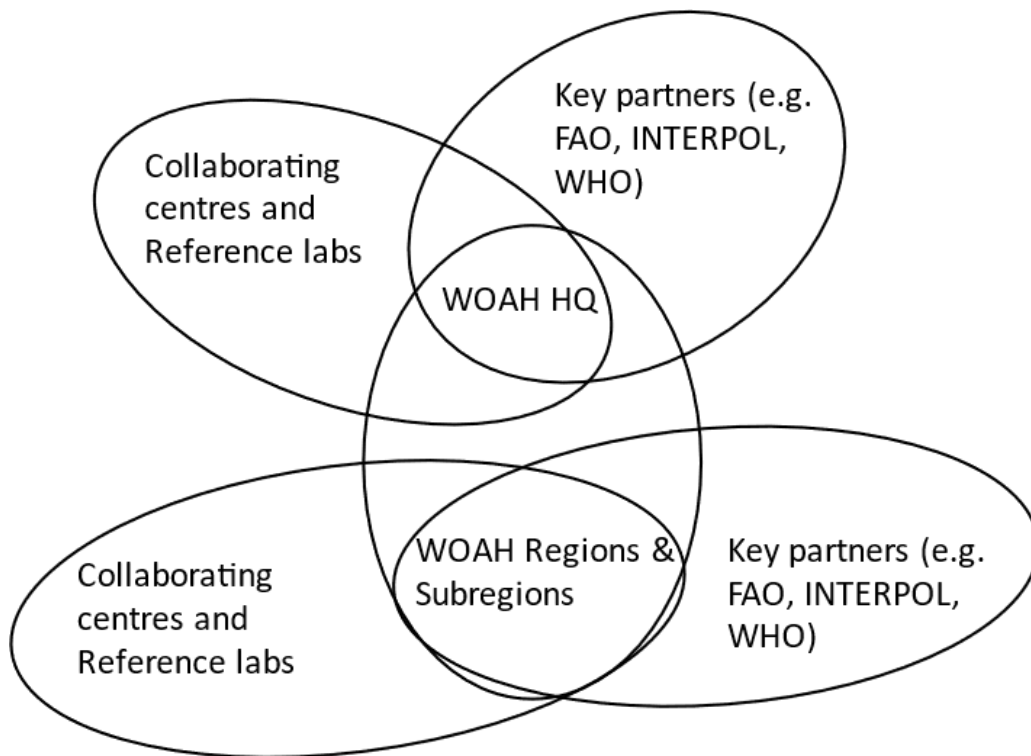
Appendix IV.

WOAH Network Components and Links

MEETING OF THE WOA *AD HOC* GROUP ON VETERINARY EMERGENCIES

– INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

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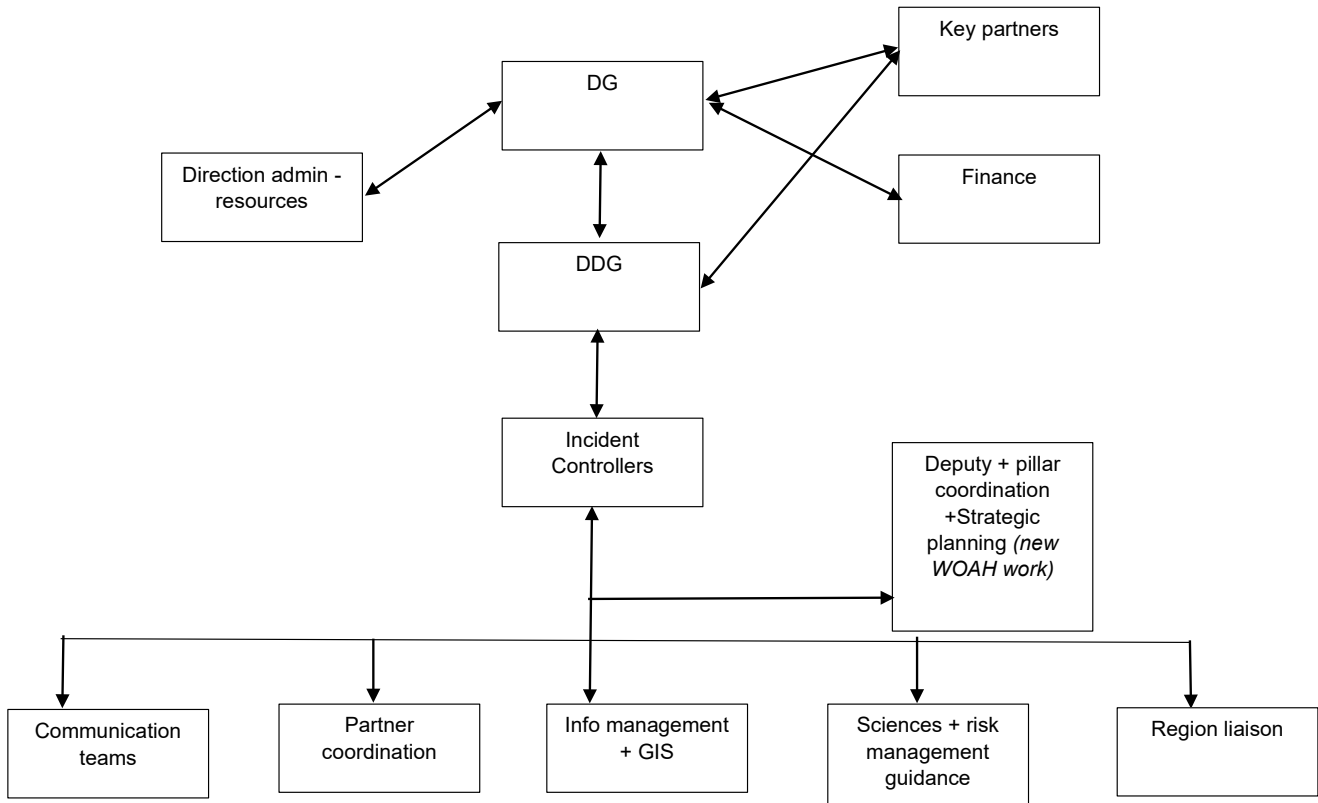


Proposed IMS Structure for WOAAH

MEETING OF THE WOAAH AD HOC GROUP ON VETERINARY EMERGENCIES

– INCIDENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

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