

Ad hoc Group on the Evaluation of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) Status and endorsement of official control programmes of Members

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23 to 26 October 2023

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A meeting of the *ad hoc* Group on the evaluation of foot and mouth disease (FMD) status and endorsement of official control programmes of Members (hereafter the Group) was held from 23 to 26 October 2023 at WOAHA Headquarters.

1. Opening

Dr Montserrat Arroyo, Deputy Director General for International Standards and Science, welcomed and thanked the Group for its commitment and extensive support towards WOAHA mandates. She highlighted that the official recognition of animal health status was an important activity for WOAHA and acknowledged the amount of work before, during and after the meeting and the efforts required in reviewing the dossiers, particularly considering the high number of dossiers received each year for FMD.

Dr Arroyo reminded the Group of the confidentiality of the dossiers for official recognition and thanked the experts for abiding by the undertaking of confidentiality. She also mentioned that if any members of the Group had any conflict of interest in the evaluation of a dossier, the expert(s) should withdraw from the discussions and decision-making of the particular application.

Dr Park briefed the Group on the state of play of the revision of Chapter 8.8. 'Infection with FMD virus' of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code)*, which included provisions for the introduction of animals from countries or zones free from FMD where vaccination is practised into countries or zones free from FMD where vaccination is not practised, recommendations for the importation of fresh meat of small ruminants from FMD-infected countries/zones, etc. She also provided an update on the recent status of expert missions conducted in 2022 and 2023.

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

Dr Manuel Sanchez chaired the Group, and Dr David Paton acted as rapporteur, with the support of the WOAHA Secretariat. The Group endorsed the proposed agenda.

The terms of reference, agenda and list of participants are presented as Appendices 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

The Group was informed that WOAHA reviewed declared interests, and it was agreed that none represented a potential conflict in the evaluation of the FMD status of Members.

3. Evaluation of an application from a Member for the official recognition of an FMD-free status where vaccination is not practised

Liechtenstein

In August 2023, Liechtenstein submitted an application for official recognition of its FMD-free status where vaccination is not practised based on historical grounds. The Group requested additional information and received clarifications from Liechtenstein during the dossier evaluation.

i. Animal disease reporting

The Group considered that Liechtenstein had a record of regular and prompt animal disease reporting. FMD has been a notifiable disease in the country for more than ten years, that is in compliance with the provisions of Article 1.4.6. point 2b. on historical freedom.

ii. Veterinary Services

The Group noted that Liechtenstein's Veterinary Services are integrated into the Swiss Veterinary Services and that Liechtenstein has the same legal position as the Swiss cantons. Based on the Principality of Liechtenstein with Switzerland, Customs Union Treaty (LR 0.631.112), Liechtenstein is part of the Swiss customs territory and works as a single, common veterinary area. The Group noted that the Veterinary Authority had current knowledge of, and authority over, the FMD-susceptible animals in the country.

iii. Historical situation of FMD

The last FMD outbreak in Liechtenstein was recorded more than 40 years ago, more than the 25 years required to claim historical freedom from FMD as described in Article 1.4.6. point 2b.iii. of the *Terrestrial Code*.

iv. Absence of vaccination and entry of vaccinated animals in the past 12 months

The Group acknowledged that vaccination against FMD had ceased in Liechtenstein in 1991 and was prohibited since then by legislation. The Group further noted that no vaccinated animal had been introduced since the cessation of vaccination.

v. Surveillance in accordance with Articles 8.8.40 to 8.8.42.

Liechtenstein reported that the surveillance system is based on five principles: the obligation to report (clinical surveillance), surveillance programmes, investigation of abortions, import controls, and meat inspections.

The Group noted that no FMD-specific surveillance programme was in place (and this is not required for historical freedom according to point 2.b. of Article 1.4.6. of the *Terrestrial Code*). However, Liechtenstein's early warning system for FMD used exclusion tests as a method to improve the sensitivity of FMD detection. Liechtenstein reported that 45 exclusion tests (for Liechtenstein and Switzerland together) were performed during the past 24 months, and all tested negative for FMD. Liechtenstein clarified that one exclusion test was performed in Liechtenstein in the past five years. FMD testing is performed at the Institute of Virology and Immunology (Switzerland), an ISO 17025 accredited laboratory and samples to rule out FMD are tested by RT-PCR and non-structural proteins (NSP) ELISA.

In addition, Liechtenstein reported that passive surveillance had been conducted through ante- and post-mortem inspections at abattoirs in Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

vi. Regulatory measures for the early detection, prevention and control of FMD

The Group considered that the early warning system should enable prompt detection of FMD in case of an incursion into the country. The Group noted a monthly report on the global epidemiological situation, including FMD, and an assessment of the potential risk of introduction of diseases into the country was made available to professionals and the public. Different types of guidance about FMD, including advice for travellers, are available on the official website of the Veterinary Services.

Liechtenstein described its system for individual identification of cloven-hoofed animals, which is applied in a uniform, mandatory, unambiguous, and permanent manner. Identification can only be removed with the authorisation of the cantonal authority or, for fallen animals, at the disposal facility.

The Group noted that swill feeding was prohibited by legislation and that the Veterinary Services supervise the enforcement of the regulations by carrying out the basic and risk-based inspections defined in the multi-annual national control plan. Liechtenstein reported that 25% of the farms are inspected annually, and few non-compliances were detected, mainly related to animal identification.

vii. Description of the boundaries and measures of a protection zone, if applicable.

Not applicable.

viii. Description of the system for preventing the entry of the virus

The Group acknowledged that Liechtenstein is a landlocked country without any airports, surrounded by Austria and Switzerland (officially recognised FMD-free countries by WOA) and integrated into the Swiss Customs Union Treaty. Furthermore, a bilateral agreement with the European Union (EU) about the trade of animals and their products confirms the application of similar sanitary requirements. The Group acknowledged that all animals and products could only be imported through Switzerland, and any other introductions would be through the surrounding FMD-free countries.

ix. Compliance with the questionnaire in Article 1.11.1.

The Group agreed that the dossier format was compliant with the questionnaire in Article 1.11.1. and appreciated the concise presentation of information in the dossier.

Conclusion

Considering the points mentioned above, the Group concluded that Liechtenstein's application was compliant with the requirements of Chapter 8.8, Article 1.4.6. and with the questionnaire in Article 1.11.1. of the Terrestrial Code. Therefore, the Group recommended the recognition of Liechtenstein as an FMD-free country where vaccination is not practised.

4. Evaluation of an application from a Member for the official recognition of an FMD-free status where vaccination is practised

The Group assessed a request from a Member for the official recognition of its FMD-free status where vaccination is practised. Based on the final recommendation of the Scientific Commission concluding that the application did not meet the requirements of the *Terrestrial Code*, the dossier was referred back to the applicant Member.

5. Evaluation of applications from a Member for the official recognition of FMD-free zonal status where vaccination is practised

The Group assessed requests from a Member for the official recognition of their FMD-free zonal status where vaccination is practised. Based on the final recommendations of the Scientific Commission concluding that the application did not meet the requirements of the *Terrestrial Code*, the dossiers were referred back to the applicant Members.

6. Evaluation of applications from Members for the endorsement of an official control programme for FMD

No applications were received for evaluation during this cycle.

7. Adoption of the report

The Group reviewed and amended the draft report. The Group agreed that the report would be subject to a short period of circulation to the Group for comments and adoption. Upon circulation, the Group agreed that the report captured the discussions.

.../Appendices

Appendix 1 Terms of reference

MEETING OF THE *AD HOC* GROUP ON THE EVALUATION OF FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE STATUS AND ENDORSEMENT OF OFFICIAL CONTROL PROGRAMMES OF MEMBERS

Paris, 23 to 26 October 2023

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Purpose

The purpose of the *ad hoc* Group on the evaluation of foot and mouth disease (FMD) status and endorsement of official control programme of Members (the Group) is to evaluate applications for official recognition of FMD free status and for endorsement of the FMD official control programme of Members.

Background

In accordance with the [Standard Operating Procedures \(SOPs\)](#), Members can be officially recognised by WOAHA as having an FMD free status or an official FMD control programme endorsed by the WOAHA through the adoption of a resolution by the World Assembly of Delegates (the Assembly) in May every year. A Member wishing to apply for the official recognition of its FMD free status or its official FMD control programme endorsed by WOAHA should complete and submit the relevant [questionnaire](#) laid out in Chapter [1.11](#) of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code)* and comply with all requirements specified in the *Terrestrial Code*. The Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases ([Scientific Commission](#)) is responsible for undertaking, on behalf of the Assembly, the assessment of Members' applications for their compliance with WOAHA 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 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 FMD. Based on the evaluations, the Group will provide its conclusions and recommendations to the Scientific Commission.

Prerequisites

The Group members should:

- Sign the 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 deliver

Before 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 [1.11](#) of the *Terrestrial Code*, main sections of the questionnaire, regular notification to WOAHA, payment of the fee, 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 rules on confidentiality of information of the WOAHA, 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., **23 September 2023**).

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 1.4. and [8.8](#) of the *Terrestrial Code*;
- Evaluate and study in detail all dossiers provided by WOAAH;
- 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 meeting and preferably by **13 October 2023**;

The SD will compile the summary tables and the questions to be forwarded to the applicant Members before the meeting. 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) and/or zone(s) to be recognised (or not) as free from FMD and the official control programme of Member(s) to be endorsed by WOAAH and to indicate any information gaps or specific areas that should be addressed in the future by the applicant Members.

If during the meeting 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 meeting if needed.

After the meeting

The SD will circulate the draft report after the meeting 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 FMD free status or an official FMD control programme endorsed by WOAAH. The report should indicate any information gaps or specific areas that should be addressed in the future by the Members.

Reporting / timeline

WOAH will circulate the draft report no more than seven days after the meeting (no later than 30 October 2023) and the Group will finalise its report within ten days (indicative deadline: 10 November 2023).

Appendix 2 Agenda

MEETING OF THE *AD HOC* GROUP ON THE EVALUATION OF FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE STATUS AND ENDORSEMENT OF OFFICIAL CONTROL PROGRAMMES OF MEMBERS

Paris, 23 to 26 October 2023

AGENDA

1. Opening
 2. Adoption of the agenda and appointment of chairperson and rapporteur
 3. Evaluation of an application for the official recognition of an FMD-free country status where vaccination is not practised
 - Liechtenstein
 4. Evaluation of an application for the official recognition of an FMD-free country status where vaccination is practised
 5. Evaluation of applications for the official recognition of FMD-free zonal status where vaccination is practised
 6. Evaluation of applications from Members for the endorsement of an official control programme for FMD
 7. Adoption of the report
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Appendix 3 List of Participants

AD HOC GROUP ON THE EVALUATION OF FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE STATUS AND ENDORSEMENT OF OFFICIAL CONTROL PROGRAMMES OF MEMBERS Paris, 23 to 26 October 2023

List of Participants

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