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Self-declaration of freedom from Bluetongue by Austria

Self-declaration submitted to the OIE on 08 May 2019 by Dr Ulrich Herzog, Delegate of Austria to the OIE, Chief Veterinary Officer, Head of Group Veterinary Medicine, Veterinary Services, Food Safety and Central Veterinary Authority, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection, Austria.

1. Historical overview and current situation of Bluetongue in Austria

Austria was free of Bluetongue Virus (BTV) infection until October 2008 when BTV-8 was detected for the first time. Austria was able to regain its BT-free status on 31. December 2011. Due to the massive spread of BTV-4 in South-/East-Europe in 2014, the surveillance programme in Austria was adapted in 2015 to ensure early detection of possible cases. On 17. November 2015, the first BTV-4 infection was found in Austria. In the years 2015 and 2016 Austria had altogether seven BTV-4 outbreaks in five districts with a total of ten infected animals (for more details see table 1 and figure 1). The last BTV-4 outbreak was confirmed on 22. December 2016. After the outbreaks were discovered, restriction zones were set up in accordance with [Regulation \(EC\) No. 1266/2007](#) with the aim of preventing any spread into disease-free areas by restricting livestock trading. Figure 1 illustrates the 2015/2016 BT-cases and the established BT-restriction zones (in yellow).

Figure 1: BTV-4 outbreaks and corresponding restriction zones (in yellow), Austria, 2015 – 2016

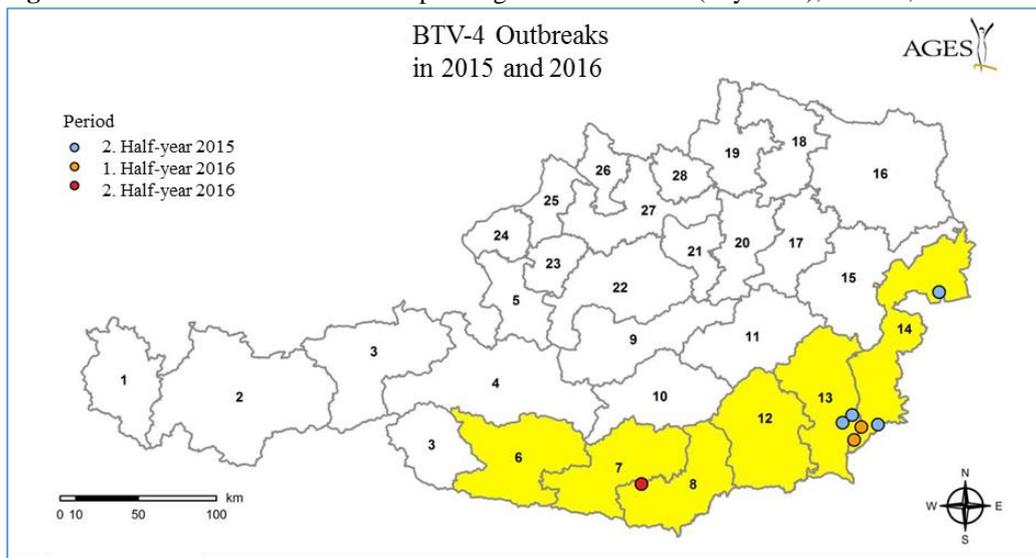


Table 1: BTV-4 cases, Austria from 2015 to 2016

Province	District	Year	Holdings affected	Animals infected (cases)
Burgenland	Neusiedl/See	2015	1	1
Burgenland	Jennersdorf	2015	1	1
Steiermark (Styria)	Hartberg-Fürstenfeld	2015	1	2
Steiermark (Styria)	Südoststeiermark	2015	1	2
Burgenland	Jennersdorf	2016	2	3
Kärnten (Carinthia)	Klagenfurt	2016	1	1

No compulsory vaccinations for serotype 4 of bluetongue were set up, although vaccination was possible on a voluntary basis. All cases were found in the frame of the surveillance programme - none of the positive animals showed clinical signs.

No case of bluetongue has been reported in Austria since 22. December 2016. Restriction zones were lifted on 5. February 2019.

Austria's BTV surveillance programme was set up in accordance with Article 8.3.14. to 8.3.17. of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (OIE Terrestrial Code)*. BTV is notifiable in the entire country.

2. Control and eradication measures

After notification and confirmation of BTV-infections in 2015 and 2016, the following measures in accordance with [Council Directive 2000/75/EC](#), the [Austrian Bluetongue-Bekämpfungs-Verordnung, BGBl II 2013/287](#) (Bluetongue Eradication Regulation) were implemented:

- installation of restriction zones
- movement restrictions according to [Commission Regulation \(EC\) No. 1266/2007](#)
- intensified surveillance within and outside restriction zones
- outbreak holdings were placed under official control (movement restrictions)
- epidemiological investigation and sampling in outbreak holdings and relevant surrounding area
- notification via Animal Disease Notification System (ADNS) and OIE WAHIS

Voluntary vaccination on the animal owner's request was allowed in order to allow certain movements.

3. Surveillance

The whole susceptible population to BTV of Austria is covered by active and passive surveillance. The Austrian bluetongue surveillance programme is adapted to fulfil the provisions of Articles 8.3.14. - 8.3.17. of the *OIE Terrestrial Code* and Annex I of [Commission Regulation \(EC\) No. 1266/2007](#). The main objective of the surveillance programme is to monitor the presence of the disease in domestic ruminants and to determine the seasonally vector free period in Austria (entomological surveillance).

In Austria the target population is as follows (2018):

1.957.196 cattle in 60.675 holdings
456.978 sheep in 17.241 holdings
109.486 goats in 10.431 holdings

3.1. Passive surveillance

BTV is notifiable in the entire country under the legal basis of the Austrian Animal Disease Act ([RGGI 1909/177; § 16 Z.10](#)). Any suspicion has to be notified immediately to the veterinary authority including clinical signs as well as laboratory results that indicate virus circulation. Both trigger further measures by competent authorities. If animals are suspicious for BTV infection, blood samples for serological and virological testing are taken by an official veterinarian and investigated in the National Reference Laboratory.

In 2017, cattle from 18 holdings and in 2018, cattle from 11 holdings were tested within the framework of passive monitoring for bluetongue disease, which were undertaken all year round on the basis of the notification obligation under Art. 16 of the Austrian Animal Diseases Act and of livestock testing in holdings where outbreaks have occurred. All the tests on the samples yielded negative results (see Figure 4).

3.2. Active surveillance

A risk based active surveillance programme for BT exists in Austria since 2008. Upon detecting the first BTV-4 cases the programme was adapted in 2015 in order to detect the disease as early as possible and to be able to accurately establish the precise extent of BT virus circulation. The active surveillance programme is planned by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection (BMSGK) together with the Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety (AGES) and the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna (VMU) and has been approved and co-financed by the European Commission.

Austria is divided into 28 regional units (Figure 3), the size of which takes into account the topographic situation, the density of susceptible species (cattle, sheep, goats) and political districts. This enables the implementation of a statistical sampling plan. 60 unvaccinated animals from each regional unit are subjected to serological BTV-antibody tests quarterly. This sampling plan aims at demonstrating a disease free status with a targeted prevalence of 5 % with 95 % confidence. Requirements of Commission [Regulation \(EC\) No. 1266/2007](#) concerning necessary numbers of samples to regain disease-free status are considered within the calculation of the sampling plan.

Figure 3: Blue tongue monitoring regional units (28), Austria, 2019



Figure 4 provides a graphical overview of passive and active monitoring in 2017:

Figure 4: Holdings sampled within the framework of the active BT-monitoring programme (marked green) and the passive BT-monitoring programme (marked red), Austria, 2017

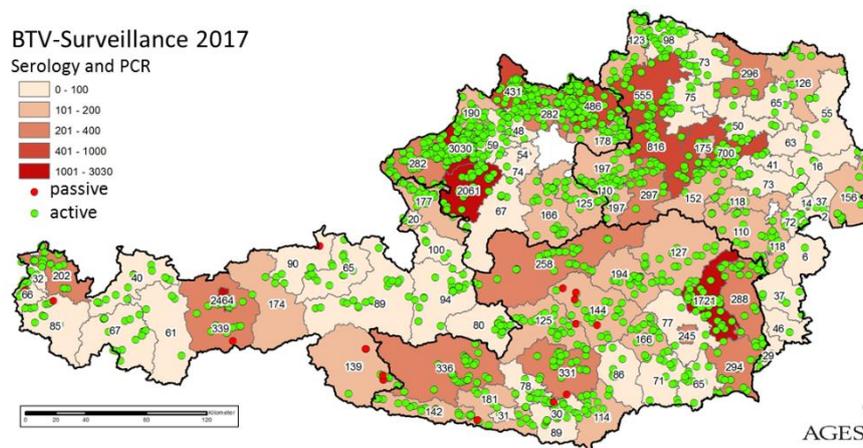


Table 2 shows the data of the surveillance programme in cattle in Austria for the years 2015-2018. The table also contains the numbers of additional investigations carried out e.g. in connection with trade of susceptible animals.

None of the investigated animals showed a BTV-infection.

Additionally, other animals like sheep, goats and camelids (including lammas and alpacas) were also tested for BTV-virus genome and/or antibodies. In 2018 8 sheep holdings, 5 goat holdings and 2 camelid holdings were investigated. None of these animals showed a BTV-infection.

For serological testing commercial ELISA systems (sandwich ELISA) and for virological testing commercial real time PCR systems are used. All test systems are validated and accredited by the National Reference Laboratory for BTV.

Table 2: BT surveillance in cattle in Austria from 2015 to 2018

Year	Number of cattle	Number of sampled animals for active surveillance	Number of sampled animals for additional investigations (incl. trade-related)	Total of sampled herds
2015	1.965.515	3.242	8.751	1.289
2016	1.953.201	5.424	19.671	2.636
2017	1.965.618	6.928	13.590	2.384
2018	1.957.196	6.938	22.352	2.087

3.3. Vector surveillance

Austria runs a vector monitoring programme to acquire information on the occurrence and activity periods of the insects transmitting the virus. The main role of the entomological monitoring is to determine the seasonally vector free period in Austria. Vector monitoring is carried out only during the vector free period according to Commission [Regulation \(EC\) No. 1266/2007](#).

The vector for the bluetongue virus, *Culicoides* spp. (biting midges), occurs in the entire territory of Austria. *Culicoides* are active throughout summer months, but mainly in July and August. In autumn, their activity decreases significantly with the increasing number of frosty days (minimum temperature below 0 °C) and finally comes to a standstill. In spring, when daily average temperatures above 10 °C are reached, they become active again. Due to their inactivity and absence in winter months, a potential virus transmission can be excluded. Midge monitoring is carried out with UV light traps installed at nine locations across Austria (Figure 5). The insects caught in the traps are sent to the University of Veterinary

Medicine of Vienna for morphological identification. Additionally, the temperature is monitored as the onset of activity of biting midges and also the ending of the vector-free period strongly depends on the spring temperatures.

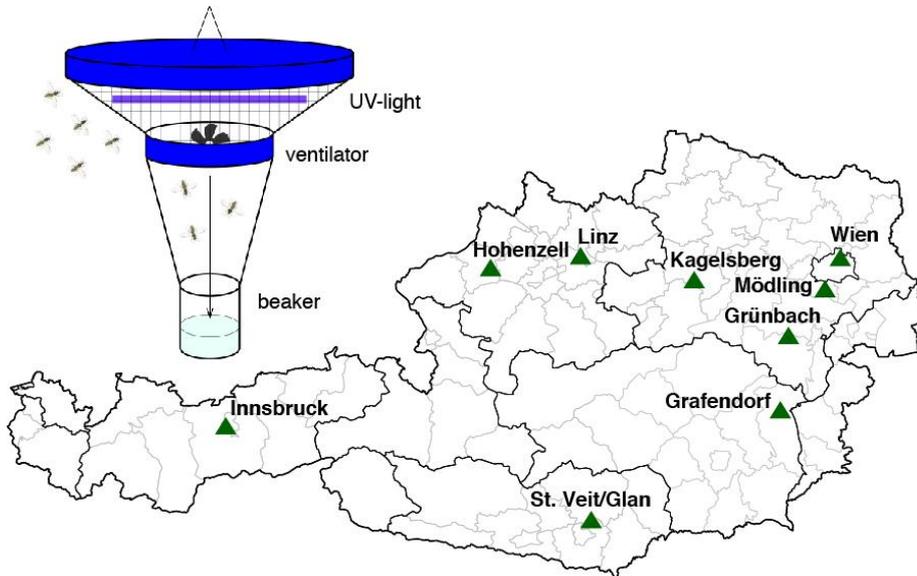
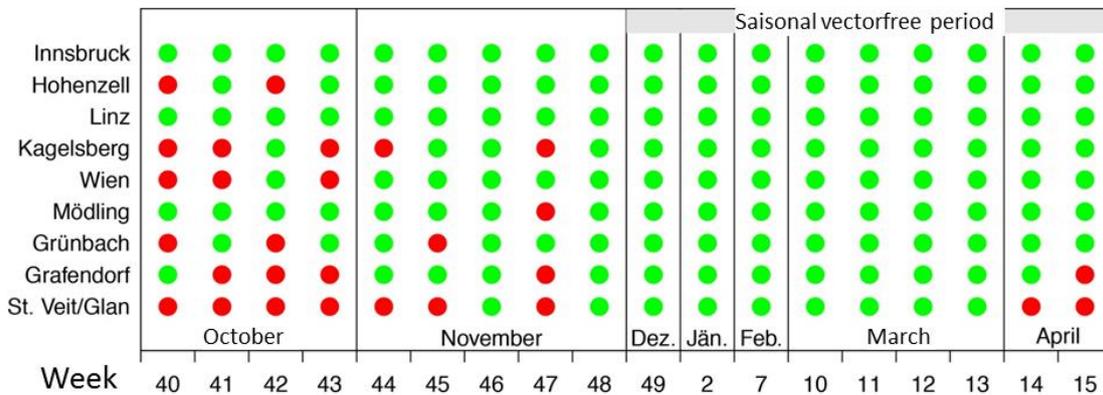


Figure 5: Vector monitoring at nine sites (green triangles) to determine the vector-free period in Austria.

The principle of the trap (Figure 5) is rather simple: insects are attracted by the UV-light and then pushed by the ventilator into a beaker filled with water.

Results of the vector monitoring during the 2016/2017-season are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Activity (red) and inactivity (green) of midges at nine locations in Austria during the 2016/17-season.



Based on Annex V of Commission Regulation (EC) No. 1266/2007, a seasonal vector-free period can roughly be declared each year from December to April of the following year to ease trade restrictions. Potential virus transmission is excluded given the inactivity of the midges. To estimate more precisely the beginning and end of the vector-free season, vector monitoring is conducted. Only the combination of vector and temperature monitoring enables authorities to react promptly and precisely to adjust the vector-free period. The vector-free period in Austria lasted on average 138 days (i.e. 20 weeks) each season (Table 3).

Table 3: BT vector-free period, Austria, 2015-2018

<u>Vector-free period</u>	<u>Days</u>	<u>Weeks</u>
15.12.2015–21.04.2016	129	18.5
02.12.2016–14.04.2017	134	19
01.12.2017–30.04.2018	151	22
MEAN	138	20

4. Measures implemented to maintain freedom

Early detection system. Bluetongue is a notifiable disease in Austria according to the Austrian Animal Disease Act ([RGI 1909/177; § 16 Z.10](#)). Any suspicion must be immediately reported to the competent authorities. Furthermore, the active surveillance programme as described in 2.2. is continued.

Movement rules. Transport of susceptible animals and their germinal products from restricted areas to other member states has to comply with Annex III of [Commission Regulation \(EC\) No. 1266/2007](#). The requirements for the import from non-EU countries are laid down in [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No. 206/2010](#) laying down lists of third countries, territories or parts thereof authorised for the introduction into the European Union of certain animals and fresh meat and the veterinary certification requirements.

Imports of semen and embryos of susceptible species took place in accordance with the following legal acts: [Commission Decision 2016/168/EC](#) (COMMISSION DECISION of 4 January 2006 establishing the animal health and veterinary certification requirements for imports into the Community of bovine embryos and repealing [Decision 2005/217/EC](#)), [Commission Decision 2011/630/EU](#) (COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION of 20 September 2011 on imports into the Union of semen of domestic animals of the bovine species) and [Commission Decision 2010/472/EU](#) (COMMISSION DECISION of 26 August 2010 on imports of semen, ova and embryos of animals of the ovine and caprine species into the Union).

Import of susceptible animals and their germinal products is also compliant with the relevant articles (Article 8.3.6-8.3.12) of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (OIE Terrestrial Code)*.

Vaccination. Vaccination against BTV serotype 4 of susceptible animals is applied on a voluntary basis at the owner's request. A licensed inactivated vaccine is used. Vaccination is carried out by private veterinarians under control of the local competent authority.

5. Conclusions

- Prior to the confirmation of the first BTV-8 outbreak in 2008 and the first BTV-4 outbreak in 2015, Austria had been free from bluetongue.
- The last outbreak of bluetongue serotype 4 was confirmed on 22. December 2016. The results of the passive and active surveillance programmes demonstrate that there has been no evidence of infection with bluetongue virus in Austria for more than two years.
- Austria submitted information on BTV to the OIE through WAHIS.

The OIE Delegate of Austria declares that the country complies with the requirements for a country free from BTV as of 5 February 2019 in accordance with Chapters 1.6 and 8.3 (Article 8.3.3. point 2 a.) of the *Terrestrial Code*.