



Transparency of OIE's standard setting procedures

02/04/2012 The OIE is the intergovernmental organisation in charge of preparing and adopting public standards and guidelines for the prevention and control of animal diseases worldwide, and for improving animal welfare. The World Trade Organisation recognises OIE standards and guidelines on animal diseases including zoonoses. Standards in the Terrestrial and Aquatic Codes and Manuals are also intended to prevent and control the spread of animal diseases by ensuring the sanitary safety of international trade and exchanges of animals and animal products while avoiding unjustified sanitary barriers to trade.

The procedures for developing and updating the standards published in the Terrestrial Code and the Aquatic Code are responsive, transparent and rapid. Importantly, they provide a basis for continuous improvement to standards as new scientific information comes to light, and for 'fast track' adoption of new standards when Member Countries need to address important new risks to human and animal health on an urgent basis. Each one of the 178 OIE Member Countries has an equal voice in the development and adoption of standards and each Member Country has a responsibility to engage with the OIE in this important work.

The standards contained in the OIE Animal Health Codes, are developed with the active participation of Member Countries, knowing that these will apply equally to everybody. They are the fruit of a consensus of the very senior public veterinary authorities of Member Countries, thus accounting for their value and their very wide practical application.

The Codes must often be used with their companion documents the Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines for Terrestrial Animals (Terrestrial Manual) and the Manual of Diagnostic Tests for Aquatic Animals (Aquatic Manual), the reference standards for veterinary laboratories. The purpose of the Manuals is to establish international harmonisation of laboratory methods for the most important animal diseases. Standards are described for laboratory diagnostic tests and the production and control of biological products (principally vaccines) for veterinary use across the globe, providing internationally agreed techniques.

Requests for the development of a new standard or the revision of an existing standard come to the OIE from various sources. Proposals from OIE national Delegates are given highest priority, particularly if several OIE Member Countries support the request. Proposals from international and regional organisations that have official agreements with the OIE are also given priority (currently the OIE has signed 51 such agreements). Requests from other organisations, be they scientific, industry or non-governmental organisations (NGO), are also considered.

The World Assembly of Delegates elects four Specialist Commissions by vote every three years. These are the Scientific Commission, the Terrestrial Code Commission, the Laboratories Commission and the Aquatic Animals Commission. Specialist Commissions only have the right

to propose new or revised standards for adoption by Member Countries at each annual OIE General Session.

OIE headquarters staff is responsible to ensure that the Terrestrial and Aquatic Codes as well as the Manuals are kept up to date on an ongoing basis. When a proposal is made to develop a new standard or to significantly revise an existing standard, the Director General of the OIE decides how the preparatory work will be managed, with reference to the terms of reference of the four OIE Specialist Commissions and the technical responsibilities of the OIE headquarters staff. The world renowned experts who prepare the proposals for a new or revised standard for the Specialist Commissions are generally selected from the global network of 260 OIE Reference Centres. The reports prepared by the experts for the Specialist Commissions are then provided to OIE Members by each Commission as annexes to their reports.

It is important for the acceptability and the credibility of OIE's advice to Member Countries that it be scientifically based, independent and free from potential conflict of interest in particular with commercial entities. OIE's working procedures ensure that this is respected through transparent approach to information management and procedures for the management of legitimate confidentiality. More specifically, the OIE has put in place a legal procedure for protecting the confidentiality of the information brought to the knowledge of any staff or experts working for the OIE as well as a procedure for declaring a potential conflict of interest that these experts or OIE staff may have with commercial entities.

The current OIE Strategic Plan (2011-2016) sets out the priorities, strategies and overall direction of the OIE's work programme, including for standard setting. It is developed under the direct supervision of the Director General in consultation with the elected OIE Council and submitted by him to the World Assembly for approval once every five years.

Specialist Commissions play a key role in the OIE standard setting procedures as they ensure that the proposed standards are based on comprehensive and up-to-date scientific information. OIE Member Countries and others submitting comments to Commissions' proposals are encouraged to provide a scientific rationale for their comments, to facilitate analysis by Specialist Commissions. On a twice yearly basis, OIE Member Countries are invited to comment on the recommendations in the reports of Specialist Commissions. Organisations with which the OIE has formal agreements are also invited to provide advice, as appropriate to the relevant areas of expertise. Thus, a 'two-year standard setting cycle' may afford as many as four opportunities for comment for stakeholders.

The five Regional Commissions of the OIE (Asia, Far East and Oceania; Americas; Europe; Africa and Middle-East) also provide important input to the strategic planning process and to identifying priorities for standard setting. The Recommendations adopted by Regional Commissions, and those voted at OIE Global Conferences, often identify a need for the OIE to develop standards relevant to matters of strategic importance.

In conclusion, the OIE's standard-setting policies, as required by Members, guarantee the production of science-based standards using democratic and transparent procedures.