Entering a new era: the birth of the WAHIS Web application!

15/05/2006 Since the creation of the OIE ' s new Animal Health Information Department in January 2002, major efforts have been made to improve the transparency, efficiency and speed with which animal health information is disseminated to Member Countries and to make it the information more readily available to the general public. In addition to being posted on the Web, this information is automatically sent to Delegates of OIE Member Countries and the Organisation's partners, as well as to any person or institution subscribing to the OIE ' s electronic mailing list, a service provided free of charge. This new approach gives a wider audience of users access to emergency information and ensures that the OIE remains the major provider of animal health information worldwide.

In parallel, the user-friendliness and coverage of the OIE Web site has have been enhanced, with the creation of new sections and the provision of access to archived information not previously available to end-users (archives of the weekly information publication, archives of country reports contained in the annual publication "World Animal Health", etc.). The introduction of Mapping to illustrate disease distribution worldwide has also recently been introduced. One of the main achievements since 2002 has been the shift away from a ' mailbox ' type of relationship between the OIE and its Member Countries towards a network management approach in dealing with animal health information. This has improved the quality and the quantity of information provided by Member countries year after year.

The active search and verification procedure for unofficial information from various sources that was introduced in 2002 has become more and more effective each year. Its results have improved the exhaustiveness of the OIE's information in general, and the credibility of official information from certain Member Countries in particular.

Another step forward in improving the OIE ' s animal health Information information has been to replace the previous disease lists A and B with a single OIE list of diseases, selected on the basis of criteria established in 2004, and to change the notification procedures. These new procedures, introduced in January 2005, provide a clearer definition of epidemiological events requiring immediate notification and improve the quality of the information collected by the use of new standardised new reporting forms. The previous system of monthly reporting limited to former list A diseases, whether absent or present, has now been extended to all OIE-listed diseases, based on a new six-monthly reporting procedure.

Today, all these efforts to modernise the OIE's World Animal Health Information System have reached fruition with the advent of the WAHIS Web application, which will herald in a new era in the provision of animal health information.

WAHIS is the fruit of more than two years' intense effort by the OIE Animal Health Information Department and the Information Systems Unit, involving the development of a 730-page technical specifications document, a call for tenders in December 2004 – January

2005, the selection of a private contractor, and the implementation of the project. As a result, Member Countries with a good Internet connection can now process their information directly using the WAHIS Web application instead of using paper forms. This will help to ensure that all Member Countries and end-users have access to real-time information. OIE Delegates can access this secure Web application and process the information needed to submit their immediate notifications and follow-up reports, six-monthly reports and annual reports. The WAHIS Web application provides each Member Country with a map to obtain the geographical coordinates of an event occurring in the country. Countries experiencing difficulty with Internet access will go on using the paper forms, which will then be processed into the WAHIS Web application at the OIE Headquarters.

Last but not least, the WAHIS output system has been modernised through the development of the WAHID Interface, providing access to the World Animal Health Database (replacing Handistatus II) and allowing end-users a wide range of queries on a given country or region, or two or more countries or regions, all with mapping support.

The two systems (Handistatus II and WAHID Interface) will coexist on the OIE Web site until the transfer of data from Handistatus II to WAHID has been completed.

The birth of WAHIS and WAHID is an event of crucial importance for OIE Member Countries. I should like to congratulate the staff of the OIE Animal Health Information Department, the Information Systems Unit, the OIE Delegates who helped to test the new system, all the other members of the OIE team involved in this project and the contractors for such an excellent job. I should also like to thank Member Countries for bearing with us during the inevitable teething problems associated with the development of any new computer system.

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