



## **The OIE recognition of country sanitary status for freedom from diseases**

**21/11/2006** The OIE has been given by its Member Countries the responsibility of compiling a list of Member Countries or zones that are officially recognised as being free from certain animal diseases.

In May 1994, a procedure was developed for the official recognition by the OIE of the foot and mouth disease (FMD) free status of Member Countries. The procedure has since been expanded to include official recognition of freedom for a country or zone from rinderpest, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia (CBPP) and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). Some Member Countries have suggested that the diseases for which the OIE officially recognises health status be increased. According to the 4th strategic plan of the OIE it is the prerogative of the International Committee (the General Assembly of Member Countries' Delegates) to possibly take such decision.

The official recognition occurs following a very democratic and impartial procedure. A Member Country that wishes to apply for the recognition sends its request to the OIE, accompanied by the specific questionnaire (available on the OIE website at [http://www.oie.int/eng/info/en\\_procedures.htm](http://www.oie.int/eng/info/en_procedures.htm)) and other relevant information. In May 2002, the International Committee voted a resolution asking Member Countries to participate in some of the costs linked with the recognition procedure.

After submission of the request, an Ad hoc group comprising the best renowned experts is then appointed to review the submission with regard to the relevant disease. The recommendations from the Ad hoc group are then reviewed and endorsed - if relevant - by the competent elected Specialist Commission (in this case the Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases). The Commission or the Ad hoc group may request a field technical mission to be sent to the applicant Member Country, depending on the quality of the documentation provided and the questions raised by the Ad hoc group.

Once the Commission recommends the acceptance of a request by a Member Country, all Member Countries' Delegates are informed of the OIE's intention to propose the change of the disease status of the Member Country for that particular disease. Member Countries then have 60 days in which to register any objection in writing. Should an objection be raised, which must be based on scientific or technical grounds, the country or countries objecting are required to submit documentation supporting their case. Member countries wishing to obtain additional information relevant to the application of another Member Country, can request it directly from the Official Delegate to the OIE of the relevant country.

The official recognition is then finally voted and adopted by the International Committee each year. OIE Member Countries must take that recognition into account when developing import health measures.

A Member Country can also declare itself free of certain diseases for which provision has not been made for official recognition of freedom by the OIE as well as for declaration of “provisional freedom” from rinderpest and CBPP. A Member Country declaring itself free from a given OIE listed disease or provisionally free from rinderpest and CBPP, can submit a declaration to the OIE stating that it declares itself free from such disease in accordance with the requirements of the OIE *Code* . The self-declaration for freedom from an OIE listed disease is the strict responsibility of the Member Country concerned and does not have official OIE recognition status as for the four diseases described above.

The maintenance of a disease free status officially recognized by the OIE is dependent on continued observance of OIE standards and reporting by Member Countries of any significant event that may change that status. Failure to comply provides grounds for the OIE to revoke the given status. Member Countries must also notify the OIE in writing during the months of November of each year that the epidemiological situation in respect of each of the diseases in question, remained unchanged. In addition to official information received from Member Countries, the OIE also depends on a "tracking system" based on disease information obtained from non official sources. In these cases, the Member Country is asked by the OIE to confirm or refute the information before taking appropriate actions.

At the 74th OIE General Session in May 2006, the adoption of Resolution XXVII including the new categorization of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) status to the list of sanitary recognition confirms now the sole responsibility and mandate of the OIE worldwide on countries status with regard to BSE. The European Commission also used to establish a scientific platform for the evaluation process for the allocation of a GBR (Geographical BSE Risk) in respect of BSE to countries wishing to export to EU Member Countries. In fact, the European Commission will now cease to evaluate countries according to the GBR and will recognize the OIE categorization system for its own recognition of countries in respect to BSE risks in animals and animal products.

The official recognition granted by the OIE to countries or zones following the above mentioned sanitary recognition procedures is of great significance for international trade. This official recognition can be considered as equivalent to an international standard, in that it should be recognized by trading partners. Deviations from, or lack of acceptance of this sanitary status recognition must be scientifically justified by any importing country.

OIE recognition of country or zone status for freedom from diseases helps developing countries – both importing or potentially exporting - to overcome difficulties they may encounter in sending expert evaluation missions of sanitary status to their trading partners territories.

By introducing the concept of “zoning” and “compartmentalisation”, OIE procedures also help countries partially infected by a disease to safeguard or obtain international market access.

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