



Network on BSE-TSE Minutes of the 17th meeting

Held on 13-14 October 2022

Meeting room: SEAT M07/M08 and web-meeting

(Agreed on 22 October 2022)

Participants

- **Network Participants of Member States (including EFTA Countries and IPA countries):**

Country	Name
Austria	Hermann Schildorfer
Belgium	Severine Matthijs
Croatia	Tihana Miškić, Karmen Branović Čakančić
Cyprus	Georgia Aparin
Czechia	Pavel Vodrážka, Klara Jelinkova
Denmark	Anne Sofie Hammer
Estonia	Luisa Leinberg
Finland	Suvi Joutsen
France	Thomas Maignien
Germany	Christine Fast
Hungary	Tamas Lancsak
Ireland	Justin Byrne, John McConville
Italy	Romolo Nonno, Giuseppe Ru, Elena Maria Bozzetta
Latvia	Edvins Olsevskis
Lithuania	Viktoras Maskaliovas
Malta	Sergio Fiore, Steve Farrugia
The Netherlands	Linda Kox
Norway	Michael Tranulis
Poland	Mirosław Paweł Polak
Portugal	Sofia Quintas
Romania	Theodora Chesnoiu Vasile
Slovakia	Martin Mojzis
Slovenia	Polona Juntos
Spain	Maria Esther Prieto Caballero
Sweden	Maria Nöremark
Norway	Michael A. Tranulis

Switzerland	Torsten Seuberlich
Albania	Lisa Aldin
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Slobodan Dojcinovic
Montenegro	Rados Mkovic, Nikola Pejovic
North Macedonia	Aleksandar Jovanchev
Serbia	Sanja Aleksic Kovacevic
Kosovo	Saranda Ametaj
Turkey	Anil Demeli

- **EFSA:**

BIOHAW Unit: Ernesto Liebana, Kateryna Chuzhakina, Ancuta Cezara Simon, Angel Ortiz Pelaez, Pietro Stella, Frank Verdonck.

- **European Commission (EC):**

Fabien Schneegans (DG SANTE G5- Food Hygiene, Feed and Fraud)

- **Others:**

WOAH: Aurelio Cabezas Murillo

External speakers: Emmanuel Comoy, Sylvie Benestad, Mike Miller, Atle Mysterud, Takateru Daikai

Day 1, 13 October 2022

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed the participants from 24 EU Member States, Norway, Switzerland, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey.

Apologies were received from representative of Greece.

2. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

3. Agreement of the minutes of the 16th meeting of the Network on BSE/TSE held on 18-19 October 2021, Parma¹.

The minutes were agreed by written procedure on 5 November 2021 and published on the ESA website on 22 November 2021.

4. Chronic wasting disease (CWD): update

Three presentations provided updates of the situation of CWD in North America and Norway, and an overview into European CWD situation was addressed.

4.1 CWD in North America: update. Should we get worried in Europe

Michael W Miller (external speaker), wildlife veterinarian and CWD epidemiologist, presented an update of the situation of CWD in North America, lessons learnt from the long experience of handling

¹ <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/event/2020/15th-meeting-efsa-biocontam-biohaz-bse-tse-network-minutes.pdf>

the disease in North America and potential management strategies adopted, and highlighting the parallelism of the situations in North America and Europe, as well as final recommendations.

4.2 Characterization of CWD strains in Europe²

Sylvie Benestad, veterinary pathologist from the Norwegian Veterinary Institute of Norway, presented the latest evidence on the characterization of CWD strains in Europe, not only of Norway but also of Sweden and Finland. She showed some of the latest results, in particular, the emerging evidence of the presence of multiple strains of the TSE agent circulating in Europe at the moment. In particular the transmission study in bank voles of Norwegian CWD, showing that CWD prion strains affecting Norwegian cervids are distinct from those found in North America².

4.3 CWD in Norway: update. What's next. Future prospects

Atle Mysterud, Professor of Ecology at University of Oslo, after providing an overview of past strategies on depopulation of reindeer in one of the populations of wild reindeer in Norway affected by CWD, presented ongoing integrated wildlife disease management and surveillance of semi-domestic reindeer population in Norway.

4.4 Q&A

To presentation 4.2 there were questions about the interpretation of the possible evolution of moose strains into more contagious reindeer-like strains through passage in animal models, and about the presence of these strains, some of them contagious, evolving already in the field for a long time. Dr Benestad answered it was difficult to transfer those results of experimental studies to natural conditions and that the surveillance efforts were very small before 2016 to speculate about how long CWD strains could have been evolving in Norway.

To presentation 4.3 there were questions about the impact of age variability in the presentation of the disease and about the reintroduction of reindeer in the culled population of Nordfjella. Prof Mysterud replied that the agent can be adapted in the host hence the age of the population needs to be taken into consideration. It has been decided to wait 5 years for the restocking, taking it from the practice in the North America. Dr Miller informed there were no clear basis to justify the 5-year clearance before restocking.

5. Zoonotic potential: species barrier

Two presentations were provided on different aspects of the same theme: the zoonotic potential of TSE. Two approaches were presented, mathematical modelling and experimental animal models.

5.1 L-BSE: verification of spontaneity. Impact of feed ban on L-BSE

Takateru Daikai, Assistant Director from Animal health division, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) Japan, presented the main outcomes of the paper by Daikai and Yamamoto, 2022. "*Epidemiological verification of the mechanism of occurrence of atypical L-type bovine spongiform encephalopathy*"³. regarding the effectiveness of the feed ban in reducing the cases of C-BSE and L-BSE, using data from nine European countries to assess whether L-BSE could be transmitted orally to new birth cohorts. In addition, recent results from the surveillance programme were presented.

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33229531/>

³ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/tbed.14298>

5.2 Assessment of zoonotic potential of TSEs: the contribution of in-vivo experimental models

Emmanuel Comoy, veterinary researcher and member of CEA (Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission) and Université Paris-Saclay, presented an overview of major inoculation experiments of prion diseases on primates and provided additional details on these experimental models that has shed light on transmissibility, pathogenesis and resistance of prions. This review has been recently published: Comoy et al. (2022)⁴ "*Non-human primates in prion diseases*". He presented the main conclusions of this paper, highlighting the achievement of the experimental studies in non-human primates in the history of TSE.

Day 2, 14 October 2022

6. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed the participants to the second day of the Network meeting.

7. Pulse Survey: EFSA Network on BSE/TSE and TSE in Europe

Angel Ortiz (EFSA) prepared a pulse survey for Network participants regarding the scientific network format, attendance by members and observers, awareness of experts and public in Europe about the risk of TSE for humans. The main outcomes of the survey highlighted that:

- The majority of the members attend the meeting to catch up with scientific developments in the field, to meet colleagues from other countries and network and to listen to the updates by the EC, WOAH and EFSA.
- Over 90% of the participants want to keep the two sessions in the annual meeting, and about half of them consider sufficient and adequate just attend the annual meeting and not to engage in other activities of the network, whereas approx. 30% recognised this was not sufficient.
- Regarding the follow up and use of MS Teams, half of the participants regularly follows the posts and updates while the other half is not active on MS Teams platform. Among the main reasons for not proposing topics in the annual meeting it was stated that 44% (n= 14/32) of the survey participants prefer the topics proposed by EFSA; some participants explained that research on TSE is not performed in their MS, while in other countries BSE cases are not recurrent.
- The EFSA Scientific network on BSE/TSE is identified with the words knowledge, interaction, scientific, science, exchange and useful
- Half of the attendees considered that although TSE diseases in Europe are in decline, many aspects are still not well understood, and we should strengthen the research and risk assessment efforts, and 40% considers that despite being in decline, we should continue with the current level of research and risk assessment efforts.
- Approximately 55% of the attendees believe that currently there is very little level of awareness of the public in Europe about the risk of TSE for humans, and approx. 25% believes that younger generations do not know anything about TSE and older generations have forgotten or do not perceive risks anymore.
- Most of the participants consider that CWD is not a problem that should only worry Scandinavian countries

⁴ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00441-022-03644-7>

- In decreasing order, the animal TSEs causing the most worry (in both classical and atypical forms) and should be prioritised in terms of research and risk assessment are BSE, scrapie and CWD (45%), followed by CWD, BSE and scrapie (20%), and BSE, CWD and scrapie (12.9%).

8. General session

8.1 EFSA activities on TSE 2021-2022

Angel Ortiz (EFSA) updated the Network on the TSE-related risk assessment activities that took place in EFSA since the 2021 Annual Network meeting. In particular, he presented the main findings of the scientific opinion regarding the use of a multi-step catalytic co-processing hydro-treatment for the production of renewable fuels using Category 3 animal fat and used cooking oil. The scientific opinion was adopted on 28 September 2022 and will be published by the end of October 2022. Angel provided also updates on the ongoing scientific opinion on the monitoring of CWD to be submitted by March 2023 as well on the PAP pig opinion to be submitted by June 2023. Finally, future prospects regarding Czechia that submitted on 12 May 2022 to the EC the application to be recognized as a Member State with negligible risk of classical scrapie were discussed.

8.2 EU TSE annual report 2021: preliminary results

Giuseppe Ru, Director of the EURL on TSE and contractor for the production of the EFSA's EU summary report on TSE, presented the preliminary findings that will be included in the EU annual report on TSE for 2021. The report presents the results of surveillance of TSE in different animal species and is expected to be published by the end of November 2022 by EFSA. It includes data from 27 Member States (MS), 8 non-European Reporting Countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey), and the United Kingdom (as non-MS from 1 February 2020).

8.3 Update on the activities of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) in the TSE field

Aurelio Cabezas, Disease Status Officer of the Status Department of the WOAH, updated the Network on the TSE-related activities ongoing in WOAH since the previous Network meeting. During 2021 there have been many activities in WOAH linked to the revision of the BSE chapters in the Terrestrial Animal Health Code, which will be presented to the General Assembly for approval in May 2023.

8.4 Update on the regulatory activities of the EC in the TSE field

Fabien Schneegans, legislative officer of G5 – Food Hygiene, Feed and Fraud, Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety, European Commission, presented the activities of the EC since the last Network meeting. Two horizontal topics were presented: 1) Feed ban; 2) Trade-related issues. Three disease-specific topics were also presented: 1) BSE; 2) scrapie; 3) CWD.

8.5 Q&A

The chair asked participants for further comments and questions but there were none.

8.6 Round-the-table discussion on the topics discussed in the EFSA Scientific Network on BSE-TSE and country updates

Open floor for all participants (not by country):

- FRANCE informed of the forthcoming publication of a risk assessment of the use of fat tissue for feed due to cross-contamination with specified risk materials (SRM) when splitting the carcass. Some aspects concerning the use of gelatine and ruminant collagen for feed have also been included in this opinion.
- IRELAND suggested the use of email as the main channel for communication because Microsoft Teams is not a supported platform in their institution. SWEDEN concurred with this proposal. The chair explained that it is EFSA policy to use Microsoft Teams for the scientific networks but, exceptionally, important communications could be also channelled by email.
- EFSA showed the summary of the answers to the pulse survey and asked for feedback. The members supported the continuation of the annual meeting of the EFSA network and consider the meeting a unique opportunity since there are no meetings anymore in the area of TSE. The general consensus was to hold the meetings physically in Parma or somewhere else, but if needed, doing the meeting in Parma every second year would be a minimum.
- SLOVENIA asked WOHAT if and when the name of the OIE Manual will be amended, because of the requirements related to QA system and accreditation according to ISO170025, where all changes of relevant references should be followed and corrected. Auditors are very thorough with that kind of changes. WOHAT representative said that that will not be soon, it can take several months. That information is important for laboratories, due to audits and modification of the SOPs, etc.
- Croatia asked WOHAT if the BSE active surveillance will be eliminated in the future, following the new provisions of the terrestrial manual. The representative of WOHAT replied that, in the revised provision, it will go from active to passive surveillance plus high risk animals, and that the point system will disappear. The representative of the EC expressed the opinion that in the EU active surveillance should stay in place, and that may eventually ask EFSA opinion on this matter, but eventually EU would align with WOHAT provisions.

9. Any Other Business

- The draft minutes will be circulated soon following the requirement to publish the network minutes within 14 working days. At least one Network meeting will be planned for 2023. Additional meetings/activities will be organised depending on the need and topics for discussion identified by the Network.
- Angel Ortiz (EFSA) invited the Network participants to the upcoming info session for potential applicants on alternative methods to produce animal-by-products under the EU work frame legislation, which will be held on Thursday 8 December 2022⁵.
- A discussion followed regarding the format and participation of European and International experts. Most of the Network participants endorsed the current hybrid format and the participation of EU and WOHAT representatives. In general, it was proposed to implement the interaction between participants and the representative from The Netherlands committed to bring forward more topics for the interactive sessions for the next annual meeting, such as the risk of relaxing the feed ban. Information about the EFSA panel self-tasks and grant & procurements were also proposed to be addressed next year.
- No other businesses were discussed.

⁵ The date has now been changed to 1 December 2022

The Chair thanked all participants for their attendance and closed the meeting.