

Webinars on increasing
preparedness for highly pathogenic
avian influenza in Europe
(12/09/2023)

Q&A



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WEBINAR 1: UPCOMING CALL FOR ACTIVE SURVEILLANCE IN WILD BIRDS

Question 1: How much time should you invest per year if you want to participate?

Answer 1: This will depend very much on the respective surveillance node, and how many consortium partners, sub-contractors and staff you are going to involve there. EFSA is not expecting a particular number of staff to hire or prescribing how much time should be spent on a certain task, but we will be specifying certain deliverables in the call for proposals that we are expecting to be fulfilled. As long as you are delivering what we are expecting there, it will be up to you as to how you would like to organise yourselves. In general, we do not envisage sampling to take place year-round, depending on the respective surveillance node, as it will probably be focused on certain months during the year, but there might be other activities such as the network activities and the training taking place also during the other months.

Question 2: Is EFSA expecting a centralised database for data collection and sequencing?

Answer 2: Since our aim is to make the surveillance results and also the sequences available publicly, for both the general public and the research community, we have decided not to create a completely new centralised database, but to make use of one of the already existing public databases for genomic data. We are also aware that there are new open-access databases in the development. At the time when this becomes relevant, we will be using the most advanced or the most common platform that is being used. However, there will be a new communication platform on which our central coordination team will make regular reports with these results and interpretations thereof available.

Question 3: What about testing mammals?

Answer 3: We agree that this is a very hot topic and would make sense from a scientific point of view, but this is not the scope of this upcoming call.

Question 4: Are the surveillance nodes exclusive? If intense HPAI virus activity in a country has been obvious elsewhere but the surveillance node, is there room for modification?

Answer 4: We will need to circumscribe the geographic locations of the respective surveillance nodes as much as possible, as they are based on the scientific background described in the [External Scientific Report](#), on our experts' suggestions that are backed up by their extensive experience on the topic and result from many years of work in the piloted geographic locations. We do not aim to be too restrictive, but we will not be able to be too open in terms of the exact geographic locations of the surveillance nodes. Some of them will be broader, for example those ones along coastlines and covering several countries, but others will be more restricted to certain wetlands. However, during the second and third years of the project, small adaptations to the sampling plan can be made upon agreement with the central coordination team.



Question 5: Can an institution from Ukraine be involved in the activity?

Answer 5: Only [EFSA Art. 36 organisations](#) are eligible to apply to the call for proposals as applicant or partner. There are no Ukrainian organisations in the list of EFSA Art. 36 organisations, available [here](#). However, organisations that are not on the EFSA Art. 36 list can take part in the project as a subcontractor, but only for the execution of non-core tasks – the text of the call for proposals will specify which tasks are considered 'core tasks', which cannot be subcontracted.

Question 6: In the past, active wild bird surveillance data has been submitted to EU/EFSA together with the passive surveillance data. Will we also be submitting the data collected by this activity through the same channel or send them separately?

Answer 6: The data collection and submission you are referring to is required from Member States as per EU legislation. However, this upcoming call is a voluntary pilot initiative and will not be following the same approach. Due to its voluntary nature, we are not able to ask Member States or other countries to submit the data within the same framework that we are using for a legally required activity. That said, if EC considers the information relevant, the data may be documented together with the data from the surveillance programmes in EFSA's annual avian influenza surveillance report. This will be for EC to decide.

Question 7: The [External Scientific Report](#) recommends: 'New investigations need to be integrated to see which mitigation/adaptation strategies (e.g. closing down wetland areas or, alternatively, active carcass-removal activities) would be most effective to dampen waves of infection in wild birds and mammals.' Would (piloting) management options, and to which extent, be included in these activities?

Answer 7: We agree that this would be an interesting question to consider, but it cannot be covered within the scope of this call, as risk management questions are not within the remit of EFSA.

Question 8: Is the aim screening for only HPAI viruses, or also LPAI viruses?

Answer 8: You will be able to screen for all avian influenza viruses with the help of rapid diagnostic tests (e.g. PCR), but only samples positive for highly pathogenic avian influenza will be subtyped and sequenced.

Question 9: When will the budgets for the individual surveillance nodes be published? Together with the call in November or after assessment of available resources for the 9 surveillance nodes?

Answer 9: In the call for proposals expected to be published in November, there will be an indication of the estimated budget for each node (referred to as 'lot') for the estimated 36-month duration of the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA). Then the budget for each lot will be assigned with the Specific Grant Agreements under each lot and the exact value of these Specific Grant Agreements will be decided during the implementation of the FPA.

Question 10: Is it possible to share a list of the participants (and potential partners)?

Answer 10: EFSA is not in a position to share the list of participants to the webinar. However, as mentioned in the presentation, there is the possibility to use the partner search facility of the EU Funding and Tender opportunities portal to express interest to partner for this call. It is



important to notice that the platform is open to any organisations; therefore, it is up to the future applicant to check that organisations expressing interest to become partner are eligible to participate in the call (i.e. being on the list of EFSA Art. 36 organisations). The EFSA National Focal Points can also support an organisation in identifying potential partners for the call.

Question 11: What would the non-core activities include?

Answer 11: This will be specified in detail in the upcoming call for proposals.

Question 12: To which extent will the local ornithological expertise be needed in the activities?

Answer 12: Ornithological expertise will be brought to the table by our central coordination team, but at the same time, the staff that will be performing the field work will need to identify wild birds correctly and therefore of course need to have a certain level of ornithological knowledge. This will also be needed to trap and sample wild birds correctly. Still, you will be trained by our central coordination team on all of these aspects and therefore do not need to hire high-level experts in ornithology, but we would strongly recommend to involve field staff that already knows how to handle wild birds.



WEBINAR 2: UPDATES ON EFSA'S BIRD FLU RADAR

Question 1: Are seabirds such as gulls and terns considered in these models? Are interactions between species considered? For example, some species remain confined to Northern Europe (geese) and do not reach Southern Europe, but can transmit HPAI to species that are widespread throughout Europe (e.g. teals).

Answer 1: No, currently seabirds such as gulls and terns are not included in the model. However, in an update that we will work on the upcoming year, we will include gulls in the model. To answer the question about interaction between species: it is taken into account, but not in a very detailed way at this stage. We did not have enough data for that. What is included is that the risk of a certain species being infected with HPAI is based on the accumulated risk for all the other 11 species. This means that if the risk of an avian influenza outbreak is high in a certain species, it will affect the probability of an outbreak in the other species.

Question 2: Are there options or plans to expand the number of species included in the model?

Answer 2: Yes, we are planning to include more species to the model in the next update, which will be available around August 2024.

Question 3: Does the model include any information on HPAI outbreaks in Russia? That would be very interesting for us in Finland during the fall migration.

Answer 3: At the moment this information is not included, which is one of the current limitations of the model. The model is quite good at predicting where the next outbreak in Europe will occur, but it is not very good at predicting the beginning of the epidemic season, because of this lack of data from Russia and other countries outside Europe. Later on in the project – by August 2024 - we will explore options to include such data sources to improve the model.

Question 4: Has there been/will there be any attempt to incorporate actual weather radar data on migratory bird movements into the tool?

Answer 4:

- Answer if with 'weather radar data' the questioner means birds showing up on radar data: This is quite a difficult thing to integrate with the sort of data we have at the moment. In the long term it would be interesting, but the problem is that with a lot of weather radar data we do not have species identification. Sometimes it is possible to identify the species from the radar data, in particular with small samples, but often not for the entire dataset. That makes it difficult to include the radar data. Another problem with the radar data is that we are currently mostly looking at long term changes in population distributions, at the time scale of weeks or months, whereas weather radar data picks up very short-term waves of migration. We hope to explore the usefulness of such potential data sources in the future.
- Answer if with 'weather radar data' the questioner means data on the actual weather across Europe: This is something we want to try and incorporate in the model. For this, we are in contact with the EU SEED project that can provide data on changes in the weather to us. We will then be able to predict bird abundance across Europe better,



because movements of birds can occur, for example, in association with snow fall or ice.

Question 5: In the part about weekly abundance predictions, does week 1 mean the beginning of the calendar year or of the epidemiological year?

Answer 5: The beginning of the calendar year.

Question 6: Does the model encompass Western Balkan countries, e.g. Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro etc.?

Answer 6: It incorporates all of those countries; it essentially incorporates the whole of Europe. However, we do need to keep in mind that the amount of data available from different parts of Europe will differ. This means that the model will provide less precise estimates for regions that have smaller amounts of data.