

# 26th Scientific Network on Animal Health and Welfare ANIMAL HEALTH TOPIC meeting



10-11 July 2025

09:00-18:00 / 09:00-13:00

Minutes agreed on 30 July 2025

**Location:** EFSA - Parma (Meeting Room M09) and online

**Attendees:**

- o Network Participants:

Country	Member State Organisation
Austria	AGES
Croatia	Croatian Agency for Agriculture and Food
Cyprus	Veterinary Services
Czech Republic	State Veterinary Administration
Denmark	University of Copenhagen
Estonia	National Centre for Laboratory Research and Risk Assessment
Finland	Finnish Food Authority
France	ANSES
Germany	Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut
Hungary	Ministry of Agriculture - National Food Chain Safety Office
Ireland	The Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine
Italy	Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale dell'Abruzzo e del Molise 'Giuseppe Caporale'
Latvia	Food and Veterinary Service
Luxembourg	Luxembourg veterinary and food administration (ALVA)
Netherlands	NVWA
Norway	Norwegian Scientific Committee for Food and Environment
Poland	Central Veterinary Inspectorate Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences
Portugal	Direção Geral de Alimentação e Veterinária
Slovak Republic	University of Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy in Kosice
Spain	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and food MAPA
Sweden	Swedish Veterinary Agency (SVA)



MEETING MINUTES - 26th Scientific Network on Animal Health and Welfare  
ANIMAL HEALTH TOPIC meeting

- Observers:  
Swiss Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office(Switzerland);  
MARD (Albania); Veterinary office of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia and Herzegovina); Food Veterinary Agency (Kosovo); Food and Veterinary Agency (North Macedonia); Scientific Veterinary Institute Novi Sad (Serbia); General Directorate of Food and Control / Animal Health and Quarantine Department (Türkiye)
- Hearing Experts:  
GIRAULT Guillaume; VERNGE Timothée
- European Commission  
SANTE
- Contractors:  
UCLM
- EFSA:  
**BIOHAW Team Animal Health:** AZNAR ASENSIO J Inmaculada, BROGLIA Alessandro, CATTANEO Eleonora, GERVELMEYER Andrea, KOHNLE Lisa, KRYEMADHI Kamela, MELO Miguel, MUR Lina, ORTIZ PELAEZ Angel, PAPAEO Stella, TAMPACH Stefania, ZANCANARO Gabriele  
  
**BIOHAW:** VERDONCK Frank



## **1. Welcome and apologies for absence**

The Chair welcomed the participants.

No apologies were received.

## **2. Adoption of agenda**

The agenda was adopted without changes.

## **3. Agreement of the minutes of the 24th meeting of the Scientific Network on Animal Health and Welfare (ANIMAL HEALTH TOPIC) held on 23-24 September 2024**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed by written procedure on 21 October 2024.

## **4. Joint programming on vector-borne diseases**

Frank Verdonck, Head of Unit of EFSA's BIOHAW Unit, introduced EFSA's new initiative to jointly coordinate risk assessments for vectorborne diseases across Member States. He explained the rationale for this effort, citing the increasing emergence of vectorborne diseases due to climate change and globalisation. The initiative is structured around a five-year mandate covering 25 diseases, with two pillars: monitoring and risk assessment.

He described the proposed Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA), which will comprise several lots and thereby divides Europe into four geographic zones to facilitate coordinated work. The FPA will support tasks such as data harmonisation, dashboard development, and outbreak response. A list of tasks will be offered from which Member States can choose from, based on prioritisation and joint decision-making on exactly what they would like to work on.

It was emphasised that suggestions for tasks can be brought forward by Member States at this stage.

Discussion highlights: Participants raised concerns about the feasibility of hiring staff under short-term contracts and the need for flexibility in funding mechanisms. Spain and Luxembourg emphasised the administrative burden and the difficulty of coordinating across multiple institutions. EFSA acknowledged these concerns and confirmed that the call for proposals would be launched in autumn 2025, with a strong emphasis on practical deliverables and stakeholder engagement.

Germany and France stressed the importance of ensuring that the call targets risk assessors rather than academic researchers. EFSA clarified that applicants would need endorsement from their national Chief Veterinary Officers to confirm their role in national risk assessment.

### **5.1 HPAI: Building capacities for active surveillance in wild birds (SENTINEL Wild Birds project)**

Lisa Kohnle from EFSA presented an update on the SENTINEL Wild Birds project, launched in 2024 to enhance early warning systems for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) through active surveillance in wild birds. The project established a coordinated network of surveillance nodes across Europe, strategically located along migratory flyways. The aim is to detect HPAI circulation in wild birds before spillover into poultry.

Key components of the project include field sampling of wild birds in key locations, with a focus on migratory species, rapid diagnostic testing and whole genome sequencing to characterise circulating strains, real-time data sharing to support risk assessments and policy decisions, and monthly genomic analysis and publication of results on an open-access platform.



The project is implemented by seven consortia, each responsible for surveillance in designated regions and sampling activities have already been carried out over almost one year. Lisa Kohnle presented preliminary results based on the data collected during the first year of the project, including the detection of a new HPAI A(H5N1) virus genotype. She also presented summary statistics on the specific wild bird species samples, sample matrices targeted and weeks of the year with the highest sample- and bird-level prevalences.

The coming sampling period will start in autumn when two new surveillance nodes are expected to join the project.

## 5.2 HPAI: User survey on EFSA's Bird Flu Radar

Miguel Melo from EFSA presented the results of a user survey conducted to evaluate EFSA's Bird Flu Radar, a spatio-temporal risk assessment tool to estimate the risk of HPAI introduction in wild birds designed to support early warning and preparedness. The aim of the survey was to receive feedback on the tool's usefulness, user friendliness, data presentation and overall effectiveness in supporting decision-making.

Key findings of the survey include:

- The tool is used by a wide variety of stakeholder and considered highly relevant.
- In many instances proactive responses were triggered by the tool.
- Users requested broader species coverage and longer prediction windows.
- Many users expressed their willingness to provide further feedback on the tool.

A new call to continue the development of EFSA's Bird Flu Radar will be launched in September 2025, taking into account the results of the user survey.

Possible improvements include increased sensitivity and specificity, prediction further into the future, and enhanced visualisation of risk estimates.

## 5.3 HPAI: Contingency planning in Denmark

Denmark provided a comprehensive overview of the country's contingency framework for HPAI, coordinated by the Danish Veterinary Consortium. Four pillars of the framework were described: expert group meetings, outbreak investigations, ad hoc support, and research.

Denmark highlighted several research projects, including the Rofus project, which identified wetlands and coastal areas as high-risk zones, and the Enigma project, which developed endemic-epidemic models to predict outbreak timing and location. Within-flock SEIR models were used to estimate introduction dates and outbreak dynamics. The Enigma project website was introduced, which provides public access to model outputs and forecasts. The upcoming Enigma 2 project will integrate biosecurity data, vaccination effects, and migratory bird patterns.

Denmark moreover emphasised the importance of collaboration between universities, government agencies, and field veterinarians.

## 5.4 HPAI: Modelling challenge

Timothée Vergne introduced a European-wide HPAI modelling challenge under the Horizon Europe project "WiLiMan-ID". The challenge aims to simulate a fictional HPAI outbreak on a virtual island and engage modelling teams to provide real-time policy advice.

Structure of the challenge:

Phase 1: Preparation of a synthetic epidemic dataset.

Phase 2: Modelling teams receive phased data and respond to evolving scenarios.

Phase 3: Evaluation of model performance and synthesis of lessons learned.

Risk managers were invited to contribute to:

- Defining evaluation metrics (e.g. number of outbreaks, duration, animal losses).
- Prioritising intervention strategies (e.g. movement bans, vaccination, culling).
- Reviewing model outputs and communication formats.



## MEETING MINUTES - 26th Scientific Network on Animal Health and Welfare ANIMAL HEALTH TOPIC meeting

An interactive session was held to gather feedback on preferred metrics and strategies. Participants prioritised outbreak location and number, followed by duration and animal losses. Movement bans and preventive culling were prioritised as key strategies.

Luxembourg asked about using historical epidemic events and not only fictional events for the development of the scenario, to which Timothée Vergne replied that the fictional events are actually based on what is known from historical epidemic events. Spain asked if the model parameters would be same for all the teams and the reply was that this would still need to be determined, but the hope was that everyone would use different approaches and parameters for comparison.

### **5.5 HPAI: Update on the French vaccination campaign**

France presented an update on its national HPAI vaccination campaign, launched in October 2023. The campaign targets domestic ducks and is based on two vaccines effective against clade 2.3.4.4b HPAI viruses.

Key figures include:

- 55 million ducks vaccinated.
- 2,100 establishments covered.
- 32,371 samples collected through weekly passive surveillance.
- 622,654 samples collected through monthly active surveillance.

Surveillance methods include:

- Weekly testing of five dead birds per establishment.
- Monthly clinical evaluations and swab testing of 60 birds.
- End-of-cycle serological testing of 20 birds.

No HPAI-positive results were detected. However, over 700 samples tested positive for low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI), indicating high LPAI circulation in the duck sector.

France is also conducting a cost-benefit analysis and exploring the use of environmental samples (e.g. dust, droppings) for surveillance. No negative consumer reactions to vaccinated poultry products have been reported.

Switzerland asked how vaccination is being received by farmers, and France replied that it is being very well received. However, now that vaccination will start to be paid by the poultry industry, this might change. Nonetheless, France thinks that the farmers would still want to vaccinate due to the perceived benefits in terms of production and trade. Germany asked if passive surveillance was mandatory, and France replied that passive surveillance would be needed given that active surveillance alone was not sensitive enough. The Netherlands asked what the future expectations were in terms of funding, and France replied that the goal was to achieve a 50-50 ratio (public/private).

### **5.6 HPAI: Biosecurity awareness campaign**

Alessandro Broglia from EFSA presented EFSA's communication campaign on poultry biosecurity, developed in collaboration with the European Commission. The campaign targets small- and medium-scale farms and aims to raise awareness of biosecurity practices to prevent HPAI.

Key communication materials include fact-sheets, posters, stickers, and social media content.

Three core messages have been selected:

- Prevent virus entry (e.g. control access, clean tools, separate clean/dirty zones).
- Avoid species mixing (e.g. separate poultry species and exclude pets).
- Ensure early detection (e.g. report signs of illness or sudden deaths).

The campaign emphasises:

- Trust-based messaging through veterinarians and farm technicians.
- Visual communication to overcome language barriers.
- Positive framing of biosecurity as a tool for farm health and productivity.

Materials will be available in all EU languages by mid-September 2025. Feedback from Member States was encouraged, particularly on message clarity and stakeholder targeting.



## 5.7 HPAI: Avian influenza annual surveillance report

Gabriele Zancanaro from EFSA previewed the upcoming annual HPAI surveillance report, which integrates data from multiple sources using the SIGMA data model. It was highlighted that this was the second year of full SIGMA implementation for the avian influenza data collection.

More specific, the data sources include:

- Union surveillance programmes.
- One Health grant laboratory data.
- SENTINEL Wild Birds project (see 5.1).
- ADIS and WAHIS databases for reported outbreaks.
- Wild bird density data from the European Bird Portal.

Key improvements compared to previous years:

- Establishment-level data with unique IDs.
- Harmonised classification of establishments.
- Test-level results and geospatial coordinates.
- Enhanced data validation and automated report generation.
- Inclusion of data on mammals.

The report will analyse trends in surveillance coverage and positivity, risk factors for outbreak occurrence, the effectiveness of sampling strategies (e.g. bucket sampling), and the interaction between wild and domestic bird populations.

There was a question if the worst-case scenario would be applied to decide on the positivity of a given establishment if multiple test results were available for multiple birds. This was confirmed and it was moreover highlighted that also the scenario of having different avian influenza viruses circulating in one establishment was being considered.

## 5.8 HPAI: Dairy cows

Andrea Gervelmeyer from EFSA presented EFSA's recently published Scientific Report on the HPAI A(H5N1) B3.13 genotype circulating in US dairy cattle. The report was developed in response to a mandate received in late 2024.

Main findings of the report include:

- The virus causes mild to severe symptoms in dairy cattle, including reduced milk production.
- High within-farm transmission via milking equipment and personnel was observed.
- 981 dairy herds infected across 16 US states, affecting 58% of the national dairy population.
- Control measures in the US include movement restrictions, mandatory reporting, and enhanced biosecurity.

EFSA moreover assessed potential pathways for introduction of this particular genotype into the EU:

- Trade: analysis of legal and illegal imports of potentially contaminated commodities.
- Migratory birds: identification of candidate species and flyways from North America to Europe.

Finally, it was highlighted that the work on the topic continued with a Scientific Opinion expected to be published in November 2025 and covering the risk of introduction into EU dairy cattle, adaptations needed in EU surveillance systems, and the likelihood of milk contamination and food safety implications.

Spain asked if a worsening of clinical signs had been observed in dairy cattle, and EFSA replied that this might not be the case, explaining that the full clinical manifestation had still been unknown at the beginning of the outbreak, and that only with time, the full clinical profile was discovered. Germany asked about the feedback received from the US colleagues, and EFSA confirmed that they had reviewed the report and answered to some of the questions (but it was limited to the information provided by official channels). Luxembourg asked about the possibility of migratory sea mammals being vectors, which had however not been discussed in the context of this mandate.



France commented that it was possible to detect the virus through testing wastewater, which was another aspect that had not been considered in the context of this mandate.

## 6.1 ASF: Annual and risk factor reports

Lina Mur from EFSA presented the 2024 African swine fever (ASF) epidemiological report, noting an 83% drop in domestic pig outbreaks compared to 2023, and introduced the scope of the upcoming 2026 risk factor report. Most outbreaks occurred in Romania, and six were reported in large commercial farms. Surveillance data showed that 79% of outbreaks were detected via clinical suspicion, 14% through systematic testing of dead pigs, and 7% via tracing.

Wild boar outbreaks remained stable, with Poland accounting for 30%. Passive surveillance yielded 70% of positive cases, despite representing only 5.2% of samples. The report also highlighted a continued decline in small pig farms and a recovery of wild boar populations in the Baltic states.

Lina Mur then conducted a live poll to gather feedback on the report's usefulness. Participants identified hunting bag data, temporal and spatial analyses, and restricted zone mapping as the most valuable components. Spain and Luxembourg raised concerns about the difficulty of convincing hunters to participate in population control efforts and requested more evidence linking wild boar density to ASF risk.

## 6.2 ASF: wild boar management strategy – Latvian approach

Latvia presented the national wild boar management strategy, developed in response to ASF's endemic presence in the country since 2014. The evolution of the epidemic and the rationale behind the strategy were outlined.

A national strategy was adopted in August 2023, followed by a detailed management plan in April 2024. This plan was developed collaboratively with stakeholders, including hunters, scientists, and local authorities. The expected target density was 0.15 wild boar/km<sup>2</sup>, based on EFSA recommendations and experiences from other countries.

Key measures include:

- Development of a national wild boar census methodology (in collaboration with ENETwild).
- Minimum hunting quotas and incentives for hunters.
- Biosecurity protocols for hunting and carcass handling.
- Promotion of game meat consumption to reduce waste.
- Public awareness campaigns and stakeholder engagement.

Implementation challenges:

- Resistance from hunters due to fatigue and lack of incentives.
- Difficulty maintaining long-term control measures.
- Need for accurate population data and monitoring tools.

Latvia emphasised the importance of tailoring measures to regional epidemiological contexts and maintaining stakeholder motivation over time.

Spain emphasised the broader societal impact of wild boar, including road accidents, crop damage, and zoonotic disease transmission. Latvia acknowledged these concerns and stressed the importance of tailoring measures to regional contexts. Spain also asked about the targeted wild boar density, if it was to be reached every year or just for 2026. Latvia replied that the aim was to reach this value and maintain it.

## 6.3 ASF: Wild boar abundance model by ENETwild

Joaquín Vicente presented updates on ENETwild's work to model wild boar abundance across Europe. The models support ASF risk assessments and management strategies by providing spatially explicit estimates of wild boar density.

Key developments include:

- Integration of hunting bag data, camera trap data, and environmental variables.
- Use of Bayesian hierarchical models to estimate abundance at NUTS3 level.
- Validation of models using independent datasets and expert feedback.



## MEETING MINUTES - 26th Scientific Network on Animal Health and Welfare ANIMAL HEALTH TOPIC meeting

### Applications:

- Identification of high-risk areas for ASF persistence and spread.
- Support for targeted surveillance and carcass search efforts.
- Evaluation of the impact of control measures on wild boar populations.

### Future work:

- Refinement of models with updated data from Member States.
- Development of interactive dashboards for visualisation and decision support.
- Collaboration with EFSA on the 2026 ASF risk factor report.

Joaquín Vicente highlighted the importance of harmonised data collection and sustained collaboration between countries to improve model accuracy and utility.

## 7.1 FMD: German perspective

Germany presented a detailed case study of a recent foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) outbreak in water buffaloes near Berlin, the first confirmed case in the country since 1988. The outbreak was detected in January 2025 and involved a small hobby farm with 14 animals.

### Key points:

- The outbreak was confirmed via polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and serology, and the lesions were consistent with FMD.
- The virus was identified as serotype O, closely related to a Turkish strain.
- The infected animals were culled, and a containment zone was established.
- Germany temporarily lost its FMD-free status but regained it in April 2025 after extensive surveillance and wildlife testing.
- The outbreak was managed efficiently due to existing ASF crisis infrastructure.

Germany highlighted the importance of rapid response, inter-agency coordination, and transparent communication. The case underscored the need for preparedness even in low-risk regions.

Türkiye asked about the age of infected animals, and Germany clarified that the ones that died were older (6–7 years), while the younger calves survived despite showing lesions. This was noted as unusual, as FMD typically caused higher mortality in younger animals.

## 7.2 FMD: Hungarian perspective

Hungary reported on a more extensive FMD outbreak involving five large-scale dairy farms in the northwest of the country. The outbreak began in early 2025 and affected over 10,000 cattle and pigs (the latter culled preventively). The virus was also identified as serotype O but genetically distinct from the German strain. Suppressive vaccination was used in two cases, and public opposition to burial sites complicated response efforts.

Hungary elaborated on the role of wind in the spread of the virus, noting that strong winds during culling may have contributed to cross-border transmission to Slovakia. However, backyard farms in the path of the wind were not affected, suggesting human movement may have played a larger role (e.g. veterinarians and farm owners may have had cross-border connections), but no definitive source of introduction was confirmed.

Luxembourg asked if Hungary would have done something differently due to issues with public perception. Hungary replied that the political involvement was problematic and that radio and television were not very effective channels for information dissemination.

Hungary plans to submit its dossier to regain FMD-free status by July 2025.

## 7.3 FMD: Molecular outbreak investigation

Guillaume Girault from the EU Reference Laboratory presented a molecular analysis of the FMD outbreaks in Germany and Hungary. Whole genome sequencing confirmed that the two outbreaks were caused by different strains of serotype O, ruling out direct epidemiological linkage. He also provided further details on the FMD outbreak in Slovakia and highlighted the geographical proximity of the outbreaks in Hungary and Slovakia.



Molecular analysis supported the hypothesis of separate introductions, likely via contaminated feed or fomites. The findings reinforced the value of molecular tools in outbreak tracing and risk assessment.

## **8. PPR: Update from Albania**

Albania reported on their first confirmed peste des petits ruminants (PPR) outbreaks in June 2025, with 11 primary outbreaks across multiple regions. The outbreaks affected both goats and sheep, with clinical signs including stomatitis, anorexia, and high mortality. Samples were confirmed positive by the EU Reference Laboratory, and genetic analysis indicated similarity to strains circulating in Greece and Hungary.

Key actions included quarantine, disinfection, movement restrictions, and public awareness campaigns.

Germany asked how the virus had entered multiple farms if they were not connected. Albania responded that each outbreak underwent an epidemiological investigation and that illegal movement of small ruminants across the green border was the most likely source of introduction.

North Macedonia inquired if Albania planned to initiate vaccination. Albania stated that vaccination was not yet underway but could be considered if the outbreak expanded. Coordination with the European Commission was ongoing.

## **9. EUPAHW and biosecurity in small ruminants**

Eleonora Cattaneo from EFSA presented EFSA's work under the European Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare (EUPAHW), focusing on biosecurity in small ruminants. She described a systematic literature review and a social science research project conducted in Romania, Spain, and Ireland.

The review identified effective biosecurity measures and knowledge gaps, while the social science research revealed that farmers valued biosecurity but often considered it burdensome. Trusted advisors like veterinarians seem to play a key role in influencing behaviour.

France asked if EFSA had submitted proposals for the second round of the internal programme and if biosecurity would remain a focus. EFSA confirmed that biosecurity in small ruminants would continue to be a priority. Luxembourg asked if farms had undergone formal biosecurity scoring, and EFSA replied that the research focused on perceptions. The Netherlands asked about the use of artificial intelligence, and EFSA replied that it was used for abstract screening but that full-text reviews still had to be done manually.

## **10. LSD: first case in France**

France reported on its first-ever lumpy skin disease (LSD) outbreak in dairy cattle in June 2025, in the Savoie region. The outbreak involved 14 confirmed cases across multiple farms.

Control measures included culling, movement restrictions, pasteurisation of milk, and vector control.

The presentation was followed by many questions, including if insect traps were deployed, if pasteurised milk was sold, and if traceback investigations were conducted. France confirmed all measures were in place and clarified that the first 300,000 vaccine doses came from South Africa, with additional doses expected from the EU bank. France also confirmed that the outbreak involved animals of different ages.

Epidemiological investigations are ongoing, but the source of introduction remains unclear. The outbreak has prompted a review of national preparedness plans.

## **11. One Health surveillance**

Andrea Gervelmeyer from EFSA presented updates on EFSA's One Health surveillance activities. She described the integration of SIGMA standards for data collection across animal, human, and environmental sectors, and the development of a public dashboard.



## MEETING MINUTES - 26th Scientific Network on Animal Health and Welfare ANIMAL HEALTH TOPIC meeting

Participants attending EFSA's One Health Surveillance workshop on the preceding days shared insights on intersectoral collaboration and were encouraged to exchange lessons learned with their national counterparts. Based on this, there were also discussions on amending their grant agreements accordingly. The next meeting of the One Health subgroup is scheduled for August 2025.

### **Any Other Business**

Ángel Ortiz from EFSA presented the two new mandates on BSE received from the EC, on the possible alignment of the requirements laid down in Regulation (EC) No 999/2001 on BSE monitoring and surveillance (deadline 31 March 2026) and of the Specified Risk Material (SRM) removal (deadline 31 December 2026) with the revised Terrestrial Code of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

Germany took the floor and asked if France expected the different bluetongue serotypes to continue to be present in the country, which was confirmed.

In addition, there was a discussion initiated by the Netherlands and Luxembourg on the availability of vaccines in the EU bank, and if any risk assessment in this regard had been conducted, which was denied.

### **Conclusions**

The following meeting will likely be organised in September/October 2026. A poll will be circulated in due time.