SCIENTIFIC PANEL ON ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE

173rd AHAW Panel Plenary meeting

27-28 May 2026
9:00-16:30/09:00-15:00
MINUTES - Agreed on 11th May 2026

EUROPEAN FOOD SAFETY AUTHORITY

Location: EFSA, Parma and Teleconference

Attendees:

- Panel Members:
  ALVAREZ Julio, BOKLUND Anette, DIPPEL Sabine, DÓREA Fernanda, FIGUEROLA Jordi, HERSKIN Mette, MICHEL Virginie, MIRANDA CHUECA Miguel Ángel, NANNONI Eleonora, NIELSEN Søren Saxmose, NONNO Romolo, RIBER Anja, STAHL Karl, STEGEMAN Arjan, THULKE Hans-Hermann, TUYTTENS Frank, WINCKLER Christoph

- Hearing Experts[1]:
  Not applicable

- European Commission and/or Member States representatives:
  EC: EC: ALAEZ PONZ Ester, BONBON Etienne, GAVINELLI Andrea, LEDOUX Celine, TOFT HOLM Laerke

- EFSA:
  ALARCON Evelyn, AMATO Laura, ASHE Sean, AZNAR ASENSIO J Inmaculada, BALDINELLI Francesca, BALTUSYTE Ieva, BEKESI Klaudia Dora, BENEDETTI Beatrice, BIGONI Fabio, BILARDI Lucia, BROGLIA Alessandro, CANDIANI Denise, CARO Eleonora, DHOLLANDER Sofie, FABRIS Chiara, FEREIDOUNI Sasan, HEMPEN Michaela, KONDRASHOVA Julia, KOHNLE Lisa, KRYEMADHI Kamela, LAVITOLA Benedetta, LIMA Eliana, LOPEZ Aitana, MANAKIDOU Aikaterini, MELO Miguel, MUR Lina, ROJO GIMENO Cristina, RUSINA Alessia, STOCKER Anna Sophia, TAMPACH Stefania, VADALA Miriam, VAN DER STEDE Yves, VERDONCK Frank, VITALI Marika

- Others:
  Not applicable

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. Declarations of Interest of Panel members

In accordance with EFSA's Policy on Independence[2] and the Decision of the Executive Director on Competing Interest Management[3], EFSA screened the Annual Declarations of Interest filled out by

[1] As defined in Article 34 of the document "Implementing Rule of the Management Board of the European Food Safety Authority laying down the rules on the selection, appointment and operations of the Scientific Committee, Scientific Panels and of their Working Groups": https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/paneloperation.pdf
[2] https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/independence-policy-2024.pdf
[3] https://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/corporate_publications/files/decision-ed-on-competing-interest-management-2024.pdf

the Panel members invited to the present meeting. No conflicts of interest related to the issues discussed have been identified during the screening process, and no interests in were identified during the screening process, and no interests were declared orally by the Panel members at the beginning.

4. Agreement of the minutes of the 172nd Panel plenary meeting held on 29 April 2026

The minutes of the 172nd Panel plenary meeting were agreed by written procedure on 12 May 2026.

5. Scientific output(s) submitted for discussion/adoption

5.1 Art 29. Risk posed by VBDs: mitigation measures (EFSA-Q-2025-00186). Discussion on methodology for risk assessment and preliminary results.

The structured framework for assessing risk mitigation measures for vector-borne diseases was presented and discussed with the Panel experts. It was explained that, for each disease requested in the mandate, the methodology will consist of an expert elicitation combining individual and collective expert judgments, informed by the available evidence on the risk-mitigating measure compiled in a disease dossier. Each expert will receive the dossier together with a standardised Excel form to complete their individual assessment in advance of the meeting.

The scoring system is based on four levels, classifying measures from non-contributory to sufficient as a standalone measure for surveillance or control. Experts will be asked to complete the Excel form and provide the underlying reasoning prior to the meeting.

During the meeting, a group discussion will aim to reach consensus, and the collective judgment and its rationale will be recorded. Where consensus cannot be achieved, differing opinions and their justifications will be documented.

The process is scheduled to take place through scoring sessions in June–July, followed by regulatory comparison and final opinion drafting later in the year.

5.2 Art 31 and 29 - New World Screwworm mandate

An introduction to New World Screwworm (NWS), and the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the Scientific Report and Scientific Opinion requested by the commission was presented.

Subsequently, the comprehensive assessment questions developed from the ToRs were explained and discussed. A brief overview of the history of NWS eradication in the United States during the 1960s was then provided, followed by an update on recent outbreaks in Central American countries and Mexico.

The presentation concluded with a question-and-answer session, during which experts' queries were addressed. Deep reviewers for the draft documents (Scientific Report & Scientific Opinion) were appointed.

5.3 Art.29 – Specified Risk Material (SRM) removal (EFSA-Q-2025-00442)

The draft Scientific Opinion was reviewed by the experts and main comments were discussed. Outcome of the discussion is reported below.

General comment

The text should be shortened throughout the document to enhance clarity and quality of communication.

1. Section 1.2 : Interpretation of the ToR. It was explained that this opinion applies a new approach not previously used in EFSA BSE Risk Assessments, namely the separate assessment of C-BSE and the atypical BSEs. For atypical BSE, limited data are available; therefore, the assessment relies largely on expert judgment. However, based on the available data and expert knowledge, the oral transmissibility for atypical BSE is lower than for classical BSE, although the uncertainty remains high. There is also a significant difference between the prevalence of C-BSE and those of the atypical BSE types with levels of the atypical BSEs being significantly higher and consistent from year to year. These differences imply that the resulting infectivity resulting from each type of BSE are different. This approach may serve as a reference for future assessments.

2. Section 2.2.3 – TSEi SRM Model: It was explained how the section was developed, including background information on the TSEi model and the updated TSEi SRM modelling approach. Revisions were made to the text to address comments and improve clarity. Please note that there are some comments with reference to section 2.2.3.2 that will be addressed by the WG.

3. Section 3.1.1 Evolution of the SRM in the EU: should be shortened and moved to Section 1 and possibly entitled "historical background".

4. Section 3.2: Assessment of the differences between SRM list in the EU and WOAH provisions relevant to the EU situation (SAQ1.1) It was explained that this section is necessary to clarify the implications arising from the deregulation of ABPs. The Panel was ultimately happy with the section given changes made prior to the meeting.

5. Section 3.4.1.2. Rationale for the separate assessment of classical and atypical BSE:The panel would like to have this section shortened maintaining only Table 7 with some concise descriptive text and moved to the methodology section. Any further information can be moved to the annex. It was agreed however that, for the time being, the section will remain in its current position, pending the shortening of the section, to be reviewed at next panel meeting.

Please note that similar comments were made by the panel with reference to Section 3.4.1.1 The concept of prion infectivity and the use of CoID50 in the context of RA. i.e. shorten this section and move to the methods. This particular point was not discussed during the meeting due to a lack of time.

6. Section 3.4.2 – Outputs of the TSEi SRM Model: The Panel agreed that the priority is to clearly describe what would occur if an infected animal enters the production chain. There was a general preference for using the median rather than the mean, as the latter was considered highly biased. It was ultimately agreed to include all three metrics: mean, median, and maximum.

Regarding the presentation of results, the Panel recommended improving clarity, especially for C-BSE where the mean number of infected detected animals is below zero. Therefore the main message in relation to the results for C-BSE is "the estimated mean probability (not number) of infected and undetected carcasses in one year was 0.XX, which equates to approximately one infected carcass every X years."

Finally, it was strongly recommended not to use the mean results from the TSEi model as an input for the PAP model. The use of the median, or preferably the full distribution, was considered more appropriate. The Panel was informed that the adoption of the PAP model for SRM is still ongoing.

7. Section 3.9: Alternative SRM measures (SAQ2.1) Again, only keep here what is necessary and keep it short. Move background/methods components to section 1.

5.4 Art. 31 - Epidemiological Analysis of ASF in the EU during 2025

The main highlights of the recently published EFSA Article 31 report on the epidemiological analysis of African swine fever (ASF) in the EU in 2025 were presented to the Panel. Key findings for 2025 include an increase in ASF outbreaks in both domestic pigs (+76%) and wild boar (+44%) compared with 2024, as well as record levels of surveillance in the EU in terms of the total number of samples collected. Importantly, the disease was detected in wild boar in Spain after 31 years without reported outbreaks, increasing the number of affected Member States to 14. A plan for the completion and review of the EFSA Art 31 Risk factor report expected to be published by the end of 2026 was also presented to the Panel.

5.5. Art.29. Vector Borne Disease – Risk posed by VBDs: Risk intro, spread, impact (EFSA-Q-2025-00185)

The draft Scientific Opinion on the risk assessment of nine vector-borne diseases (VBDs) was discussed. For some risk assessments, a more detailed description of the underlying data and assumptions is required, particularly where the results appear unexpected or counterintuitive.
It was agreed that scores should be made available on Zenodo.
The Panel was also updated on the work on wind-borne introduction of VBDs using the HYSPLIT model. No major concerns were raised regarding the approach; however, it was recommended that the outcomes be validated by an expert of the model.

5.6 Art 31 - Scientific and technical assistance Keeping of Equidae –(EFSA-Q-2024-00187).

The draft text related to Art. 31 was submitted for endorsement.

During the meeting, the experts discussed on main comments, while for editorial and minor comments it was agreed that they will be addressed after the meeting.

The first comment tackled was on whether to provide more detail in the summary section, particularly on feeding practices, flooring and bedding, which can be informative. It was explained that the summary focuses on the most typical elements and that further details would be difficult to include. An agreement to keep the summary as currently drafted was reached.

Comments were also raised regarding terminology for housing systems, and it was agreed to call them "housing and pasture-based system" when referring to all the ways of keeping equids. On the same line, the terminology used in Figure 1 was also discussed, to enhance clarity in the distinction between the different housing systems (i.e. distinction between open-sided group housing and group housing with windows; improve the descriptions of tethering in outdoor areas).

Further discussion addressed the comments on the description of types of contact between conspecifics. It was agreed to retain the current classification and to ensure consistency with the terminology used in the SO, to improve clarity and consistency across documents.

It was agreed to enhance transparency in the reporting of literature and studies by thoroughly including information on the representativeness of sample sizes in relation to the target population, as well as by clearly outlining the type of horses (e.g., sport, leisure, meat…) and any limitations in the quantity and quality of the available data, where relevant.

The distinction between pasture-based systems with and without fences was discussed. It was agreed to maintain this distinction for welfare assessment purposes, and to use the glossary section in support of the common understanding of the terminology used.

In relation to the conclusions, all comments were discussed and solved. It was agreed to keep the current content, and to align the structure to those of the previous mandates.

Considering these amendments, the document was unanimously endorsed by the Panel.

5.7 Art. 29 - Request for a Scientific Opinion concerning the welfare of horses (EFSA-Q-2024-00188)

The main comments received on the first draft in response to ToRs 2a and 2b of the mandate for horses were discussed with the Panel.

For all the draft, the Panel discussed the structure of the sections and agreed to keep consistent with the structure of the previous SOs and align the approach with the current guidance documents.

Similarly, the panel suggested to align the description of EKEs exercise and explanation of the results with the previous SOs. When EKEs were carried out, the suggestion was to create a dedicated sub-paragraph to explain the EKE exercise and, when possible, to use tables to summarise the quantitative results.

Suggestion was made on allocating text to the hazard or welfare consequence sections, and some examples were made. Also, it was suggested to clearly justify why these specific ABMs were selected over others.

In relation to the section on enrichment, the panel agreed to restructure the section to strengthen the adherence to the EFSA guidance and agreed to incorporate aspects related to positive welfare similarly to how it was carried out in the welfare assessment of the other species.

It was agreed to report the comments back to the WG and that a new draft of these sections will be submitted in the next months.

5.8 Art 29 - Request for a Scientific Opinion concerning the welfare of donkeys and hybrids (EFSA-Q-2024-00189).

The first draft of the SO on the welfare of donkeys and hybrids, addressing the sections in response to ToRs 2a and 2b of the mandate was reviewed by the Panel experts. The main comments received were discussed in the meeting. It was agreed that the content developed in the SO on the welfare of horses that are applicable to donkeys will be cross-referenced in the welfare of donkeys and their hybrids, and so the SO will contain mainly the new text specific to donkeys. The purpose is to reduce the length of the SO, repetition from the SO of horses and support the timely delivery of the mandate.

The experts commented that "obesity" is not a welfare consequence per se and discussed if this condition can be considered included in the welfare consequence of "metabolic disorders", or how it can be assessed. It was agreed to report back this discussion to the WG for their consideration.

Another aspect discussed was the lack of literature for donkeys and their hybrids. It was agreed that, when literature on horses can be relevant also for donkeys, it can be used, but this information will be reported explicitly in the text to ensure transparency and clarity of the process.

Finally, it was specified that, when there is a lack of literature on donkeys and/or hybrids and reference is made to horse literature, this should be clearly stated in the text.

The comments made will be reported to the WG, and next draft is planned to be submitted in the next months.

5.9 Art 29 - Scientific Opinion on the notification by Sweden of stricter national measures according to Article 26(3) of Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009. (EFSA-Q-2025-00653)

An update was given to the Panel regarding the progress of the work done for the mandate. They were informed about the timeline of the WG meetings taken place as well as about the upcoming one and the status of the Tasking Grant under the FWC GP/EFSA/ALPHA/2021/10, Lot 2. The existing literature on head-only electrical stunning of heavy pigs and the data received from the respective call for data are under assessment. The related challenges and the clarifications asked from three countries were communicated.

6. Other scientific topics for information/discussion

6.1 Current status of EFSA Weight of evidence and Biological relevance guidance- AHAW Perspective

The chair updated the panel with the discussion on the revision of the EFSA weight of evidence and biological relevance guidance by the Scientific committee. The discussion focused on opportunity and challenges of the update of the guidance and made some suggestions targeted to the need for risk assessment in AHAW. Those insights will be reported to the WG for their consideration.

6.2 DOI info session

The info session was organized to explain EFSA procedures for COI management. The EFSA guide for experts was shared, together with indication of supporting resources for the experts. After the presentation, a question-and-answer session allowed to discuss practical aspect related to DOI preparation, submission and update.

6.3 Experts' feedback survey

EFSA staff presented to the Panel the outcomes of the Expert Feedback Survey, conducted at the end of 2025 with members across all Panels, aimed at collecting feedback on the scientific and administrative support provided by EFSA, as well as on their level of involvement, commitment, and overall satisfaction in working with EFSA.

EFSA staff also recalled, in line with the principle of mutual feedback, that feedback to Panel members on their participation and contributions to EFSA activities will be provided in the near future.

6.4 EC's presentation on animal welfare updates

The Panel received an update from DG SANTE on ongoing developments in the area of animal welfare, including revisions of EU legislation and initiatives related to transport, on-farm welfare, and companion animals.

Information was also shared on supporting studies and projects, in particular those addressing animal welfare indicators, digitalisation, and the use of new technologies for monitoring and enforcement.

DG SANTE acknowledged EFSA's role in providing scientific input to ongoing policy initiatives.

7. AOB

7.1 New Mandate: Newcastle Disease

EFSA staff informed the Panel of a request from the European Commission for scientific and technical assistance and a scientific opinion on vaccination against Newcastle disease (ND).

The mandate is motivated by the recent increase of ND outbreaks in certain Member States, including in vaccinated flocks, indicating that current vaccination strategies may not fully prevent infection and spread.

The Panel took note of the Terms of Reference (ToR), which include: ToR 1- describing the epidemiological situation and reviewing available vaccines and evidence on their efficacy, and ToR 2- assessing the effectiveness of current vaccination protocols and providing recommendations on vaccination strategies and surveillance.

The timelines foreseen are November 2026 for the Scientific Report covering ToR 1 and June 2027 for the scientific opinion on ToR 2.

8. Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on 30 June 2026, via teleconference.