SCIENTIFIC PANEL ON ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE

176th AHAW Panel Plenary meeting

28-29 October 2026
9:00-13:00
9:00-13:00
MINUTES - Agreed on 11 November 2026

Location: Parma

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:

COHEN Iulia- Delia, MESMAN Sanna, MITEVA Aleksandra, TOFT HOLM Laerke.

- EFSA:

AMATO Laura, AMORE Giusi, BOKLUND Anette Ella, ASHE Sean, AZNAR ASENSIO J Inmaculada, BALDINELLI Francesca, BALTUSYTE Ieva, BENEDETTI Beatrice, BIGONI Fabio, BROGLIA Alessandro, CANDIANI Denise Francesca, CARO Eleonora, DHOLLANDER Sofie, FEREIDOUNI Sasan, GERVELMEYER Andrea, HEMPEN Michaela, KOHNLE Lisa, KONDRASHOVA Julia, LIMA Eliana, LOPEZ Aitana, MANAKIDOU Aikaterini, ROJO GIMENO Cristina, STOCKER Anna Sophia, VAN DER STEDE Yves Pascal D., 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

Item 5.2 was added to the agenda, to inform the Panel about a new mandate received.

3. Declarations of Interest of Panel members

In accordance with EFSA's Policy on Independence and the Decision of the Executive Director on Competing Interest Management, EFSA screened the Annual Declarations of Interest submitted by the Panel members invited to the meeting. No conflicts of interest related to the issues discussed have been identified during the screening process, and no interests were declared orally by the Panel members at the beginning.

[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

4. Agreement of the minutes of the 175th Panel plenary meeting held on 21-22 September 2026

The minutes of the 175th Panel plenary meeting were agreed by written procedure on 8 October 2026.

5. New mandate

5.1. New mandate on fish welfare

EFSA updated the Panel on a new mandate on fish welfare. Following a request from the European Parliament (EP), EFSA (Animal Welfare Team) is starting a new scientific assessment on the on-farm welfare of farmed finfish, covering five key species: Atlantic salmon, rainbow trout, common carp, European seabass and gilthead seabream. The assessment will focus on the grow-out production phase, including the main farming systems and management practices, the most relevant welfare consequences associated with them, the main hazards contributing to these welfare consequences, animal-based measures to assess and monitor them, and recommendations to prevent or mitigate the most relevant welfare consequences. Broodstock management, hatchery operations, egg and larval stages, transport, and stunning and killing are outside the scope of this mandate. Deadline of the mandate is June 2029.

5.2. New mandate on Shamonda virus

The Panel was informed of a new urgent joint EFSA–ECDC mandate on Shamonda virus, The assessment will review the available scientific literature, describe the current situation and evolution of the two novel Shamonda virus variants in the EU and elsewhere, and provide a qualitative assessment of the risks related to their spread, host range, possible zoonotic potential, transmission pathways, and impacts on animal and public health. The deadline for this Art. 31 Scientific Report is by the end of November 2026.

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

6.1 Art. 29 - Vector-borne diseases: risk of introduction, spread and impact (EFSA-Q-2025-00185)

The Panel was updated on the ongoing risk assessment of 24 vector-borne diseases, with a presentation of the comparative results on incursion and impact across the EU, including geographical patterns, relevant incursion pathways and disease-specific findings. The associated uncertainties were also presented, with generally lower uncertainty for livestock pathways and higher uncertainty for vector pathways, and particular caution required when interpreting wind-borne incursion estimates. The VBD WG will discuss and agree on the conclusions and the draft SO will be submitted for adoption, planned for next AHAW Plenary.

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

The draft sections responding to ToR 2 and ToR 3 of the mandate were submitted for thorough reading to the Panel. The most relevant comments provided by Panel members were discussed during the meeting. It was agreed to simplify the conclusions, avoiding unnecessary repetition. ToR3 was endorsed. It was agreed to remove conclusions that merely repeat the WCs associated with each hazard as already stated in the main text, and to number the conclusions to facilitate cross-referencing. Conclusions do not need to be systematically restated as recommendations; the Panel agreed that only key or overarching recommendations should be included in the dedicated Recommendations section. Before the next plenary, all Panel comments will be addressed and, for both

opinions, the Abstract, Summary, Overall Conclusions and Recommendations will be finalised. The next plenary will focus mainly on standing points on ToR2, and the SO will be submitted for adoption.

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

The draft Scientific Opinion concerning the welfare of donkeys and hybrids was submitted for thorough reading prior to the meeting, and a discussion was carried out during the meeting on selected relevant aspects.

Same points mentioned regarding the draft SO on the welfare of horses (item 6.2) are applicable also for this draft. The draft SO will be submitted for adoption at the next AHAW plenary meeting.

6.4 Art.31 - New World Screwworm (NWS) scientific report (EFSA-Q-2026-00276)

The draft scientific report on the NWS was discussed. It describes the biology of the pest, its re-infestation of Central America and South of the USA, as well as measures taken by affected countries and potential pathways through which the pest could enter the EU. Panel experts provided suggestions for improving the report. The deadline for approval of the scientific report is 31st October 2026.

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

The draft SO on SRM was submitted to the panel for thorough reading. The revised text of the answers to the ToRs section of the Opinion was considered a significant improvement from previous drafts, with the answers to the SAQs now more clearly reflected in the responses to the ToRs. The Panel discussed that some sections, however, remain unnecessarily complex, and provided suggestions for improvement, listed below.
The separation of C-, H- and L-BSE was welcomed. The distinction between median and extreme scenarios could be clearer, giving greater prominence to the median results while acknowledging higher-risk tail scenarios.
The practical implications of the results should be clearer, particularly where WOAH provisions already keep infectivity below the infection threshold. The added value of any further reductions achieved through alternative measures needs to be put into context.
The Panel decided that the decreasing annual prevalence of classical BSE should be explicitly referred to in the Answers to the ToRs.
The relevance of recycling of classical BSE infectivity was highlighted. The Panel decided that the Answers to the ToRs should explicitly refer to the low probability of classical BSE recycling (in the extremely unlikely event that a highly infectious carcass is missed at the abattoir and infectious tissue enters ruminant feed) including a reference to the feedban.
It had previously been decided by the panel not to make recommendations in the Opinion, nevertheless the conclusions therein should provide a clear and actionable interpretation, including the practical significance of differences between the 36-, 48- and 60-month scenarios.
Overall, the objective is to make the Answers to the ToRs clearer, more practical and easier to interpret for risk-management purposes.
A subgroup of the Panel was tasked with finalizing the drafting of the answers to the ToRs and agreeing on the revised text through a written procedure or, if needed, at a pre-plenary meeting, prior to sharing it with the WG. The final version of the draft SO will be submitted to the next AHAW Plenary for adoption.

6.6 Art. 29 - Risk posed by vector-borne diseases: mitigation measures (EFSA-Q-2025-00186)

The RA protocol was endorsed by the Panel by written procedure prior to the meeting. At the meeting, the Panel discussed the draft Scientific Opinion on VBD risk mitigation measures, submitted for first reading, and addressing ToRs 2.4 and 2.5 of the mandate. The methodology, assessment and conclusions were presented, and main

comments received by the Panel were discussed at the meeting. It was agreed to further develop the assessment section, including moving relevant content currently presented in the conclusions into the assessment, and to refine the section on uncertainty. The conclusions will therefore be streamlined to focus on the findings most informative for answering the ToRs and on meaningful combinations of surveillance and control measures. The draft will be revised to address the Panel comments and to finalise the discussion, conclusions, recommendations and supporting material. The Scientific Opinion will be submitted to the next AHAW Plenary for adoption.

6.7 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)

The draft Scientific Opinion was submitted to the Panel for thorough reading. Fruitful discussions took place. It was agreed to put the experimental and observational studies in chronological order, to delete a figure in the section of the survey, to merge some paragraphs from the description of the stunning method with the information contained in the interpretation of the ToRs, and to merge a couple of paragraphs and delete few others in the sections dedicated to comparative approach in order to reduce the length of the draft. The Opinion will be submitted to the Panel in December for adoption.

6.8 Art. 29 - RVF: Product movement from restricted zones (EFSA-Q-2026–00333)

The Panel discussed the draft Scientific Opinion on the risk posed by movements of products from restricted zones in the event of RVF outbreaks and the proposed methodological framework. Comments focused on the interpretation of the ToRs, the distinction between release and exposure assessment, the identification of relevant product-use pathways and the assessment endpoint. The protocol will be revised accordingly, with ToR1 to be further developed once the approach for ToRs 2–4 has been agreed, and resubmitted for endorsement by the AHAW Panel in the next meetings.

7. Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on 2-3 December, online, open to observers.