Scientific Panel on Animal Health and Welfare
Minutes of the 77th plenary meeting
Held on 19 09 2013, Prague
(Agreed on 05 10 2013)

Participants

- Panel Members:

- EFSA:
  - AHAW Unit: Franck Berthe, Denise Candiani, Chiara Fabris, Maria Ferrara, Andrea Gervelmeyer, Justyna Jaskiewicz, Silvia Ines Nicolau Solano, and Frank Verdonck
  - SAS Unit: Gabriele Zancarano, Didier Verloo and Jose Cortinas Abrahantes

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair of the Panel, welcomed the participants.

Apologies were received from Howard Browman, Ilaria Capua, Ivar Vågsholm, and Stéphan Zientara.

The Chair of the Panel informed the Panel that the opinion on risks posed by the influenza A (H3N2v) virus for animal health, its potential spread and implications for animal and human health (EFSA-Q-2012-00912) was adopted by written procedure on the 17 09 2013. The Chair of the Panel noted the great effort of the ad hoc working group and EFSA staff on this opinion.

2. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted with no changes.

3. Declarations of interest

In accordance with EFSA’s Policy on Independence and Scientific Decision-Making Processes¹ and the Decision of the Executive Director implementing this Policy regarding Declarations of Interests², EFSA screened the Annual Declaration of interest (ADoI) and the Specific Declaration of interest (SDoI) filled in by the experts invited for the present meeting. No conflicts of interests related to the issues discussed in this meeting have been identified during the screening process or at the Oral Declaration of interest at the beginning of this meeting.

4. Agreement of the minutes of the 76th Plenary meeting held on 25-26 06 2013.
The minutes were agreed by written procedure on 15 07 2013 and published on the EFSA website on 17 07 2013.

5. New mandates
No new request was received.

6. Scientific outputs submitted for discussion

6.1. Monitoring procedures at slaughterhouses (EFSA-Q-2012-00840)
For this mandate, the conceptual model is an assessment based on sensitivity and specificity of indicators for consciousness when considering slaughter with stunning, and indicators for unconsciousness and death when considering slaughter without stunning. Various activities - including systematic literature review, online survey, hearing expert meeting – were run to get information about specificity, sensitivity and feasibility of the indicators that are being selected for inclusion in the monitoring procedures.

The draft opinion on bovines (captive bolt stunning and slaughter without stunning) was discussed with the Panel. A flowchart showing the toolbox of selected indicators and, eventually, actions to be undertaken at each key stage of the stunning process was discussed. A similar flowchart for slaughter without stunning was also presented and discussed. For each toolbox, 2-3 indicators toolbox will be “compulsory” while some other will be additional. The Panel suggested to avoid the distinction between indicators A and B, as requested from the ToRs of the mandate, and replace it with indicators of consciousness, unconsciousness or death. It was agreed that a legend to the flowchart has to be produced including short operational instructions. The statistical model for the sampling protocols was discussed: the operators (performing the stunning and neck cutting etc) have to check 100% of the animals whereas the Animal Welfare Officer will sample a number of animals dependent of the selected indicator sensitivity.

The draft opinion on bovines will be submitted for adoption at the next Plenary meeting in October; the remaining three opinions will be discussed in November and circulated for written adoption in the following weeks.

7. Progress report on other scientific outputs

7.1. Vaccine for bovine tuberculosis (EFSA-Q-2013-00241)
The discussion the Panel confirmed that it is not possible to solve major questions related to the design of a field trial based on scientific grounds only. Therefore, it was agreed that the opinion will describe the ideal conditions to validate the DIVA test (e.g. based on OIE guidelines to validate a diagnostic test) and the ideal conditions to test bTB vaccine performance (e.g. double-blind randomized controlled field trial). Based on these ideal situations, the opinion will list the data that should be delivered by the field trial to allow assessments of the DIVA test performance and the vaccine performance in the future. Any deviations from the ideal situation should be justified and accounted for as they will introduce bias in the results. This approach will highlight the scientific issues related to bTB vaccination but will not take any decision in the design of the trial. The Panel suggested describing the ‘unit of interest’ for the vaccination trial in relation to the role of badgers as a reservoir (core host or spill-over host). The Panel also indicated that new methods have been developed to allow the estimation of test characteristics and vaccine performance from data collected in one field trial.

7.2. Self-task for bovine tuberculosis (EFSA-Q-2013-00531)
The AHAW Panel will develop a conceptual framework towards holistic approach to bovine tuberculosis. The objective is to establish and maintain a broad understanding of the
epidemiology of bovine tuberculosis, relevant to effective surveillance and control, throughout the EU, while addressing specific questions posed from the Commission. The Panel considered necessary to compare epidemiological situations in the MS and in different areas within the MS, and to identify key issues that hinder effective bTB surveillance and control or otherwise provide an explanation for differences in effectiveness of surveillance and control programs in those different epidemiological contexts. An update will be presented in the next Plenary meeting.

7.3. Use of low atmosphere pressure system (LAPs) for stunning of poultry (EFSA-Q-2013-00322)

This request is similar to the two previous ones for Scientific Opinions concerning electrical parameters for the stunning of lambs and kid goats and the use of carbon dioxide for stunning of rabbits, received in February 2013. Currently, Council Regulation 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing does not allow the use of low atmosphere pressure system for stunning of poultry. EFSA is requested to assess four scientific publications received by the Commission to support a possible the inclusion of this method in the EU Regulation. Annex I of that Council Regulation describes the allowed stunning methods and related specifications. Such Annex can be amended to take into account of scientific and technical progress, on the basis of an EFSA opinion.

The mandate was formally accepted by EFSA on 29 April 2013. Following the adoption of the above-mentioned Scientific Opinions on lambs and rabbits, the same methodological approach will be followed to address this mandate.

7.4. Self-task for a guidance on assessing studies evaluating the efficacy of stunning interventions regarding animal protection during stunning (EFSA-Q-2013-00532)

The AHAW Panel agreed to develop a guidance document, which defines the criteria against which studies evaluating the efficacy of stunning interventions regarding animal protection during stunning will be assessed. The approach followed in the guidance document was agreed with the panel. The draft guidance document will be sent to the panel members for endorsement for the public consultation of the guidance document, which will take place from 15 July to 08 September 2013 before its adoption in November.

7.5. Request for a scientific opinion on the main welfare risks related to the farming of sheep for wool, meat and milk production (EFSA-Q-2013-00580)

Sheep farming for milk, meat and wool production is of increasing importance worldwide, including in the EU and particularly in Eastern European countries.

Council Directive 98/58/EC lays down minimum standards for the protection of animals kept for farming purposes, including sheep. The EU Strategy for the protection and welfare of animals 2012-2015 foresees the option of a revised animal welfare framework, introducing the use of animal-based welfare indicators to simplify the current legal framework and to enhance the applicability of general principles to all farm animals. The European Commission requested EFSA to review the scientific literature on the welfare of sheep farmed for wool, meat and milk production, and in particular to identify the main risk factors and welfare consequences for the different farming productions. Main factors and welfare consequences common to the different production systems should also be identified. EFSA formally accepted the mandate and established an ad hoc Working Group for the development of the Opinion. Contacts are also being undertaken with stakeholders and international organisations involved in the welfare of sheep to gather information.
7.6. Request for a scientific opinion on Enzootic bovine leukosis (EFSA-Q-2013-00546)

Enzootic bovine leukosis (EBL) is a disease caused by the bovine leukaemia virus (BLV). Most infections appear to be subclinical, but a proportion of cattle over 3 years old develops persistent lymphocytosis, and a smaller proportion develops lymphosarcomas in various internal organs. While the infection appears to be widespread globally, in the EU there are many Member States that are officially free (Decision 2003/467/EC), or have one or more regions recognised as officially free.

There is a need to assess if EBL is a disease for which control measures are still justified. This is linked to the existence of free areas within the EU and in some of its trading partners and the possible risk of reintroduction of the disease in these currently free areas. Another important aspect is related to estimating the morbidity rate and whether it can be considered significant at country or regional level; this consequently needs to be assessed against the control measures and their impact on cattle production.

There is a need for an assessment of the significance of the risk posed by EBL, its morbidity and the relevance of control measures and surveillance.

The Panel welcomed this new request from the European Commission. Klaus Depner accepted to chair the working group to be formed. The Panel noted the numerous terms of reference of the mandate and, in agreement with the Commission services, wishes to concentrate the work on the issues of impact as per first, second and third ToR.

7.7. Request for a scientific opinion concerning a multifactorial approach on the use of animal-based measures to assess the welfare of pigs (EFSA-Q-2013-00667)

The Commission is planning to develop guidelines to facilitate the proper implementation of the requirements of Council Directive 2008/120/EC laying down minimum standards for the protection of pigs as part of the EU Animal Welfare Strategy 2012-2015. Therefore EFSA is requested to deliver a scientific opinion to assess the multi-factorial interaction and associations between risk factors, welfare consequences and animal-based measures to assess the welfare of pigs bearing in mind the objective of their use in assessing degree of compliance with legal requirements.

The Commission requests EFSA to use a multi-factorial approach on the use of animal-based measures to assess the welfare of pigs especially those welfare parameters regulated in Directive 2008/120, Articles 3 and 4 and Annex I Chapter I-II as well as Directive 98/58 Annex numbers 10, 13 second paragraph, 14, 15 and 16. The assessment should be based on and linked to the risk assessment of the previous EFSA scientific opinions on the welfare of pigs. In particular the Commission highlights the importance of the chosen indicators use in assessing compliance with legislative requirements as listed above.

The Panel welcomed this new request from the European Commission. Sandra Edwards accepted to chair the working group to be formed. It was noted by the Panel that due to the timeframe give and the lack of available data addressing the third ToRs was challenging.

8. Other issues

8.1. Activities of the Standing Working Group on Emerging Risks (SWG-ER)

The Standing Working Group on Emerging Risks (SWG-ER) has initiated an expert consultation with the BIOHAZ and AHAW Panels to identify priority emerging risks and drivers of biological emerging risks to human and animal health for the next 5-10 years. The first round of the Delphi approach was carried out during the June plenary meeting of the AHAW Panel. The session identified a list of drivers to emerging biological risks for human and animal health. The exercise highlighted the multiple interactions between drivers and
allowed to define such interactions as context to emergence, and subsequently to a risk question. As a follow-up to the first-round consultation of the Delphi, a small workshop will be organised by EFSA in November to explore the use of General Morphological Analysis as a tool for scenario generation. This will be done with the SWGER sub working group on biological risks and additional experts. The example chosen for the workshop will be emerging viruses.

8.2. EFSA workshop: thinking risk assessment out of the box

On September 17, in conjunction with the AHAW plenary meeting, a workshop was held to specifically address the question whether drivers and their combination: is context sufficiently and appropriately considered in risk assessment. The workshop (chaired by Preben Willeberg) was structured around 4 presentations, followed by a general discussion around the following questions: i) what makes transdisciplinarity possible and successful? ii) to what extend does the current methodological framework for risk assessment enable the integration of risk questions context? iii) how to ensure the best possible formulation of risk questions? and iv) access to data and information needed to ensure risk assessment in touch with reality?

The workshop recognised that taking a broad look at societal questions before embarking on risk assessment is paramount, to ensure that advice to risk managers is pertinent. For this to happen, one should make sure that societal questions are best translated into risk questions. Such aspects should also be taken into consideration during the assessment itself. This in turns leads to questions about the scientific disciplines that contribute to the risk assessment and about the risk assessment methodology itself.

9. Next meetings

Next meetings in 2013: October 22/23, and November 26/27.

The October plenary meeting of the AHAW Panel will be open to observers. The following dates have been agreed for 2014: Feb 4/5, March 24/25, May 13/14, June 24/25, Sept 16/17, Oct 21/22, and Dec 02/03.

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