



European Food Safety Authority

SCIENCE

NOTE FOR THE ADVISORY FORUM

State of Play on the Animal Health and Welfare Assessments as regards Avian Influenza

The Animal Health and Welfare Panel adopted on 22 September 2005 a scientific opinion on the risk of introducing Avian Influenza (AI) in the EU. The opinion contained several conclusions and recommendations for the risk managers. It concluded that biosecurity is the primary tool to combat the disease by prevention of both the initial case and secondary spread. It also warns that breaches of biosecurity measures can, under certain circumstances, result in massive spread of the diseases.

Vaccination is recommended as a valuable tool to support the eradication of AI. The opinion further raises concerns on the animal welfare aspects of the disease pointing out that the animals suffer, not just from the disease itself, but in many cases also from poor culling methods and it lists methods that should be used.

On 11 November 2005 the European Commission requested an additional opinion on the risks of AI (Asiatic strain H5N1) introduction in the EU by wild birds and particularly by migratory birds taking into account the most recent data. The mandate is focused on the risk that populations of wild birds become a reservoir of this virus and to address the risk that the virus may pose for entry, exposure, contamination, transmission and spread to birds and poultry on the EU territory due to migratory birds.

EFSA has appointed a group of 15 experts (ornithologists, epidemiologists and virologists) whom met for first time on 15 November, and later on by 19 December and 30 January 2006.

The draft report of the working group collects the most recent information on AI and migratory birds. A meeting has been held on 17 February to structure the document following the risk assessment methodology and the Scientific Report shall be finalized during the last working group meeting on 10 March. For the possible adoption of the opinion, a written procedure has been foreseen, to be launched by 15 March and to be finalized by 28-29 March (coinciding with the 18th Plenary meeting of the AHAW Panel).

If the Scientific Opinion is adopted on 29 March it is foreseen that all final amendments and contributions will be in place by the beginning of April.

Additionally, EFSA created in February a section on AI at the AF Extranet in order to ask EU Members to provide all the information they have available on AI, to be shared

AF 03.03.2006 - 11

AHAW Assessments as regards AI

with others (i.e. Risk Assessment Reports, Epidemiological studies, etc). Several MS used this possibility to give insight on what they had done and were planning to do as regards studies and opinions on AI.

By April 2006, EFSA is going to start a new working group on the global evaluation of AI risks including a scientific review and updating of the current AI situation. The information provided in the AF Extranet will be taken into account by the AI WG scientists. Therefore, we strongly encourage the Advisory Forum to provide all available studies and risk assessments in order to be considered by EFSA.