

## **Urgent advice 05-2019 of the Scientific Committee established at the FASFC on an assessment of the risk of African Swine Fever introduction in Belgian pig holdings associated to the access to forest roads for hikers in zone II, a risk area with ASF in wild boars**

### **Terms of reference**

The Scientific Committee is requested to evaluate urgently the following question:

Following the recent decision of the Walloon Region to allow access to the forest in Zone II, what is the potential impact on the risk of introduction of African swine fever (ASF) in domestic pig holdings?

### **Method**

This risk assessment was urgently performed based on expert opinion. A systematic literature review and uncertainty analysis could not be conducted given the limited timeframe. As the regulatory text of the decision of the Walloon Region mentioned in the question was not available at the time of drafting this opinion, the Scientific Committee assessed the risk following the permission to hikers to access forest roads in the zone II in the absence of details of the modalities of that decision.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The Scientific Committee is of the opinion that the risk of introduction of ASF virus in pig holdings is slightly increased following the permission given to hikers to access forest roads in the zone II, but that the risk can still be qualified as “low”, as estimated by the risk assessment in its rapid opinion 16-2018. This is provided that all external biosecurity measures are respected in pig holdings, that ASF control in the infected zone is continued with the same means and that hikers receive detailed information and that they respect the regulations.

This risk assessment is valid under the current conditions of the ASF outbreak in wild boars in Belgium.

The Scientific Committee draws the risk manager's attention to the risk of mechanical transfer and spread of the ASF virus by people, tools, equipment or other animals (especially pets) as a result of forest activities in the zone infected by the ASF virus. The Scientific Committee also draws the attention to the importance to maintain as priority goal to pursue and continue the depopulation of wild boars in both the infected area and the reinforced observation zone and that, therefore, the coexistence of depopulation and leisure activities (in space and time) should be avoided because of efficacy and safety reasons

The Scientific Committee recommends that access to the forest for hikers should be limited to roads and paths and that detailed information should be provided to hikers.

The Scientific Committee also recommends to reinforce the sensibilization and education of all pork operators on biosecurity, in particular concerning external biosecurity in regard to the risk of ASF introduction. In this sense, the Scientific Committee recommends strengthening all regulations on biosecurity in pig farming, in particular the royal decree of 18 June 2014 on measures for the prevention of pig notifiable diseases and to proceed with the regular evaluation of the biosecurity level of pig holdings.

The full text is available on this website in dutch and in french.