

Opinion 21-2021 of the Scientific Committee established at the FASFC on two projects of royal decree

Terms of reference

The Scientific Committee is asked to give an opinion on two draft royal decrees. The first concerns movements, gathering and trade of some terrestrial animals. The second concerns the identification and registration of some ungulates, poultry, rabbits and some birds.

These two draft royal decrees have been drafted in order to adapt the Belgian legislation in line with Regulation (EU) 2016/629 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on transmissible animal diseases and amending and repealing certain acts in the area of animal health (Animal Health Law, AHL) as well as with the numerous related delegated and implementing regulations that bring together and adapt in one single piece of legislation almost all the basic rules of the existing European regulations of the last 50 years for animal health.

The rules of the AHL concerning movements, gathering and trade of some terrestrial animals only apply to cross-border activities. The royal decree on movements, gathering and trade therefore sets the rules for domestic activities. The rules of the AHL concerning the identification of some ungulates are described in detail in the AHL, but their framework and registration procedures need to be specified in the national legislation.

In relation to the second royal decree, the Scientific Committee is specifically asked whether the decrease of samples for serological analysis in the framework of the monitoring plan for some salmonella (*S. enterica* serovars Pullorum and Gallinarum and *S. enterica* subsp. arizonae in breeding and production hens and turkeys) and certain mycoplasmas (*M. gallisepticum* in hens and turkeys, and *M. meleagridis* in turkeys) still constitutes a representative and sensitive sampling to detect the here above listed diseases.

Method

The opinion is common for both draft royal decrees as they are related to each other in the concepts and regulations they introduce. The opinion is based on expert opinion and scientific literature.

Conclusion

The Scientific Committee issues a favourable advice on the two royal decrees and makes general and specific remarks.

Concerning the traceability of animals, and more specifically for cattle movements, the Scientific Committee stresses the epidemiological and sanitary importance to assure both synchronized communication of registration data and animal movements between the different operators.

In the context of the risks of contact between animals of different health status, the Scientific Committee stresses the importance of the guarantees on the health status of the animals that the customer must give to the transporters and therefore to the operators of destination. The Scientific Committee stresses that the nature and modalities of these guarantees are not yet sufficiently defined in the current draft royal decree.

On the basis of the seroprevalence that can be detected and the other passive surveillance measures in place, the Scientific Committee gives a positive opinion on the decrease of the sampling for the serological surveillance of some mycoplasmas and salmonella in poultry.

The Scientific Committee notes that a decrease in the sampling recommended by Regulation (EU) 2019/2035 with regard to sampling for bacteriological analysis is also mentioned. This reduction already existed in Belgian legislation before the AHL came in force and had previously been validated by the Scientific Committee, noting however that this was based on a fairly high expected prevalence ('worst case scenario').

Recommendations

For cattle movements, the Scientific Committee recommends:

- to harmonise and reduce as much as possible the time required to communicate information and keep records, which currently vary greatly between the different types of operators, taking into account practical aspects in the field. In this respect, communication within 48 hours of each movement (departure-arrival) could be envisaged, whatever the type of operator (so as to be able to ensure IN-OUT monitoring for a "trader" type operator). This practice would allow to reduce the time gap between paper and Internet communication to the central database to a maximum of 72 hours, with greater reliability of all movement data. While taking into account the free choice between electronic or paper communication that must be left to the operator by the legislator, the Scientific Committee stresses the interest and added value of electronic communication in this context;
- that each type of operator must record the same information for each animal movement and at least: the transporter, the registration of the means of transport, the place of loading and unloading, the date and time of movement (departure or arrival);
- that the guarantee mentioned in Article 10 §2.2 that the customer of an animal movement must be able to give to the transporter with regard to the health status of the animals present be more explicit in the Royal Decree as to its nature and modalities, or at the very least framed by a ministerial decree or a circular.

Concerning the identification of cattle, and more specifically the renewal of their identification, the Scientific Committee recommends that a delay be specified for renewal of identification and, in any cases, before the cattle leave the herd. Regarding identification of sheep and goats, the Scientific Committee recommends that they are identified before the age of 6 months, as some control plans take into account animals from that age, sometimes even younger.

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