

Opinion 07-2023 of the Scientific Committee established at the FASFC on a royal decree establishing the conditions related to the quarantine and isolation of terrestrial animals - Part 2: amendment to add several diseases to Annex 1.

Terms of reference

The Scientific Committee delivered the opinion 04-2021 on the draft Royal Decree laying down the conditions applicable to the quarantine and isolation of terrestrial animals (part 1: dogs, cats and ferrets suspected of rabies on import in Belgium - SciCom dossier 2020/21). The Royal Decree was published on 15 December 2021. Its Annex 1 sets out the "types of quarantine required for an epidemiological unit and (the) related specific conditions " depending on the disease and the reason for suspecting it. At present, only rabies for dogs, cats and ferrets is included.

The Scientific Committee is asked to submit an opinion on :

- an amendment to the Royal Decree of 15 December 2021 laying down the conditions applicable to the quarantine and isolation of terrestrial animals, with the aim of adding several diseases to Annex 1;
- the distance required between type 2 quarantine holdings (as defined in appendix 2 of the Royal Decree) and neighbouring holdings or other premises where animals are kept and, more specifically, an opinion on the keeping of an animal shelter or other holdings where animals are already kept, combined with a type 2 quarantine holding on the same site.

Method

The opinion is based on expert opinion and on the following data:

- numbers of import irregularities and non-compliances by animal species at border control points (airports) in Belgium ;
- prioritisation lists of animal diseases (diseases included in Regulation 2020/1882, animal diseases subject to the application of Chapter III of the Law of 24 March 1987 on animal health, animal diseases included in various Anses prioritisation opinions);
- text mining work on the term "quarantine" in EFSA and WOA (formerly OIE) reports;
- the conditions relating to biosafety/containment levels in laboratories and research facilities; and
- the scientific literature.

Conclusion

The purpose of this opinion is the quarantine at import, i.e. the confinement of animals imported into Belgium because of a suspected or confirmed disease. Suspicion of disease may sometimes be of an administrative nature, where the animals are not accompanied by all the appropriate documents (health certificates, vaccination or preventive treatment documents) or, in other cases, it may be based on the presence of clinical signs in the animals.

For the purposes of this opinion, various groups of so-called "terrestrial" animals (as determined within the Animal Health Law) have been considered to be of "interest" on the basis of the import numbers for Belgium during the 2020-2021 period and the animals that

have most frequently caused problems on this occasion, namely: dogs, cats, horses and rodents. Camelids were added because they accounted for a significant proportion of the animals presented at import in 2020 and 2021. Camelids are also potentially susceptible to many cattle diseases and could therefore represent a major economic risk for Belgium. The Scientific Committee proposes a list of diseases affecting one or more of these groups of animals to be added to Annex 1 of the Royal Decree of 15/12/2021, but draws attention to the fact that this cannot be considered as an exhaustive or closed list. The Scientific Committee proposes the corresponding quarantine conditions to be applied when these diseases are suspected or confirmed in cats, dogs, equids, rodents and camelids.

A decision tree is proposed for any (suspected) disease not yet included in the list, for which import quarantine conditions would need to be determined in the future. This decision tree proposes a provisional quarantine to be applied to animals not yet officially confirmed as infected by one of the diseases listed in this notice. In the absence of a diagnostic test result, it is not yet possible to determine the appropriate level of quarantine to apply to the suspect animal. However, the Scientific Committee recommends that the conditions of this provisional quarantine should be as strict as possible. These should at least prevent any direct or indirect contact with susceptible animals and restrict contact with humans to only the required personnel taking care of the animals (adequately trained and with the necessary protective equipment), especially in case of zoonotic diseases. The duration of provisional quarantine may under no circumstances be less than the incubation period of the suspected disease, unless a definitive diagnostic test result is obtained before then.

Regarding the distance required between type 2 quarantine holdings and neighbouring holdings or other places where animals are kept, the Scientific Committee is of the opinion that a specific distance is not relevant if the level of containment is sufficient, respected and regularly monitored. Consequently, no minimum distance is necessary if the conditions set out in Annexes 2 and 3 of the Royal Decree of 15/12/2021 are strictly respected and regularly monitored. For the Scientific Committee, it is clear that an animal suspected of having a transmissible disease cannot be allowed to roam freely, even in fenced pastures.

Recommendations

Given the scale of the potential health and economic consequences and the contagious nature of some of the diseases listed in this opinion, the Scientific Committee recommends that any risk of direct or indirect contact should be taken into account during quarantine for animals suspected/confirmed to be infected by diseases listed in this opinion. In such cases, the Scientific Committee also recommends that, if possible, the animal should always be returned to its place of origin. Euthanasia of the animal should be considered in the event of confirmation or even suspicion of the most serious and contagious diseases, if strict containment cannot be ensured quickly or if the safety of staff taking care of the animals cannot be guaranteed.

In cases of suspicion, the Scientific Committee recommends ensuring that Belgian laboratories have validated diagnostic tests for the diseases listed. These tests should deliver a result as fast as possible.

The Scientific Committee recommends establishing the biosecurity/confinement conditions relating to the transport to a quarantine holding of an animal suspected/confirmed to be infected by a disease listed in Annex 1 of the Royal Decree of 15/12/2021. Following the opinion of the Scientific Committee, it is preferable to have quarantine holdings (including for provisional quarantine) as close as possible to the points of entry of animals into Belgium, i.e. close to the major airports where the border control posts are located.

The Scientific Committee recommends that the other routes by which animals enter Belgium be taken into account for the risk at import, i.e. by means of punctual controls.

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