ACTIVITY REPORT OF THE REGIONAL COORDINATION UNIT OF THE OIE SOUTH-EAST ASIA FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE CAMPAIGN
1 SEPTEMBER 1997 - 31 MARCH 1998

Original: English
May 1998
SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

Main operational matters:

- Field visits within Thailand to the borders with Cambodia and Myanmar;
- Visit to Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) Diagnostic Laboratory at Pak Chong;
- Overseas information gathering missions to Malaysia and Laos;
- Participated in FMD and other Epizootics Commission meeting in Paris in January;
- Participated in a meeting arranged with representatives of a large agribusiness-business organisation to assess private sector attitude in Thailand to FMD control;
- Made local arrangements for the 4th meeting of the FMD Sub-Commission and drafting the meeting report.

Main administrative matters:

- Administrative arrangements with the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of the Kasetsart University were established;
- The process of securing the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishing the Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) with the Royal Thai Government was pursued;
- Office equipment was purchased and communications were established;
- A project bank account was established and administrative procedures for OIE accountability put in place;
- In March the Thai Cabinet approved the MOU between Thailand and the OIE.
1. ACTIVITIES IN THAILAND

1.1 Field visits

1. With Dr Peter Roeder (FAO EMPRES\(^1\)), Dr Ab Kongthon (RCU) and Dr Genevieve Federspiel (SFVO\(^2\)), 14-15 October 1997:
   - FMD Centre, Pak Chong: Regional Reference Laboratory and Vaccine Production Centre;
   - Regional Office, Region 3, Nakorn Ratchasima: Visit to border area with Cambodia in Buri Ram Province.

2. With Dr Ab Kongthon and Dr Genevieve Federspiel, 19 – 23 October 1997:
   - Visit to border quarantine stations in Region 6 (bordering Myanmar) and live cattle market, Mae Sot (Tak Province);
   - Visit to Regional Office for Region 5 in Chiangmai for discussion on local disease control activities in Northern Region and visit to Northern Veterinary Research and Diagnostic Centre, Hang Chat (Lampang Province) for discussion on laboratory and epidemiology unit's activities in support of the FMD control programme.

1.2 Administrative activities

- Visits, with the Regional Representative of the OIE, to establish necessary contacts within Government, the Department of Livestock Development (DLD) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operatives, and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of the Kasetsart University to allow commencement of the RCU.
- Arranged redraft and Thai translation of MOU. Obtained informal clearance with Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Liaised with DLD to track progress through Ministry to Cabinet submission.
- Established a bank account for the RCU and arranged for international transfers of operating funds. Procured necessary documentation, in absence of MOU, to support account application.
- Purchased and installed office equipment and established power and communications for RCU.
- Established a system for accounting and reconciling local expenditures.
- Met with the DLD's Division of Disease Control to discuss DLD strategies for FMD control. Discussed and drafted a planning matrix for development of activities during phase 1 of the FMD control campaign.
- Hired local office assistant (investigated alternatives in Thailand, advertised, screened and interviewed applicants).
- Prepared submissions (discussion outlines) to seek approval for official visits to Malaysia and Laos.
- Analysed information and prepared Mission reports for visits to Malaysia and Laos.
- Managed all local preparations and arrangements for the 4\(^{th}\) meeting of the OIE Sub-Commission for Foot and Mouth Disease in South East Asia (3-6 March 1998). Liaised with the DLD to secure the presence of the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, senior DLD officials and media for the opening ceremony.
- Supervised arrangements for a meeting of vaccine manufacturers (2 March 1998), in association with the Sub Commission.

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\(^1\) Emergency Prevention System for Transboundary Animal and Plant Pests and Diseases programme of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.
\(^2\) Swiss Federal Veterinary Office.
• Arranged details of the First Meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Sub-Commission (1-2 March 1998).

1.3 Document and report writing

• Compiled mission notes and prepared mission reports and feedback documents for the December 1997 mission to Malaysia and the February 1998 mission to Laos.
• Prepared the complete draft report on the 4th Sub-Commission meeting and the Advisory Committee meeting.
• Prepared an updated review of the SEAFMD campaign for inclusion in a monograph on Animal Health in Asia to be published by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research.
• Prepared a project proposal for an epidemiology training module in collaboration with the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Kasetsart University.

1.4 Activities relating to the Australian Agency for International Development

• Paid a courtesy visit to Mr Ray Barge, Counsellor, Technical and Economic Co-operation, Australian Embassy in Bangkok, to inform of project commencement and to provide a brief on the project's objectives.
• Briefed Australian Agency for International Development's (AusAID) regional programme manager, Mr Keith England, and Mr Tony Bates, Australian Embassy in Bangkok, during their visit to the RCU.
• Telephone briefings to Mr Tony Bates, Program Officer, Development Assistance, concerning progress of MOU within Thai Government bureaucracy
2. OTHER ACTIVITIES

2.1 Mission to Malaysia, 8-14 December 1997

The mission consisted of visits to the head office of the Malaysian Department of Veterinary Services in Kuala Lumpur and to the State of Kelantan which at that time was experiencing outbreaks of FMD, type A virus. The Animal Quarantine Station (legal) and some Golok River (smuggling) entry points for livestock from Thailand were inspected. The FMD laboratory in Kota Bahru was found to be fully functional as a national diagnostic laboratory and playing a key role in FMD control activities in the State. This activity included monitoring post-vaccination antibody responses for the local program and for animals entering via the import protocol.

A large number of interviews were conducted with different sections/divisions of the head office. Malaysia maintains a commitment to control FMD and to confine the disease to the border belt. The control program is expected to face some difficulties in 1998 and 1999 because of the contraction in operating budgets, especially for field support of vaccination teams. An additional concern has been the appearance of all three virus serotypes of FMD during the same 12-month period. The antigenic change in the recent type A virus detected in quarantined cattle indicates that the present type A vaccine strain will not provide adequate protection.

Malaysia is continuously faced with a national shortage in meat production that in the past has been partly offset by importation of live cattle from Australia. Current exchange rate problems have stopped these imports, so for the foreseeable future the demand for live animals will most probably be met by increased volume from Thailand. The protocol developed to prevent introduction of FMD in legally imported animals has not prevented some clinical cases from appearing in quarantined animals. The importance of Peninsular Malaysia as a buffer against the spread of FMD to Indonesia is emphasised, especially with the development of trading triangles within the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

2.2 Foot and Mouth Disease and other Epizootics Commission meeting

Initial meetings were held with the Finance and Administration section to settle some routine procedures for management of the RCU. Arrangements were made for routine supply of OIE publications to be forwarded to the RCU and the Veterinary Faculty of Kasetsart University. Discussions were held with the information technology section about simple procedures for disease information recording for SEAFMD. Participation in the Commission meeting resulted in an increased understanding of the role of the OIE in developing standards for disease surveillance and monitoring and of the procedures to be followed to establish disease free zones. The early progress with the regional co-ordination unit was outlined for the Commission, which is the umbrella organisation for the SEAFMD Sub-Commission.
2.3 Mission to Laos, 8-13 February 1998

This mission was successful because of introduction to all the key senior officials in the Department of Livestock and Fisheries, and to the major disease control constraints facing the Animal Health Division. Livestock are an important part of the small holder agricultural production system and animal health issues are important to livestock owners. Especially important is the role that livestock play in income security, as livestock are a form of negotiable asset, readily converted into cash in emergencies. As such FMD control must be considered to make an important contribution to the welfare of the rural population, as the disease has significant impact on the cost and convenience of maintaining animals.

It was evident that many components of the veterinary services must be strengthened before any concerted attempt can be made to control FMD. The new European Commission funded project on veterinary services was nearing commencement and it is important for the SEAFMD program that this project is able to support directly or indirectly some of the FMD control activities in the programme locations. The Department has signalled that it will embark on a more extension-oriented approach to animal disease control in the future. However there are sparse resources available to improve communication networks and develop extension programs.

With assistance from DLD Thailand, the Animal Health Division is undertaking a pilot program to control FMD along a frequent route of spread passing through the municipality of Vientiane. A follow-up RCU mission will be requested to develop national FMD planning priorities and terms of reference for consultants to develop plans and activities to meet these priorities will be developed. It is evident from the mission to Laos that a great opportunity exists as the animal health system develops, to establish an extension and outcome evaluation orientated approach with respect to disease control programmes.
3. PLANNED SEAFMD ACTIVITIES

3.1 Actions projected for participating SEAFMD countries for the period 1 April to 30 September 1998

The 4th meeting of the Sub-Commission for FMD in South-East Asia was the first after the establishment of the RCU. The members of the Sub-Commission embraced the opportunity to include the RCU in their plans for the ensuing 12 months. A significant number of tasks were assigned to the RCU by the Sub-Commission, but at the same time the members were committed to providing plans of their national programs to the RCU. All the countries have also agreed to support an analysis of the economic impact of FMD on various production systems within the region. The veterinary services face difficulties in continuing to obtain financial resources to maintain FMD control initiatives, but all have indicated that whenever possible they will maintain the commitment. The government of Thailand is continuing to progress with the development of a biologically secure FMD laboratory with the intention of seeking OIE endorsement as a Regional Reference Laboratory.

3.2 Activities projected for the Regional Coordination Unit for the for period 1 April 1 to 30 September 1999

Recruitment of new office staff person – while the person previously recruited was able to satisfactorily undertake routine secretarial functions, it became clear that to run the office with the coordinator on duty travel the RCU must recruit someone who has skills of a higher level than a conventional secretary.

The Philippine delegate to the OIE Sub-Commission indicated that if the RCU was going to review activities of the national FMD control plan, this should be completed if possible prior to the next national elections in May. This review, it is planned, will be undertaken in late April 1998. A report will then be prepared in Bangkok for the Philippines Bureau of Animal Industries and the OIE.

A visit to Laos is expected to take place in late May 1998 to develop terms of reference for a consultant to plan the human resource and organisational development aspects of the national plan for FMD control. At this time discussions will also be held concerning a similar consultancy to examine the requirements to build an extension program to support FMD control activities. The Sub-Commission also recommended that economic impact assessment studies be carried out. It would be useful to combine all these activities if possible. The trip will be used to integrate SEAFMD activities with the European Union (EU) project on strengthening veterinary services. The report and terms of reference will be submitted to the OIE Central Bureau for action.

A EU project to develop veterinary services will soon commence in Vietnam. It is important that discussions take place as soon as possible for the RCU to become familiar with the concepts of the project so that, where appropriate, activities of the FMD national plan will be integrated into this project framework. A mission to Vietnam will take place in early July to undertake these discussions and to carry out the appraisal of the national FMD control plan. Reports on the mission will be prepared and submitted to the Government of Vietnam and to the OIE.
A mission to Cambodia will take place in late August 1998 to carry out an appraisal of the national FMD control plan and to undertake other assessments according to the standard protocol that has been developed. This visit will be used to meet with the OIE Regional representative to commence the planning for the 5th meeting of the OIE SEAFMD Sub-Commission in Phnom Penh in late February 1999. Reports on the mission will be submitted to the government of Cambodia and to the OIE.

The FMD Research Group of the European Commission will conduct an open meeting at the Institute for Animal Health, Pirbright Laboratory (United Kingdom) in September 1998. An invitation to this meeting has been received following the OIE FMD Commission meeting in Paris, January 1998. Approval from the OIE will be sought to attend this meeting.

Plans for the production of a regional SEAFMD newsletter intended to disseminate current information about RCU activities and relevant regional and international FMD matters will be developed.

Undertake collaboration with the Bangkok FAO office in order to integrate interests for a Technical Co-operation Project on FMD in the region with the economic assessment studies that will be undertaken with the project lead by the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI). In particular the linkage with the FAO project plan will be in the area of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) development.

Commence discussions about developing a model of a system for animal movement monitoring with the Division of Disease Control of the Department of Livestock Development in Thailand.

Consult with the Thai Regional Co-ordinator undertaking the tasks required to make progress with outstanding matters related to FMD vaccine quality control.

Consult with the Thai Department of Livestock Development and Thai Co-ordinator concerning the development of the high containment laboratory at Pak Chong, and progress toward OIE endorsement as the Regional Reference Laboratory.

The OIE must undertake a mission to Myanmar in the near future. Planning and arrangements for this visit will be completed during the next 6-month period and the mission is likely to be undertaken in October or November.

Develop a plan for a regional meeting of representatives of the member countries to discuss standardised approaches to FMD epidemiology.
4. GENERAL PLANNING ACTIVITY AND CONCLUSIONS

A considerable amount of time has been spent developing options for strategic approaches to various key issues related to FMD control in the region. It is clear from the two initial country visits that a framework for discussion has been identified, but the national environments are so varied that the contents of discussions will vary considerably.

The approach agreed by the Sub-commission is that the RCU will undertake a reiterative process of information gathering and analysis to develop with the national FMD Coordinator a plan to systematically deal with the problems identified in the national environment. The first part of the process will be an in-depth examination of the existing national plans. The RCU will also work with the administrations and planners to ensure that the program on progressive development of FMD control is within the development portfolio for the country and that it is within the resources available. The key paradigm must be long-term sustainability of the programme.

It is clear that within the scope of the three years of the project there will be a major amount of information gathering and planning in close consultation with the animal health authorities in each of the seven countries involved. Some of the countries will be continuing well-established programmes while others will be starting from the very basics of developing a better animal health infrastructure. There are some major constraints to the program that must be dealt with through careful planning and development of ‘win-win’ approaches to conflict resolution. Issues such as compliance with laws and regulations are probably the major non-technical constraint to the advancement of the FMD control programme in Thailand. The regional impact of the FMD situation in Myanmar is unknown because of general lack of information about the veterinary services and disease within the country. There is a large, unregulated and illegal trade in cattle and buffaloes from Myanmar into Thailand.

The national relevance of the livestock sector may be changing at a political level with the changing economic fortunes in the region. It is clear that Thailand and Malaysia will want to become less dependent on imported meat products, but it is also clear from interviews in the case of Thailand that a sustainable integrated national livestock development programme does not exist at the present time. This may be in part because illegal import of animals is an easier option at present for the meat industry than local development. This view was supported by the private sector interviews. Livestock development projects outlined tend to require or involve significant technological and institutional infrastructure and usually resources are not available long term to sustain such projects. Another problem is the scarcity of professional support. Malaysia and Thailand share a problem in that while integrated palm oil and livestock production seems profitable, it is difficult to get industry enthusiastic about the potential, because of the increased level of management and skills required. In general the overriding agricultural culture is that of rice production and while livestock are seen as assets and a means of storing these for quick returns, most farmers are livestock holders rather than producers. It would seem that the best stimulus to better disease control is trade opportunities and these may be developed through the private rather than the public sector projects. The key to the approach may then have to be the development of sustainable and enforceable disease free zones that have community and industry support.