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Self-declaration of freedom from rabies by Bahrain

Self-declaration submitted to the OIE on 28 August 2018 by Dr Fajer Al Salloom, Delegate of Bahrain to the OIE, Chief of Vet Lab & Pharmacy Section Control & Animal Health Directorate, Agriculture Affairs, Ministry of Works, Municipalities Affairs and Urban Planning, Bahrain.

I. Situation of rabies in Bahrain

The Veterinary Authority in the Kingdom of Bahrain is well established, and conducts comprehensive registration, notification and surveillance activities for animal diseases. Given the relatively small area of the island country, and the low livestock density (less than one million of all species), these activities are running smoothly under state funding and supervision. Animal treatments, prophylaxis and vaccination have been issued freely until 2015 when therapeutics were privatized but vaccination and sanitation activities continued to be state sponsored for all animals including pets. [Rabies is a notifiable disease in the Kingdom of Bahrain](#). The last reported case of rabies in animals in Bahrain was in 1962.

Most pets (dogs, cats, rabbits and hamsters) are owned by the rather large expatriate community in Bahrain, who travel to their home countries (United Kingdom, European Union, United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, etc.) annually in most cases. Dogs and cats are subject to registration, annual vaccination in addition to rigorous quarantine measures applicable to all animals during international travel. There are no wild carnivores in Bahrain, except few kept within private holdings and zoos that are under the supervision of the Veterinary Authority. Rabies has never been reported in these holdings or zoos. Mammals belonging to the Order Chiroptera are monitored by the Supreme Council of Environment in close liaison with the Veterinary Authority and the Ministry of Health. According to the records, Bahrain has a very small (negligible) population of Chiroptera because of a lack of suitable habitat.

II. Epidemiological background

Bahrain is a Member of the OIE since 1990 and has continued to provide epidemiological data according to the OIE mandate since that time. Bahrain also actively reports on animal diseases to the OIE through WAHIS.

No country or authority in the world has implicated animals imported from the Kingdom of Bahrain as a source of proved or suspected rabies incident throughout recent history.

Bahrain has a population of approximately 1,000 stray dogs. A national program has been established to monitor and control these animals steered by several government institutions including the Animal Health Directorate, the Ministry of Health, Municipalities and the Ministry of Interior, as well as Bahrain Society for Preventing Cruelty to Animals (BSPCA). BSPCA manages a well-equipped facility, with a one-time holding capacity of 400 animals. The owned dog population is estimated to be around 5,000 dog in Bahrain.

III. Rabies surveillance and Control Measures

Since 1990 up to now, an effective programme of disease **passive surveillance** has been conducted for rabies in the Kingdom of Bahrain in accordance with the recommendations stipulated in Chapter 1.4. of OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* (the *Terrestrial Code*). The programme includes:

1. Testing of all imported and exported pets for Rabies Vaccine Antibody Titre (Virus Neutralisation Test) ;
2. Occasional testing for rabies virus in canine and feline using Rapid Antigen Tests ;
3. Record of suspicious signs by private veterinary clinics ;
4. Communication between the Ministry of Health and the Veterinary Authority through the National Zoonotic Disease Committee in case of accidental contact (animal - human) involving possible rabies risk.

A rabies program is implemented by the Veterinary Authority in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The program consists of: mandatory microchipping and registration, routine rabies vaccination (killed vaccine), notification of any suspicious signs and strict import-export measures.

The animal welfare strategy of the Kingdom of Bahrain, concerning feral dogs and cats include:

- Policy of neutering, vaccination* and release ;
- Adoption ;
- Euthanasia.

*Vaccination package includes: rabies, TRICAT (Feline Panleucopaenia Virus, Feline Herpesvirus, Feline Calicivirus), canine distemper and rota virus. Rabies vaccines endorsed by Bahrain Quarantine Section must comply with the recommendations of OIE *Terrestrial Manual*. Total 4,824 of dogs and cats have been vaccinated against rabies in 2018 by private veterinary clinics.

Feral dogs and cats are closely monitored by the Veterinary Authority, BSPCA and several civil society groups for any disease signs or maltreatment.

IV. Measures implemented to maintain freedom

Early detection system for Rabies relies on:

1. Prompt border controls.
2. Mandatory report by private vet clinics, pet owners and BSPCA for suspicion signs.
3. Readiness to perform Rabies diagnosis at laboratories of the Ministry of Health and the Veterinary Authority as well as regional collaborating Laboratories.
4. Established collaboration with the GCC Centre for Early Warning on Animal Diseases based in Kuwait.
5. Disaster Mitigations Committee facilitates cooperation between relevant government ministries and departments on disaster management, including biological hazards.

Regulatory measures for the prevention and control of rabies, including effective importation procedures, are implemented. The import measures include:

- All pets imported to Bahrain must be microchipped and vaccinated for rabies at least two months before entering the country;
- Laboratory certificate reporting rabies post vaccination antibody titre, using tests described in the OIE Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines for Terrestrial Animals (virus neutralisation tests), must be annexed to the international health certificate;
- Imported pets are enrolled in the National Registration and monitoring system for their entire duration of stay in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

No imported cases of rabies in carnivores has ever been confirmed outside a quarantine station. Total of 3,038 dogs and cats have been handled by the Quarantine Section (Import & Export) in 2018.

VI. Conclusion

Bahrain implements adequate surveillance and control measures to keep the country free from rabies.

In accordance with Chapter 1.6., Article 8.14.3 of the OIE *Terrestrial Code* and the presented epidemiological data, the Delegate of Bahrain to the OIE declares that as of 25 July 2018 the country fulfils the requirements for freedom from rabies.

I, the undersigned,
..... Dr. Fajer Al Salloum

Delegate of..... Kingdom of Bahrain

to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), takes responsibility for the self-declaration
of freedom from
..... Rabies

..... (disease)

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Drawn up on 28/08/18

Signature of the Delegate:

