

ANIMAL IDENTIFICATION AND TRACEABILITY – CURRENT OIE STANDARDS

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A technical item on animal identification and traceability was presented at the 72nd General Session of the OIE in May 2004, at which time Members asked the OIE to develop standards on this matter.

Accordingly, the OIE Director General formed an *ad hoc* Group on animal identification and traceability, which has been working on the basis that these standards are an important tool for managing animal health and zoonotic diseases and for facilitating trade, as well as for preventing and controlling health crises. The *ad hoc* Group comprises experts from different regions of the world and in its work it takes into account CODEX activities to ensure proper coordination and complementarity between OIE and CODEX standards.

When drawing up draft standards, the Group has sought to ensure that the standards are fully applicable in the field, are compatible with the varying economic and technical capacities of OIE Members and are non-discriminatory.

Based on the *ad hoc* Group's work and subsequent consideration by the OIE Specialist Commissions, the International Committee (the annual general assembly of national representatives of the OIE's 172 member countries and territories) adopted general principles and recommendations on the design and implementation of identification systems to achieve animal traceability (see Chapters 4.1 and 4.2 of the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* ('the *Code*)).

In the development of standards it has also been necessary to define terminology to prevent ambiguity of meaning. For the purposes of the *Code*, 'animal identification' is defined as "the combination of the identification and registration of an animal individually, with a unique identifier, or collectively by its epidemiological unit or group, with a unique group identifier". 'Animal traceability' is defined as "the ability to follow an animal or group of animals during all stages of life".

These *Code* texts are the key international references relevant to the development and implementation of animal identification and traceability systems. Members of the OIE and Codex are encouraged to implement systems that comply with these standards as a basis for protecting animal and public health and facilitating international trade.

The OIE decided to hold this first international conference on animal identification and traceability to improve its understanding of what is happening around the world at present and to support members in applying the international standards. As a result of the conference, the OIE will assess if additional guidance, tools or standards are required.

Key words: OIE and CODEX standards – Coordination – Complementarity – Compatibility.
