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Self-declaration for the recovery of country freedom from high pathogenicity avian influenza in poultry in the Netherlands

Self-Declaration sent to the OIE on 29 July 2021 by Dr. Christianne Brusckhe, OIE Delegate for the Netherlands Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality

I. Situation of highly pathogenic avian influenza

In July 2018, the Netherlands self-declared freedom from avian influenza viruses in poultry in accordance with the provisions of Article 10.4.3. of the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code (Terrestrial Code)* (2018).

However, on 28 October 2020, the Netherlands reported an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) type H5N8 in a broiler parent flock. More outbreaks with H5N8, 11 in total, occurred in commercial poultry. One HPAI outbreak with H5N1 occurred on 15 December 2020. These events were all reported to the OIE World Animal Health Information System (OIE-WAHIS). Infected flocks were culled and the establishments were cleaned and disinfected. The last outbreak, in a turkey farm, was confirmed on 21 May 2021. The last cleaning and disinfection were completed on 18 June 2021. Measures were lifted gradually, taking into account the epidemiological situation. All events were closed, the last on 16 July 2021.

1.1. Control and intensified surveillance for recovery freedom from HPAI

The Netherlands has carried out a control programme and intensified surveillance to regain its freedom from HPAI in poultry. In addition, an effective early detection system is in place. The programmes are carried out under the responsibility of the Veterinary Authority.

1.2. Control and intensified surveillance in response to the outbreaks

The Netherlands has carried out a strict control strategy to eradicate the virus and control the 12 outbreaks. All control measures and all inspections were carried out by the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA) (the Veterinary authority). This control strategy included measures mentioned in Directive 2005/94/EC of the European Union, and extra measures taken by the Dutch authorities.

Restriction areas of 3 and 10 km radius were established where strict measures were applied. These measures included movement restrictions between poultry farms, culling of poultry on infected premises and on flocks located up to one km around an outbreak, safe destruction of carcasses and contaminated material, cleaning and disinfection of infected premises (three times), and the application of hygienic measures for personnel, trucks, material etc. In the whole country, poultry was kept inside during eight months (23 October 2020 to 6 July 2021).

Poultry on affected farms were killed in line with Chapter 7.6. of the *Terrestrial Code*. Carcasses were safely destroyed at the rendering plant in the Netherlands. Approximately 509,000 birds have been culled at the farms where the outbreaks occurred. Approximately 180,000 birds have been pre-emptively culled at farms located up to one km around the outbreaks.

Within two days after confirmation of HPAI and the culling of the infected flock, all poultry flocks in a three-km zone around each outbreak were examined clinically. When clinical signs were observed, a minimum of 20 sick birds were sampled (20 cloacal and 20 oropharyngeal samples) and tested for the presence of virus. Per flock, 20 serum samples were collected and tested for the presence of antibodies against avian influenza. None of the samples tested positive for avian influenza (Table 1), implying that none of the flocks in the three-km zones were infected with avian influenza viruses.

Table 1 - Number of samples tested in the 3-km zone surrounding the HPAI outbreaks in 2020 and 2021. All tests had negative results for avian influenza.

| Test | No. of holdings sampled | Total No. of samples |
|-------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| M-PCR | 37 | 4524 |
| ELISA | 37 | 1980 |

30 days after depopulation of each outbreak, all poultry flocks in the 10 km zones were visited and poultry clinically examined. If no signs of avian influenza were present, the area was declared free from avian influenza and the 3 and 10 km zones were abolished.

This additional surveillance programme did not reveal any additional outbreak of avian influenza. The twelve outbreaks of HPAI that occurred were all detected due to rapid notification of a clinical suspicion by the farmers.

Tracing of contacts between infected flocks and other poultry farms and identifying possible sources of virus introduction were carried out by the NVWA, the Dutch Competent Authority. Forward and backward tracing was furthermore done by interviewing the farmers about all contacts in the three weeks before the suspicion was reported. In addition, farms that delivered products or poultry were visited by the NVWA to check for presence of avian influenza as well.

The virus strain from each infected flock was tested in the Dutch reference laboratory Wageningen Bioveterinary Research (WBVR). Epidemiological analyses based on RNA sequencing and contact tracing supported the hypothesis that wild birds introduced the virus at the three farms, and no between-flock transmission has occurred.

After the outbreak on 21 May 2021, no further outbreaks were reported or detected by surveillance. The last cleaning and disinfection were done on 18 June 2021.

II. Surveillance programme and early detection system

The Netherlands has a thorough surveillance programme carried out annually to rapidly detect new incursions and to prove freedom from avian influenza. The surveillance programme is in accordance with Chapter 1.4. and Articles 10.4.26. to 10.4.30. of the *Terrestrial Code*.

The programme has the following elements:

2.1. Obligation to report a clinical suspicion of avian influenza

Avian influenza is notifiable in the whole country. Veterinarians and poultry owners/holders should notify clinical signs of highly pathogenic avian influenza to the NVWA immediately. They have to report any occurrence of clinical signs resembling HPAI, or when daily mortality in a shed is higher than 0,5 % during 2 consecutive days. This obligation is embedded in Dutch legislation (Articles 3.15 and 3.16 of regulation animal health¹) and also in European rules (Commission delegated regulation (EU) 2020/689)². All suspected cases of avian influenza are investigated immediately by the NVWA. Based on the judgement of the NVWA, oropharyngeal and cloacal swabs samples, and serum samples are collected and sent to the Dutch reference laboratory WBVR in Lelystad for further laboratory examination. This includes PCR on swab material and an ELISA for the detection of antibodies

against AI virus. Since July 2020, 69 HPAI-suspicions on poultry farms were reported. In total 4728 oropharyngeal and cloacal swabs and 910 serum samples were collected on these 69 flocks. In total twelve flocks of those 69 suspected cases turned out to be infected with H5N8.

2.2. Awareness programme

An ongoing awareness programme is in place. Information about the avian influenza situation in the Netherlands and neighbouring countries is provided regularly to veterinary practitioners, and representatives of poultry sectors (commercial and hobby flock owners), and other stakeholders like hunters, and the general public. Updates about clinical signs of circulating avian influenza virus strains and susceptible species are also provided. Information about the epidemiological situation is shared between delegates of affected and not yet affected member countries.

2.3. Early warning system

In addition to the obligation of reporting any suspicion, the Netherlands has implemented a procedure in which all farmers are legally obliged to consult a veterinarian when a drop in egg production, and/or feed and water intake occurs. The criteria are: clinical signs, and a drop of >5% of water/feed intake, and, in case of laying hens a drop of egg production > 5% during two consecutive days. The veterinarian cannot rule out HPAI, but does not suspect the flock of HPAI. The Competent Authority is informed. The veterinarian collects six oropharyngeal and six cloacal samples and send these samples to Wageningen Bioveterinary Research WBVR for confirmation or exclusion of HPAI. WBVR carries out a PCR to detect H5 or H7. The competent authority requests the farmer not to move any birds from the farm during the testing period, which takes approximately 24 hours. The competent authority does not consider the farm as suspected of HPAI (otherwise it should have been notified), but we have this early warning system as an additional monitoring system to increase the sensitivity of the whole monitoring system in the Netherlands. During the last 12 months, in total 3564 swab samples from 359 farms, where HPAI could not be ruled out, were sent to the laboratory. All samples tested negative for HPAI virus.

2.4. Serological monitoring

An active surveillance programme in which the susceptible poultry population undergoes regular clinical examination and active surveillance is implemented. Active surveillance is obligatory according to European legislation (Commission delegated regulation (EU) 2020/689). The Netherlands has an intensive serological monitoring system. Serum samples are collected on each poultry farm in the Netherlands on a regular basis. Outdoor layer farming systems are sampled 4 times a year, turkey farms are sampled each production cycle (average production cycle is 4 months), and other flocks are sampled once a year. Per visit, 30 birds are sampled. In total approximately 100,000 serological tests (ELISA) are carried out annually. All samples tested negative for antibodies against HPAI virus.

2.5. Wild bird monitoring

Monitoring of wild water birds found dead is carried out and is obligatory due to European legislation. The Dutch government has requested public to notify findings of several dead birds at the same spot. Birds are sent to WBVR and samples are examined for confirmation or exclusion of avian influenza.

III. Measures to maintain freedom

Poultry owners have a private system to secure that holders of poultry farms apply strict biosecurity measures. We also apply the extensive monitoring system to rapidly detect outbreaks. The import rules for the European Union are very strict, in order to prevent introduction of AI viruses through trade of poultry and poultry products. There are also strict rules for import of wild birds from third countries. This all should reduce the chances of infection of poultry in the Netherlands. Imports of poultry and poultry products into the Netherlands are carried out in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 10.4. Infection with avian influenza viruses of the *Terrestrial Code*. All imports of poultry, poultry products and hatching eggs are subject to veterinary certification in accordance with the provisions of Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2020/692¹.

¹https://eur-lex.europa.eu/search.html?DTA=2020&SUBDOM_INIT=ALL_ALL&DB_TYPE_OF_ACT=regulation&DTS_SUBDOM=ALL_ALL&typeOfActStatus=%20REGULATION&DTS_DOM=ALL&lang=en&type=advanced&qid=1629364434717&DTN=0692

IV. Conclusions

Considering that:

- Prior to the occurrence of new outbreak in November 2020, the Netherlands were free from highly pathogenic avian influenza in poultry (self-declaration July 2018);
- Stamping out measures were adopted that included cleaning-up and disinfecting all the affected farms;
- At least 28 days have elapsed as stipulated in Article 10.4.6 of the *Terrestrial Code* since the end of the clean-up and disinfection operations;
- Surveillance has been performed in accordance with Articles 10.4.26. to 10.4.30. of the *Terrestrial Code* during that three-month period;
- There are regular ongoing awareness programs in place on avian influenza to encourage prompt reporting of HPAI suspicions.

The OIE Delegate of the Netherlands declares that the country complies with the requirements for a country free from infection with high pathogenicity avian influenza in poultry as of 16 July 2021, in accordance with Article 10.4.6. of the *Terrestrial Code* (2021), and consistent with the information provided in OIE-WAHIS.

Annex 1

Statement to be included in the self-declaration document.

I, the undersigned, Dr C.J.M. Brusckhe, Delegate of The Netherlands, to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), takes responsibility for the self-declaration of freedom from high pathogenicity avian influenza in poultry in the Netherlands in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 10.4. Infection with Avian influenza viruses of the OIE *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*.

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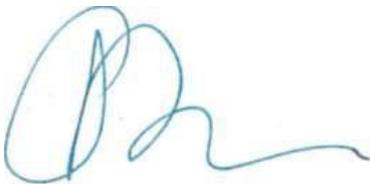
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Drawn up on 22 July 2021



Signature of C.J.M. Brusckhe