

**REPORT OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE OIE *AD HOC* GROUP ON
THE EVALUATION OF PESTE DES PETITS RUMINANTS STATUS OF MEMBERS
27 – 29 October 2020**

A meeting of the OIE *ad hoc* Group on the Evaluation of peste des petits ruminants (PPR) Status of Members (hereafter the Group) was held virtually from 27 to 29 October 2020.

1. Opening

Dr Matthew Stone, OIE Deputy Director General for International Standards and Science, welcomed the Group members and the representative of the Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases (hereafter the Scientific Commission) on behalf of Dr Monique Eloit, Director General of the OIE. He warmly introduced the two new members of the Group, Dr Abdelmalik Khalafalla and Dr Zhiliang Wang. Dr Stone thanked the experts for their availability and contribution to the work of the OIE and extended his appreciation to their institutions and national governments for allowing their participation.

Dr Stone acknowledged the amount of work before, during and after the *ad hoc* Group meeting and highlighted that the official recognition of disease status was an important activity for the OIE. He emphasised the sensitivity and confidentiality of the dossiers received and thanked the experts for having signed the confidentiality undertaking forms.

Dr Stone encouraged the Group to provide detailed feedback to any Members with a negative outcome to support them to address the gaps identified in their applications. Additionally, he asked the Group to provide informative recommendations to those Members with positive outcomes for the maintenance of their PPR free status.

Finally, Dr Stone mentioned the progress on the implementation of the OIE/FAO PPR Global Control and Eradication Strategy (PPR GCES) and stressed that it continued to be a priority for the OIE. He informed the Group that the revision of the PPR Monitoring and Assessment tool (PMAT) was ongoing. During the revision it had been noted that Members were facing difficulties in conducting risk analysis and assessing their PPR epidemiological situation to develop targeted vaccination campaigns. Dr Stone encouraged the Group to consider this issue, especially when evaluating applications for endorsement of official PPR control programmes, and make recommendations to Members, if relevant.

2. Adoption of the agenda and appointment of chairperson and rapporteur

The Group was chaired by Dr Henry Wamwayi, and Dr Abdelmalik Khalafalla acted as rapporteur with the support of the OIE Secretariat. The Group endorsed the proposed agenda.

The terms of reference, agenda and list of participants are presented as Appendices I, II and III, respectively.

3. Evaluation of requests from Members for the status recognition of PPR free countries

a) North Macedonia (Rep.of)

In August 2020, the Republic of North Macedonia (hereafter, North Macedonia) submitted an application for the official recognition of its PPR free status based on historical grounds. The Group requested additional information and received clarification from the country.

i) *Animal disease reporting*

The Group acknowledged that North Macedonia had a record of regular and prompt animal disease reporting to the OIE.

The Group took note that PPR had been a compulsorily notifiable disease since 1998 and that all legal and natural persons professionally or otherwise engaged or in contact with animals were obliged to report any suspicion of a compulsorily notifiable disease, including PPR.

The Group noted that in the past 24 months, PPR suspect cases had been reported in eleven holdings in North Macedonia. The Group appreciated that appropriate follow-up actions were triggered by these suspicions, which included investigation and laboratory testing for PPR with negative results for all sixty-five collected samples.

From the dossier and the additional information provided, the Group noted that awareness for PPR was enhanced amongst private veterinarians and sheep and goat breeders following outbreaks of the disease in a neighbouring country in 2018. However, in the following years, priority was given to awareness activities for other animal diseases present in the region compared to PPR. The Group recommended that North Macedonia maintain effective PPR awareness-raising activities targeting all relevant stakeholders, including farmers, slaughterhouse workers and veterinary paraprofessionals, to ensure the sensitivity of the passive surveillance.

ii) *Veterinary Services*

The Group noted that the veterinary authority of North Macedonia was represented by the Food and Veterinary Agency (FVA). This body was funded by the Republic of North Macedonia, donations and other sources as defined by the relevant national legislation. The FVA was structured in five independent units and nine departments, namely Animal Health and Welfare, Veterinary Public Health, Food of Non-Animal Origin, Inspection Supervision, European Union and Internal Cooperation, General and Administrative Affairs, Professional Support and Novel Foods, and Risk Assessment and Communication Departments. The FVA was also present in 29 local offices and ten Border Inspection Posts dedicated to monitor the implementation of relevant legislation over the entire food chain including commodities for import and export. In addition, the Group appreciated that North Macedonia made use of the OIE PVS pathway. Following a PVS mission to the country in 2015, improvements on legislation and quality systems were implemented according to the mission recommendations.

The Group further noted that a system for the registration and individual identification of small ruminants was in place in North Macedonia since 2008. According to this system, animals not intended for slaughter or animals older than 12 months were required to be tagged with an individual number. Movements of small ruminants within the country were registered in a national database and required an animal health certificate issued by the veterinary authority prior to shipment.

From the dossier, the Group noted a high percentage of non-compliances related to small ruminant movements within the country. In response to a question raised by the Group, North Macedonia clarified that most of these non-compliances resulted from discrepancies between the number of animals reported to the national animal register and the actual number of animals present on the farms during on-spot visits. These differences were due to under-reporting to the authorities of on-farm mortality (home slaughter, death from disease or predation) and animal movements. The Group

appreciated the transparency demonstrated by North Macedonia and the fact that the recording system implemented was able to detect these non-compliances. The Group further acknowledged that North Macedonia was working to address this gap by implementing mitigation measures such as legal sanctions, distribution of leaflets communicating farmers' obligations on animal identification, registration and home slaughter, and a 70% decrease in the price of seasonal movement certificates. In view of this, the Group recommended that North Macedonia continue working on addressing this issue and, if necessary, apply further measures to encourage a higher rate of animal mortality reporting and consequently increase the accuracy of the animal movement recording system.

iii) *Situation of PPR in the past 24 months*

The Group acknowledged that PPR had never been reported in the country. Therefore, North Macedonia was eligible to claim historical freedom from PPR, as described in Article 1.4.6. of the *Terrestrial Code*.

iv) *Absence of vaccination in the past 24 months and no entry of vaccinated animals*

Whilst there was no regulation specifically prohibiting vaccination against PPR in North Macedonia, the Group noted that vaccination could only be implemented in the country following an order by the FVA Director in case of a PPR outbreak. In light of this, the Group recommended North Macedonia to proceed with establishing the legal basis for prohibiting vaccination against PPR or a system of preventing authorisation for vaccine registration and use as soon as possible.

The Group acknowledged that vaccination against PPR had never been carried out in the country.

v) *Importation of domestic ruminants and their semen, oocytes or embryos is carried out in accordance with relevant articles of Chapter 14.7.*

The Group noted that importation of domestic and wild small ruminants had only been carried out from countries officially recognised as PPR free by the OIE. With regard to the imports of wild small ruminants, animals from two species, namely mouflon (*Ovis aries musimon*) and kri-kri (*Capra aegagrus creticus*) had been imported for hunting purposes. The Group examined the sanitary requirements applied on those imports and concluded they were compliant with the provisions of Article 14.7.9. of the *Terrestrial Code*.

The Group further noted that small ruminant products such as casings, hide and skins had been imported into North Macedonia from countries both with and without an official PPR free status and that these were in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 14.7. of the *Terrestrial Code*. North Macedonia stated that it did not import genetic material from small ruminants.

The Group concluded that import requirements in North Macedonia were in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 14.7. of the *Terrestrial Code*.

vi) *Surveillance for PPR and PPRV infection in accordance with Articles 14.7.27. to 14.7.33. and with Chapter 1.4.*

The Group acknowledged that passive surveillance for PPR had been in place in North Macedonia for at least ten years, and that more than 140 private veterinary practices supervised by FVA were carrying out veterinary public health activities including disease surveillance.

While pathogen-specific surveillance was not mandatory according to Article 1.4.6. of the *Terrestrial Code*, the Group noted that North Macedonia made use of serum samples collected for other purposes (i.e., serological surveillance for brucellosis) and tested them also for PPR. A very small proportion of these samples tested positive (3 out of 345 samples), but these were considered to be false-positives due to the characteristics of the laboratory test used (test specificity not reaching 100%) and to the fact that there was no geographic clustering of the positive samples. The Group further noted that a similar initiative was planned for 2020. The Group praised this initiative and encouraged the country to maintain this activity, noting that it would also contribute to the maintenance of a proficient laboratory capacity.

The Group noted that the most common wild species susceptible to PPR in North Macedonia was the Balkan chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica*), but an estimation of the population size was not available. The Group noted that PPR serological surveillance in North Macedonia would benefit from inclusion of wildlife samples, where possible.

With regard to diagnostic capacity, the Group observed that PPR diagnosis was carried out at the national reference laboratory for food and feed safety, located at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Skopje, North Macedonia, using commercial diagnostic methods (ELISA and PCR). The Group acknowledged that North Macedonia participated for two consecutive years in proficiency tests organised by an OIE Reference Laboratory for PPR with satisfactory results.

The Group concluded that the surveillance system in North Macedonia was in accordance with the requirements of the *Terrestrial Code*.

vii) *Regulatory measures for the early detection, prevention and control of PPR*

The Group noted that the industry, producers, farmers, keepers, veterinarians and veterinary paraprofessionals were involved in passive surveillance of animal diseases including PPR and that failure to report PPR cases would attract sanctions. The Group also took note of controls implemented by the Veterinary Authorities on the imports of livestock and livestock products into North Macedonia.

The Group acknowledged that North Macedonia was regularly participating in regional initiatives for information sharing and the control of priority diseases in the region.

Furthermore, the Group noted that a contingency plan specifically for PPR was in place since 2018, outlining the PPR related legislation as well as procedures to be followed and measures to be implemented in case of occurrence of the disease. The Group recommended that North Macedonia should organise a simulation exercise for PPR to test the contingency plan.

The Group agreed that the necessary regulatory measures for early detection, prevention and control of PPR were in place and compliant with the requirements of the *Terrestrial Code*.

viii) *Compliance with the questionnaire in Article 1.12.1.*

The Group agreed that the North Macedonia's dossier was compliant with the questionnaire in Article 1.12.1.

Conclusion

Considering the information submitted in the dossier and the answers received from North Macedonia to the questions raised, the Group concluded that the application was compliant with the requirements of Chapter 14.7., Article 1.4.6. and with the questionnaire in Article 1.12.1. of the *Terrestrial Code*. The Group therefore recommended that North Macedonia be recognised as a country free from PPR based on historical grounds.

The Group recommended that in addition to passive surveillance North Macedonia continues to explore opportunities to maintain an active surveillance of PPR as well as PPR laboratory testing capacity by using activities already in place (e.g., other disease surveillance programmes). The Group also suggested that North Macedonia takes advantage of farm visits related to the control of other animal diseases to enhance awareness for PPR. In addition, the Group recommended that North Macedonia proceed with developing a legal basis to ensure that vaccination against PPR is not implemented.

Additionally, information on the following should be submitted to the OIE when North Macedonia reconfirms its PPR status:

- Results of the 2020 planned serological survey for the detection of PPR antibodies.
- Documented evidence on implementation of PPR awareness-raising activities targeting all relevant stakeholders, including farmers, animal keepers, slaughterhouse workers, private veterinarians and veterinary paraprofessionals, to ensure an adequate level of sensitivity of the passive surveillance.

- Progress achieved following the implementation of measures to decrease the number of non-compliances related to internal animal movements and under-reporting of on-farm small ruminant mortality and slaughter.
- Organisation of a simulation exercise for PPR to test the PPR contingency plan.

b) Other request

The Group assessed a request of a Member for the official recognition of its PPR free status based on historical grounds and concluded that the application did not meet the requirements of the *Terrestrial Code*. The dossier was referred back to the applicant Member.

4. Evaluation of an application from a Member for the endorsement of its official control programme for PPR

The Group assessed a request of a Member for the endorsement of its national official control programme for PPR and concluded that the application did not meet the requirements of the *Terrestrial Code*. The dossier was referred back to the applicant Member.

5. Adoption of report

The Group reviewed and amended the draft report. The Group agreed that the report would be subject to a short period of circulation to the Group for comments and adoption. Upon circulation, the Group agreed that the report captured the discussions.

.../Appendices

Appendix I

**VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE OIE AD HOC GROUP ON THE EVALUATION
OF PESTE DES PETITS RUMINANTS STATUS OF MEMBERS
27 to 29 October 2020**

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Purpose

The purpose of the *ad hoc* Group on the evaluation of peste des petits ruminants (PPR) status of Members (the Group) is to evaluate applications for official recognitions of PPR status of Members.

Background

In accordance with the [OIE procedure for official recognition of disease status](#), OIE Members can be officially recognised as having a PPR free status or an official PPR control programme endorsed by the OIE through the adoption of a resolution by the World Assembly of Delegates of the OIE in May every year. A Member wishing to apply for the official recognition of its PPR status or for the endorsement of its official control programme for PPR should submit one of the [questionnaires](#) laid out in Chapter 1.12 of the OIE *Terrestrial Code* and comply with all requirements specified in the *Terrestrial Code* for PPR. The OIE Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases ([Scientific Commission](#)) is responsible for undertaking, on behalf of the Assembly, the assessment of OIE Members' applications for their compliance with OIE standards. The assessment carried out by the Scientific Commission is based on the recommendations formulated by a relevant *ad hoc* Group. *Ad hoc* groups are convened under the authority of and report to the OIE Director General.

Specific issues to be addressed

The Group will screen and evaluate in detail three Members' applications to assess whether they comply with the requirements specified for PPR in the *Terrestrial Code*. Based on the evaluations, the Group will provide their conclusions and recommendations to the Scientific Commission.

Prerequisites

The Group members should:

- Sign the OIE Undertaking on Confidentiality of information (if not done already);
- Complete the Declaration of Interest Form;
- Understand that the membership of the Group may be retained between its meetings to ensure continuity of the work.

Actions to deliverBefore the meeting

Upon reception of an application from a Member, the Status Department (SD) conducts a preliminary screening to check the conformity of the dossier (structure of the dossier in accordance with the SOP and with the relevant questionnaire under Chapter 1.12 of *Terrestrial Code*, main sections of the questionnaire, regular notification to the OIE, payment of the fee, OIE Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) report, etc.). If an information gap is identified, the SD requests additional information to the Member.

As the PVS reports are bound by the OIE rules on confidentiality of information, the SD and experts will consider for the evaluation the available PVS report(s) if not obsolete (PVS reports from more than five years ago) or confidential.

The SD will send the working documents to the Group, including the dossiers received from applicants, at least one month before the Group meeting (i.e., **27 September 2020**).

The experts can request support from the SD at any time.

The SD suggests the nomination of a Chair and Rapporteur for the Group's consideration.

The experts are expected to:

- Be familiar with Chapters [1.12](#) and [14.7](#) of the *Terrestrial Code*;
- Evaluate and study in detail all dossiers provided by the OIE;
- Take into account any other information available in the public domain that is considered pertinent for the evaluation of the dossiers;
- Summarise the dossiers according to the Terrestrial Code requirements by completing the summary tables provided by the SD (the summary tables will be provided at a later stage along with the working documents for the meeting). Experts are expected to capture and summarise in each corresponding section of the summary tables the main gaps as well as strengths identified during the assessment of the dossiers, using extracted texts or reference to pages/annexes of the application;
- Draft questions to the applicant Members whenever the analysis of the dossiers identifies incomplete or unclear information;
- Submit to the SD the completed summary tables for each application together with possible questions for the applicant Members at least 10 days before the teleconference (i.e., **16 October 2020**);

The SD will compile the summary tables and the questions to be forwarded to the applicant Members before the teleconference. All subsequent information and material provided by a Member will be forwarded to the Group.

During the meeting

- Agree on the appointment of the Chair and Rapporteur of the meeting (the Chair will lead the discussion and the Rapporteur will ensure that the report reflects the discussion and captures the detailed assessment of the dossiers);
- Mention any potential conflict of interest and, if relevant, withdraw him/herself from the discussion;
- Contribute to the discussions;
- Provide a detailed report in order to recommend, to the Scientific Commission, i) the country(ies) or zone(s) to be recognised (or not) as PPR free ii) country(ies) to have (or not) the OIE endorsement of official control programme for PPR, and to indicate any information gaps or specific areas that should be addressed in the future by the applicant Members.

If during the teleconference the Group decides that additional information should be requested from the applicant Members before an informed conclusion can be drawn, the SD forwards the additional information to the Group at a later date. The Chair is responsible for coordinating the finalisation of the assessment and for ensuring that the views of all Group members are taken into consideration.

Should the Group not be able to complete its Terms of Reference during this meeting, experts' contributions will be solicited after the meeting, including by teleconference if needed.

After the meeting

The SD will circulate the draft report after the teleconference is over. Experts are expected to contribute to the finalisation of the report within the following week.

The SD will circulate the final version of the report to the Group once endorsed by the Scientific Commission and is published online.

Deliverables

A detailed report to recommend to the Scientific Commission whether the Members should be (or not) recognised with an official PPR free status or should have (or not) the OIE endorsement of official control programme for PPR. The report should indicate any information gaps or specific areas that should be addressed in the future by the Members.

Reporting / timeline

The OIE will circulate the draft report no more than seven days after the teleconference (no later than 6 November 2020) and the Group will finalise its report within the following week (indicative deadline: 13 November 2020).

Appendix II

**VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE OIE AD HOC GROUP ON THE EVALUATION
OF PESTE DES PETITS RUMINANTS STATUS OF MEMBERS
27 to 29 October 2020**

Agenda

1. Opening
 2. Adoption of the agenda and appointment of Chair and Rapporteur.
 3. Evaluation of applications from Members for official recognition of PPR free status
 - North Macedonia (Rep.of)
 4. Evaluation of an application from a Member for the endorsement of its official control programme for PPR
 5. Finalisation and adoption of the report.
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Appendix III

**THE OIE AD HOC GROUP ON THE EVALUATION
OF PESTE DES PETITS RUMINANTS STATUS OF MEMBERS
27 to 29 October 2020**

List of Participants

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