



In a globalised world, animal diseases can spread as a result of the exponential growth in trade and tourism and the sanitary status of countries has become a key factor in international trade. In 1996, the OIE developed a procedure for the official recognition of a country sanitary status that covered four priority animal diseases. In some 10 years, the lists of Member Countries with an official disease status, ratified each year by the Organisation, have become an indispensable element of international trade.

OFFICIAL DISEASE STATUS: WHEN AND WHY?

In the early 1990s, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) received a mandate from its World Assembly of Delegates, composed of the Delegates of OIE Member Countries, to draw up a list of Member Countries, or zones within these countries, officially recognised with a sanitary status on selected diseases.

In 1996, the first such list was published, comprising Member Countries and zones certified free from **foot and mouth disease (FMD)** without recourse to vaccination. Since then, a similar procedure has been developed for three other priority diseases: **rinderpest**, **contagious bovine pleuropneumonia (CBPP)** and **bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)**.

At the request of its Members the OIE is currently assessing the feasibility of extending this list to diseases such as classical swine fever, equine influenza or avian influenza.

2011: Rinderpest is eradicated. OIE Resolution 18/2011 recognizes all 198 countries with rinderpest-susceptible animal populations in the world as free of the disease.

THE PROCEDURE

To ensure an impartial and democratic procedure, the OIE convenes *ad hoc* Groups of highly renowned international experts to examine the applications for official recognition of sanitary status submitted by OIE Members on a voluntary basis. The conclusions and recommendations of these Groups are then reviewed and either accepted, or rejected by an elected Specialist Commission.

The *ad hoc* Group or the Specialist Commission may call for a technical visit to be made to the country in question for verification purposes. All draft decisions are submitted to all Member Countries, which then have two months in which to comment.

Each year, at the OIE World Assembly in Paris, the status of Member Countries in regard to these diseases is reviewed and, where appropriate, ratified and published.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN THE FRONT LINE

The official disease status of countries is of great significance for international trade. A country may either lose or enhance its commercial attractiveness in the eyes of potential or existing importing partners, depending on official recognition of its status. By acquiring and maintaining its official status, a country demonstrates transparency and helps to promote animal health and public health worldwide, thereby gaining the trust of its partners and of the international community.

Official recognition of disease status provides developing and in-transition countries support to better defend their interests in trade, as well as giving them guidelines that they can use as national objectives.

The case of avian influenza

Member Countries are required to notify the OIE of any cases of highly pathogenic or low pathogenic avian influenza caused by virus subtypes H5 or H7 in domestic as well as in wild birds. However, the notification of avian influenza outbreaks in wild birds cannot lead to trade restrictions by trading partners.

Avian influenza is not one of the diseases for which the OIE has a procedure for official recognition of a country's status.

Article 10.4.2 of Chapter 10.4. of the Code lists the conditions under which a country may make a 'self-declaration' as a country free from highly pathogenic avian influenza, under its sole responsibility. Nevertheless, importing countries can request additional information or even request to audit the Veterinary Services of the country.

COUNTRY OR ZONE

The national Veterinary Services may submit an application for the whole of their country to be recognised as free from one of the priority diseases or only a zone of the country. In the latter case, the OIE's decision relates only to the part of the territory concerned.

SELF-DECLARATION

Member Countries may also make self-declarations of freedom from other OIE-listed diseases for which no official recognition procedure exists. They may do this based on the criteria and standards defined in the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code (the Code). Their trading partners may in this case request more detailed information as well as an audit of their Veterinary Services.

The OIE is the only world organisation to grant an official status on freedom from specified animal diseases, notably recognising disease status on BSE.

THE SIGNIFICANT WORLDWIDE REDUCTION IN THE INCIDENCE OF BSE PROVES EFFICACY OF OIE MEASURES

The number of BSE cases reported each year in the United Kingdom has dropped from nearly 40,000 in 1991 to only 11 in 2010. The cumulative number of cases reported from the rest of the world has gone from over 1,000 reported cases in 2001 to 34 cases in 2010. The further propagation of the infection in cattle has been prevented by the strict prohibition of

feeding meat and bone meal of ruminant origin to cattle. The very low number of recent BSE cases being reported and investigated seems to include the presence of sporadic forms of the disease, not related to classical BSE and resembling similar sporadic forms of encephalopathies found in other animal species, including humans (Creutzfeld-Jakob disease).

Today over 100 countries are not recognized as free from foot and mouth disease.

AND LASTLY...

- The criteria for evaluating the applications for official recognition are constantly evolving. They are revised to take into account the latest research on the diseases and their characteristics.
- Member Countries may maintain their official status recognised by the OIE of freedom from a given disease provided they respect the conditions which are set in the OIE Code and immediately notify any significant sanitary event which could change that status. If a Member Country fails to comply with these obligations it can be withdrawn from the official OIE list for that particular disease.
- The classification categories for BSE are: country or zone with «negligible BSE risk», «controlled BSE risk» and «undetermined BSE risk».

THE CODE:

<http://www.oie.int/en/international-standard-setting/terrestrial-code/access-online/>