

## CURRENT SITUATION OF BLUETONGUE IN EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN

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In the past, only sporadic incursions of bluetongue (BT) occurred, mainly in Southern Europe. The disease showed a tendency to disappear naturally, probably because the necessary climatic, environmental and entomological conditions to ensure virus spread and persistence did not occur. The situation has however changed dramatically in the last decade. Until three years ago, the disease mainly affected the Mediterranean Basin. Since fall 2006 new serotypes have emerged and the unprecedented spread of BTV-1 and BTV-8 caused outbreaks in many countries of the European Union (EU).

The EU Commission responded to the changing BT disease situation by developing continuous finely-tuned EU-legislation in close cooperation with EU Member States, and by allocating funding to implement vaccination programmes in the States. EU rules on BT are highly influenced by changes in the disease situation, experiences in the Member States, results of the ongoing data gathering, and research on BT disease and its vectors. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) is the risk assessor and produces scientific opinions and advice to provide a sound basis for European policies and legislation. Also, the EU Commission has ensured considerable financial support to the vaccination programmes that have been put in place in several Member States for the years 2007 and 2008.

Community rules on BT lay down general provisions for the control and eradication of BT, as well as detailed rules on disease control, monitoring, surveillance and restrictions on movements of susceptible animals. All BT outbreaks must be notified by

EU Member States to the Animal Disease Notification System (ADNS). In addition, information that has been gathered in the course of implementing BT monitoring and/or surveillance programmes must be transmitted to BT-Net system. Monthly, six-monthly and annual reports are required. Data and maps can be viewed on BT-Net: <http://eubtnet.izs.it/btnet/reports/EpidemiologicalSituation.html>

The Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFAH) plays a key role in the EU decision-making process. Representatives of EU Member States meet on a monthly basis with the European Commission. Updates on the epidemiological situation of BT (and other animal diseases) are presented by the Member States (presentations are available on SANCO webpage). The EU Commission consults SCoFAH on new proposals for an opinion after which the measure can be formally adopted in accordance with the appropriate procedure.

With the support of the Member States experts in the technical working groups and the representatives at SCoFAH, Regulation (EC) No 1266/2007 has been amended several times to respond better to the evolving disease situation. Together with appropriate surveillance and restrictions on animal movements, mass vaccination of all susceptible and reachable animals in the restricted zones with all available vaccines is currently the preferred option as regards effective BT control.

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