
Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

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**UPDATE ON ACTIVITIES RELATING TO DISEASE REGIONALISATION
39TH MEETING OF THE SPS COMMITTEE**

Communication from the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)

The following communication, received on 25 June 2007, is being circulated at the request of the OIE.

I. RELEVANT OIE DEFINITIONS

1. Zone/Region: a clearly defined part of a country containing an animal subpopulation with a distinct health status with respect to a specific disease (see Figure 1, Attachment 1).
2. Compartment: one or more establishments (premises in which animals are kept) under a common biosecurity management system containing an animal subpopulation with a distinct health status with respect to a specific disease (see Figure 2, Attachment 1).

II. DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT WITHIN THE TERRESTRIAL ANIMAL HEALTH CODE

3. The Terrestrial Animal Health Code (the Code) Chapter 1.3.5 on Zoning and Regionalisation was introduced with a Section on Import Risk Analysis in 1993 in response to Members' need for a clear understanding of the concepts of "zone" and "compartment".
4. The OIE has participated in several discussions within the SPS Committee on the need to clearly define the pathway for applying these concepts in international trade.
5. Extensive revisions to the Chapter were adopted in 2005 and in 2007. The Code (English text) may be found at http://www.oie.int/eng/normes/en_mcode.htm?e1d10. French and Spanish texts are also available on the OIE website www.oie.int.

III. OBJECTIVES OF REGIONALIZATION

6. Based on discussions within the OIE and the SPS Committee, regionalization and related concepts can be used to help resolve practical difficulties in national disease eradication:

"Given the difficulty of establishing and maintaining a disease free status for an entire country, especially for diseases the entry of which is difficult to control

through measures at national boundaries, there may be benefits to a Member Country in establishing and maintaining a subpopulation with a distinct animal health status within its territory."

7. The Code clarifies the purpose of using zoning and compartmentalisation, as "procedures implemented by a country to define subpopulations of distinct animal health status within its territory for the purpose of disease control and/or international trade".

8. A zone is defined primarily on a geographical basis (using natural, artificial or legal boundaries) and a compartment is defined primarily by management and husbandry practices relating to biosecurity. However, both concepts can incorporate a range of management and geographic features depending on the epidemiology of the disease concerned.

9. In all cases, the final authority for defining, maintaining and certifying the zone, region or compartment rests with the Veterinary Authority of the country concerned.

IV. RECOGNITION OF ZONES/COMPARTMENTS BY TRADING PARTNERS

10. In addition to explaining the potential applications and benefits of these concepts, Chapter 1.3.5 outlines a sequence of steps that can be taken to define a zone or compartment. It recognizes the need for negotiations between Veterinary Authorities in order to recognize the application of a zone or compartment with a view to international trade conditions. The OIE also emphasizes the need for accurate animal health information

V. APPLICATION TO PARTICULAR DISEASES

11. The Code contains recommendations for zones and compartments in regard to those diseases for which the concepts are appropriate. These include foot and mouth disease, avian influenza, Newcastle disease, and classical swine fever. The recommendations depend on:

- the epidemiology of the disease;
- environmental factors;
- biosecurity measures that are required and feasible to apply;
- the conduct of required disease surveillance.

VI. RECOGNITION OF DISEASE-FREE ZONES BY THE OIE

12. The OIE has procedures for official recognition of Member status for only four diseases, i.e. foot and mouth disease (FMD), rinderpest, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia (CBPP) and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE).¹ The work of evaluating country status, including free zones and zones that are free-with-vaccination (for FMD), is done under the auspices of the Scientific and Technical Commission of the OIE. The Commission's proposals are addressed to the OIE International Committee and decisions made via the adoption of Resolutions at the General Session. The Resolutions passed in 2007 in regard to Members' status for these diseases may be found in annexes to the OIE Activity Report to the 39th meeting of the SPS Committee (G/SPS/GEN/788).

¹ Details of the OIE's evaluation and approval procedure are available in G/SPS/GEN/542 and G/SPS/GEN/640/Rev.1/Add.1.

VII. ONGOING WORK OF THE OIE

13. The OIE distributed a 'Checklist on the Practical Application of Compartmentalisation for Avian Influenza and Newcastle Disease' at the General Session in May 2007. This publication will also be made available to the public on the OIE Internet site. This is not an OIE standard but is provided to help Members wishing to implement compartments for these two important poultry diseases.

14. In 2007, the OIE circulated a draft text on 'General guidelines for Compartmentalisation', which will be proposed for inclusion in the Code in May 2008. This text will provide more specific guidance in the form of an Appendix to Chapter 1.3.5 on zoning and compartmentalisation.

VIII. FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE –DEVELOPMENTS IN THE APPLICATION OF ZONING

15. In 2007, the OIE introduced some important new zoning-related concepts in regard to FMD. The "containment zone" was introduced into Code Chapter 2.2.10 (FMD) as a mechanism to provide for rapidly regaining free status in the case of an FMD incursion into a previously free country or zone, providing that specified technical criteria are satisfied. Also, the need for countries to work together in managing FMD was strongly endorsed via the undertaking of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay to establish a 15-km area contiguous to their relevant national borders that will be excluded from the OIE-recognized FMD free zones until such time as this status can be reconsidered.

16. These concepts will be considered for inclusion as appropriate in other disease chapters.

IX. IMPORTANCE OF ADEQUATE VETERINARY INFRASTRUCTURE

17. Both zoning and compartmentalisation depend on countries having appropriate veterinary infrastructure to develop, implement and certify the relevant zone or compartment. It goes without saying that if infrastructure is lacking, it may be very difficult to implement a zone/compartment and to obtain the agreement of trading partners to recognize it for the purposes of international trade.

X. EVALUATION OF CAPABILITY OF VETERINARY SERVICES (PVS TOOL)

18. The OIE is aware that the Veterinary Services in many Member Countries have shortfalls in regard to capability and infrastructure. With the objective of helping members to strengthen their Veterinary Services, the OIE has introduced a procedure for evaluating Veterinary Services, using a defined approach - the PVS Tool - and veterinary experts specially trained by the OIE.

19. As defined in the PVS Tool, the fundamental components of Veterinary Services are:

- human and financial resources as evidenced by the level of professional/technical and financial resources available;
- technical authority and capability to address current and new issues based on scientific principles;
- sustained interaction with stakeholders - to carry out relevant joint programmes and services; and
- the ability to access markets through compliance with existing standards and the implementation of new disciplines.

20. An evaluation of capability is based on a review of six to nine critical competencies within each fundamental component. On the basis of a field visit lasting one to two weeks, the OIE PVS Evaluation Team reports on the countries' capabilities, having regard to five levels of advancement defined according to performance indicators for each critical competency.

21. Under Fundamental Component IV, "the ability to access markets through compliance with existing standards and the implementation of new disciplines" the OIE has defined the following critical competencies:

- Preparation and implementation of legislation and regulations
- Stakeholder compliance with legislation and regulations
- International harmonization
- International certification
- Equivalence and other types of sanitary agreements
- Transparency
- Traceability
- Zoning
- Compartmentalization

22. In the PVS Tool, Zoning refers to the authority and capability of the Veterinary Services to establish and maintain disease free zones, as necessary and in accordance with the criteria established by the OIE (and by the SPS Agreement where applicable).

XI. PVS EVALUATION OF CAPABILITY TO APPLY ZONES

23. The PVS evaluation identifies the following levels of capabilities:

- Level 1: The Veterinary Services cannot establish disease free zones.
- Level 2: As necessary, the Veterinary Services can identify animal sub-populations with distinct health status suitable for zoning.
- Level 3: The Veterinary Services have implemented biosecurity measures that enable it to establish and maintain disease free zones for selected animals and animal products, as necessary.
- Level 4: The Veterinary Services collaborate with their stakeholders to define responsibilities and execute actions that enable it to establish and maintain disease free zones for selected animals and animal products, as necessary.
- Level 5: The Veterinary Services can demonstrate the scientific basis for any disease free zones and can gain recognition by trading partners that they meet the criteria established by the OIE (and by the SPS Agreement where applicable).

24. Similarly, compartmentalization is described in the PVS Tool as: the authority and capability of the Veterinary Services to establish and maintain disease free compartments as necessary and in accordance with the criteria established by the OIE (and by the SPS Agreement where applicable).

XII. OIE INFORMAL VOLUNTARY DISPUTE RESOLUTION

25. In the situation where an importing country does not recognize the zone/compartment established by an exporting country, the OIE can provide assistance through an informal voluntary dispute resolution mechanism.

26. At the request of both parties and under agreed terms of reference, the OIE may act as a "mediator" in animal health-related trade disputes, including on the recognition of zones or compartments. This is a technical procedure. The OIE nominates scientific experts to review the details of the case. The outcomes are not binding on the parties, unless agreed beforehand. The OIE informal process provides a useful alternative mechanism to formal WTO dispute resolution procedures.

27. To date, the OIE dispute resolution mechanism has been used on two important occasions. The possibility of using a compartmentalization approach was flagged in one of the resulting reports.

Attachment 1: Figures Illustrating the Concept of "Zone" and "Compartment" as used by the OIE

FIGURE 1

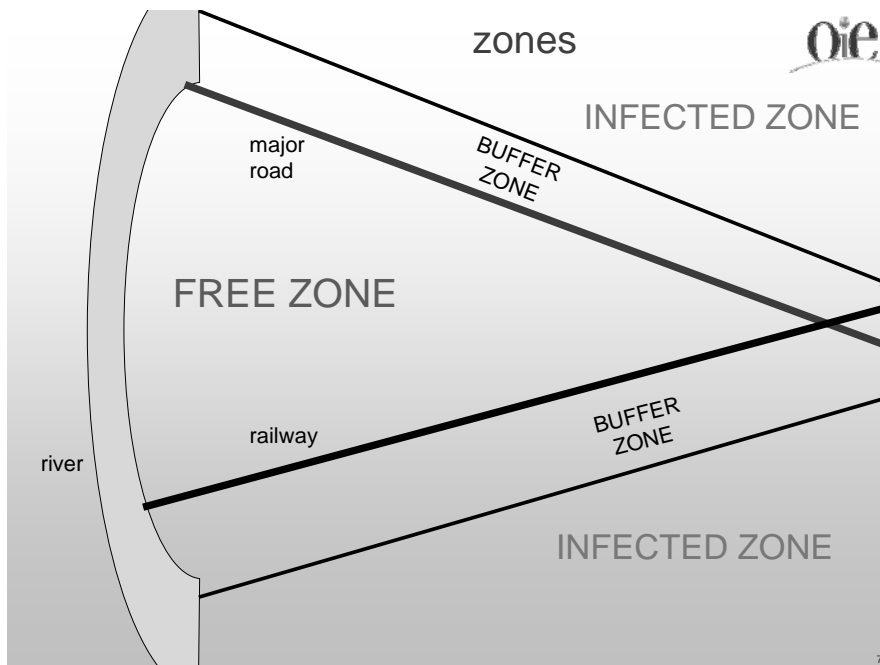


FIGURE 2

