

OFFICIAL OIE RECOGNITION OF MEMBER COUNTRIES' HEALTH STATUS

Communication from the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)

The following communication, dated 18 February 2005, is being circulated at the request of the OIE.

Background

1. The OIE has a mandate to examine upon request from a member country its claims for a particular status with regard to four of the OIE listed diseases: foot and mouth disease (FMD), rinderpest, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). With regard to BSE, member countries may apply to be recognized for only one of two categories of status (of the five in the current BSE chapter of the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code (the Terrestrial Code)) – free and provisionally free. The OIE does not routinely classify its Member Countries with respect to their animal health status for other listed diseases.

Evaluation and approval procedure

2. The procedure requires that the member country provide evidence that it complies with all the relevant provisions of the Terrestrial Code and Manual with respect to the disease for which free status is being sought, either for the whole country, or for a zone or compartment within the country.

3. A member country wishing to submit a dossier for evaluation is required to complete a standard questionnaire. Two examples of the questionnaire can be accessed on the OIE Web site (www.oie.int/eng/info/en_procedures.htm).

4. The dossier, which needs to be submitted by the OIE Delegate of the member country, should contain enough information (suitably documented) in support of the questionnaire to show that the member country complies with all the relevant provisions of the Terrestrial Code and Manual. On receipt of the dossier, the OIE undertakes a preliminary review to ensure that it is complete. In case of any deficiency, the member country is advised accordingly, and invited to resubmit its dossier.

5. The Scientific Commission then submits the complete dossier for detailed evaluation by an *ad hoc* group, comprising experts on the disease concerned, drawn usually from OIE Reference Laboratories. The *ad hoc* group assesses the dossier in accordance with the provisions of the Terrestrial Code and Manual. In assessing the dossier, the group may, if it feels necessary, interview a delegation from the applicant member country to obtain additional information or a clarification of the dossier or of the disease situation prevailing in that country. Whether a technical mission needs to be sent to the applicant member country for the purpose of validating certain details in its dossier is a

decision made by the Scientific Commission on a case-by-case basis, depending on the quality of the documentation provided and the questions raised by the *ad hoc* group.

6. As the *ad hoc* group functions under the auspices of the Scientific Commission, all recommendations of the *ad hoc* group need to be endorsed by that Commission before being discussed with Member Countries.

7. In accordance with Resolution No. XVI of 1999, recommendations endorsed by the Scientific Commission are circulated to all Member Countries, which are given 60 days to comment. Member Countries may ask for additional information or a clarification from the OIE or directly from the OIE delegate of the applicant member country. All comments from Member Countries are taken into account by the Scientific Commission in making its final recommendation. A recommendation which supports the claims of an applicant member country is debated by the International Committee (the general assembly of representatives of all OIE Member Countries, nominated by their governments) at the next annual General Session. A dossier which does not receive a positive recommendation is returned to the applicant.

8. The name of the member country is added to the list of countries, zones or compartments free from a particular disease only if the recommendation of the Scientific Commission is endorsed by the International Committee (on a one-country one-voice principle).

9. There is provision for a "fast track" procedure for free countries or zones which have experienced a disease outbreak, to allow them to regain free status without awaiting the next meeting of the International Committee. In 1997, the Scientific Commission was given the authority to restore the FMD-free status of a member country previously recognised as being FMD-free, in advance of a vote by the International Committee; this authority has now been extended to all four diseases. This is subject to the member country providing evidence that they are in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Terrestrial Code and Manual. The member country's name would then be included in the formal resolution at the next General Session.

Maintenance of status

10. Once a member country achieves free status with respect to a specific disease for the whole country, or for a zone or compartment within a country, that member country should, in accordance with Resolution No. XII of 1997, reconfirm by letter in November each year that status is unchanged. In the event of any confirmed outbreak of the disease, the OIE has the authority to remove with immediate effect the name of the country, or zone or compartment within the country from the list.

11. In addition to official information received from Member Countries, the OIE also depends on a "tracking system" based on disease information obtained from other sources. In these cases, the member country is asked by the Central Bureau to confirm or refute the information before taking appropriate actions.

Status recognition

12. As the procedure concludes with an official recognition by the OIE of the status of the member country for that disease (through a formal resolution), other OIE Member Countries have an obligation to take that recognition into account when developing import health measures for commodities from that member country.
