



WORLD ORGANISATION FOR ANIMAL HEALTH

Protecting animals, preserving our future

25th Conference of the
OIE Regional Commission for the Americas
by videoconference,
on 22 and 23 September 2020

FINAL REPORT

Introduction

The 25th Conference of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas was initially planned from 21 to 25 September 2020, in Cusco, Peru. However, due to the persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, the OIE Council, following an extraordinary meeting held in June 2020, decided to adapt the Conference into a virtual format. Thus, the 25th Conference of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas was held on 22 and 23 September, by videoconference (via Zoom) from 10: 00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. (Buenos Aires time).

A total of 226 participants, including Dr Mark Schipp, President of the OIE World Assembly of Delegates, OIE Delegates and/or representatives from 30 Members and senior officers from 16 regional and international organisations, attended the Conference. In addition, representatives of the private sector as well as private veterinary organisations from the region were present.

Members of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas: Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Curazao, Chile, Dominican (Rep.), Ecuador, El Salvador, France, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, Surinam, Trinidad y Tobago, United States of Americas, and Uruguay.

International/regional organisations: ALA¹, CaribVET², CARICOM³, CVP⁴, EC⁵, FAO⁶, FARM⁷, ICFAW⁸, IDB⁹, IICA¹⁰, OIPORC¹¹, OIRSA¹², PAHO/WHO PANAFTOSA¹³, PANVET¹⁴, PROCISUR¹⁵ and SG-CAN¹⁶

Also present on behalf of the OIE were: Dr Monique Eloit, OIE Director General; Dr Jean-Philippe Dop, Deputy Director General “Institutional Affairs and Regional Activities”; Dr Montserrat Arroyo, Head of the OIE Regional Activities Department; Dr Luis Barcos, OIE Regional Representative for the Americas; and Dr Catya Martinez, OIE Sub-Regional Representative for Central America. Participating in the Conference as facilitators were: Dr Budimir Plavšić, OIE Regional Representative in Moscow; Dr Roberto Balbo, OIE Sub-Regional Representative in Brussels; and Dr Karim Tounkara, OIE Regional Representative for Africa. Technical and administrative team members from both OIE Headquarters and the OIE regional offices in the Americas also took part in the event.

¹ ALA: Latin American Poultry Association

² CaribVET: Caribbean Animal Health Network

³ CARICOM: Caribbean Community

⁴ CVP: Permanent Veterinary Committee of the Southern Cone

⁵ EC: European Commission

⁶ FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

⁷ FARM: Federation of Rural Associations of MERCOSUR

⁸ ICFAW: International Coalition for Farm Animal Welfare

⁹ IDB: Inter-American Development Bank

¹⁰ IICA: Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture

¹¹ OIPORC: Ibero-American Pig Farmers' Organisation

¹² OIRSA: *Organismo Internacional Regional de Sanidad Agropecuaria*

¹³ PAHO/WHO: Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization – PANAFTOSA: Pan American Foot and Mouth Disease Center

¹⁴ PANVET: Pan American Association of Veterinary Sciences

¹⁵ PROCISUR: Cooperative Programme for Agrifood and Agroindustrial Technology Development in the Southern Cone

¹⁶ SG-CAN: General Secretariat of the Andean Community

Welcome addresses

Dr Mark Schipp, Delegate of Australia to the OIE and President of the OIE World Assembly of Delegates, and Dr Mark Trotman, Delegate of Barbados to the OIE and President of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas, welcomed the participants.

SESSION 1: IMPACTS AND LESSONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

OIE strategy and the COVID-19 pandemic – the wider picture

**Challenges for the development and implementation
of the 7th OIE Strategic Plan
in the post-pandemic world of COVID-19**

Dr Monique Eloit, OIE Director General, outlined the 7th Strategic Plan and informed participants about the adaptations that would be made to the Plan in order to meet the challenges of the “new world”. She also explained how the OIE saw the planning and implementation of its activities for the coming five years, emphasising the following aspects:

- The next OIE Strategic Plan will differ significantly from the previous ones because its development process was more inclusive, involving Members, partners and OIE staff. Also, the 7th Strategic Plan promotes an Organisation that is more committed to explicitly stated values and guiding principles but, above all, rather than just updating the 6th Strategic Plan, the 7th Plan aims to create fresh momentum to continue building an Organisation ready to meet current and future challenges.
- As the new plan is less technical than the previous ones, it is also accessible to ministers, decision-makers and a variety of partners, including resources partners. This is in line with the OIE’s active participation in political forums, such as the G7, the G20 and other high-level ministerial meetings.
- The Plan has five main objectives: (1) scientific expertise; (2) transformation towards a digital model, with a data management strategy; (3) respond to the needs of Members; (4) foster close collaboration with partners; and (5) ensure efficiency and agility thanks to the application of modern processes and tools.
- The challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted, once again, the need for more scientific expertise, in particular for assessing risks at the human/animal/environment interface, as well as the importance of strengthening existing agreements or establishing new agreements with key partners to be able to work actively and in coordination for the common good.
- The need to exchange more data/more sophisticated data with as many partners as possible, as well as the new ways of working (namely teleworking and virtual meetings), reinforce the relevance of the OIE’s commitment to a digital transformation of the Organisation.
- The 7th Strategic Plan, as proposed to the Membership, is still relevant. However, the prioritisation of these five strategic objectives – or, in other words, the speed of their respective implementation – will differ from what was envisaged one year ago. Undoubtedly, digital transformation is the most urgent objective, and success in implementing the other four objectives is highly dependent on the OIE’s ability to accelerate digital transformation.
- At the same time, other objectives should also be addressed, including: expanding and strengthening wildlife expertise; ensuring the relevance of OIE programmes for its Members based on the current context, for which the OIE Training Platform is a crucial tool; and adjusting the partnership strategy, including revitalising some of the existing partnership agreements, in particular with organisations involved in wildlife or environmental issues. The partnership with WHO must also be strengthened, which is key to future discussions on the global governance of any future health crises. Also, the OIE’s internal processes must be modernised, which is one of the components of the Organisation’s digital transformation.

- Finally, the challenge posed by the COVID-19 pandemic involves prioritising such areas as the management of animal health information systems, which will call for optimisation of the way in which the OIE manages its global and regional actions for the benefit of its Members.
- The implementation of all these activities in response to the new challenges will have a major impact, which Members must understand and accept, namely: OIE staff will not be able to dedicate the same amount of time to “business as usual”, as it will need to focus on all the changes that must be undertaken, and traditional activities are likely to be reduced in order to concentrate temporarily on new areas, such as wildlife, emergency preparedness and response, and data management. The priority for recruitments will be given to digital transformation, in particular thanks to the money saved from holding fewer meetings in 2020.

**Adaptation of the activities of the OIE Regional Commission
for the Americas during the COVID-19 pandemic,
lessons learned and future proposals
on the functioning of the OIE in crisis situations**

Dr Mark Trotman, President of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas and Delegate of Barbados to the OIE, described how the Regional Commission’s activities had been coordinated during the pandemic and its interaction with the Delegates in the Americas. He also presented proposals for future work based on the lessons learned. These included the follow-up of activities through virtual meetings and adaptation to electronic media, pursuing a more participatory and inclusive approach for Members and other stakeholders. He pointed out that the Americas Region, with the support of the Regional Representation, had been working virtually for 15 years and therefore already had extensive experience in this area.

Based on the presentations by the Director General and the President of the Regional Commission, seven working groups were organised to discuss in detail how the pandemic was impacting on the OIE’s work.

Following the group discussions and the comments expressed through online chat in these working groups, the Regional Commission took note of the following:

- Emphasis was placed on the great value of the OIE’s official communications and link-up with other organisations, and its appropriate use of electronic media.
- The OIE has succeeded in using virtual tools to strengthen the relationship and cooperation between Veterinary Services, including facilitating direct communication with experts in real time.
- The virtual meetings have allowed broader participation of the staff of Veterinary Services and OIE partners in the different meetings.
- In general, the Region has succeeded in prioritising activities to ensure ongoing animal health management and export certification during the crisis.
- Stress was placed on the importance of interdisciplinary work and close communication with the different actors, including the production sector.
- Stress was placed on the important role of science and the need to allocate resources to it, including resources for strengthening the structures of veterinary laboratories and quarantine facilities.
- The concept of biosecurity, which is widely known, promoted and applied in animal health, has become relevant for the public as a whole.
- While a few countries highlighted joint work between the public health and animal health sectors, many pointed to lack of cooperation or implementation of the “One Health” concept. The pandemic has demonstrated the need for many countries to incorporate not only veterinarians but also environmental, ecosystem and social science professionals into their animal health teams as an integral part of a whole.
- The pandemic has underlined the great usefulness of electronic certification, which is a major opportunity for the OIE to provide its Members with further guidelines on the matter.

- It is vital for the OIE to continue to promote the “One Health” concept and to support its Members in carrying out actions to facilitate joint work between the public health and animal health sectors.
- The Members asked the OIE to consider the possibility of issuing recommendations on contingency management by livestock personnel.
- It was also suggested that the OIE consider the possibility of increasing the use of new technologies, adapting OIE proceedings to a virtual format, and even consider conducting field missions remotely, where possible.

The pandemic and the Veterinary Services – country lessons

Country insights and lessons: How Veterinary Services are managing the COVID-19 crisis: surveillance, international certification for trade, and evolution of trade in animal products during the pandemic

The Delegates of Peru, Cuba, El Salvador, the United States of America and Uruguay presented a summary of their experiences and lessons learned on providing Veterinary Services during the pandemic, including reflections on best practices.

Following the presentations, the participants broke into seven working groups, which enabled the Regional Commission to highlight the following:

- The Veterinary Services have demonstrated good adaptability and resilience to the crisis, prioritising animal health and food safety actions and preserving biosecurity and the working conditions of their staff.
- With regard to certification systems, the countries highlighted their adaptation to electronic media to cope with the crisis. At the same time, they noted that national legislation would need to be adapted in this regard in the future. They mentioned that it would be important to involve the private sector in this. Lastly, they stressed the key role that the OIE could play in providing guidelines on the matter.
- Emphasis was placed on collaboration between Veterinary Services and public health agencies in the countries and, in some cases, the key role of veterinary laboratories. The view was expressed that further progress was needed on cross-sector collaboration to ensure a true “One Health” approach.
- The Veterinary Services have adapted their work to a blended system of working at home and working in the office, as well as adapting the use of field and border management measures in response to demand.
- The digitisation of activities, the capabilities of the different digital platforms, the use of technology tools and the implementation of veterinary information systems posed a challenge for several countries.
- When considering the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on activities and ways of working, it is not just the challenges of digitisation and electronic certification that should be taken into account; it is also very important to highlight the impact on interpersonal relationships, which could greatly affect future professional relationships.
- As trust between Veterinary Services around the world is based clearly on interpersonal relationships, reflection is needed on how to continue working as a team, not only in terms of replacing the General Session or the Regional and Global Conferences with virtual meetings but also how to continue developing and preserving professional networks, as well as how to maintain close contact between the Delegates. If the virtual world continues over the coming years and new Delegates begin to take over, rethinking of how to forge, maintain and strengthen ties with colleagues in a virtual world is required.
- Government support for Veterinary Services is key to ensuring the proper provision of services, especially in times of crisis.

OIE strategy to reduce risk and future disease spillover events (wildlife health management)

Mr François Diaz, Chargé de mission of the OIE Preparedness and Resilience Department, explained the importance of wildlife health management, the key issues and challenges for Veterinary Services in this field, as well as the emerging directions and priorities for the OIE.

The presentation served as a short discussion starter for the subsequent working group, in which the Regional Commission highlighted the following:

- The OIE's ongoing actions in this area are relevant, given that the interaction between domestic animals, wildlife and human beings, in a context of climate change and deforestation, is related directly to the emergence of diseases.
- From the Veterinary Services' standpoint, it is necessary to enhance wildlife disease surveillance and diagnostic capabilities and actions, given the fundamental role of wildlife as a reservoir and in disease transmission. One of the elements on which these capabilities and actions rely is high-quality disease notification by Members in order to provide useful information to systems for the prevention, detection and early warning of disease emergence events.
- Actions in the field of wildlife health management call for an interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach linking the wildlife sectors with those of the environment and animal health in general.
- Apart from the need to update national legislation or develop a regulatory framework to consider wildlife health management, cultural elements should also be taken into account, such as subsistence hunting preferences or habits posing a risk to public health. Training and education in risk communication will therefore be required.
- Wildlife is a potential vector for the introduction of diseases. The OIE should consider the issue of ornamental aquatic species, in order to coordinate non-invasive actions and technical procedures when taking samples for diagnostic laboratory analysis.
- As lack of knowledge about circulating pathogens in wildlife is a major challenge, it would be useful and extremely worthwhile to consider a centralised international information bank.
- In some cases, wildlife is outside the surveillance and management of traditional Veterinary Services, making monitoring and control difficult, not to mention the aggravating factor of illegal trade, which poses a great risk. It would be useful for the OIE to consider bringing together all stakeholders, including high-level authorities, to discuss the importance of good wildlife management to ensure human and animal health.
- The current COVID-19 crisis, which has not really been a crisis of direct concern to the Veterinary Services, except in a few countries and, occasionally, when veterinary laboratories have been required to provide some kind of support, should spur us to reflect on the future and on the potential risk that the next crisis will be a zoonosis and that the Veterinary Services will indeed be impacted, not only by changes in working conditions but also by the need to manage the situation optimally. So, now is the time to start working towards changing the perception of Veterinary Services, time to affirm that the Veterinary Services are responsible for safeguarding not only the health of commercial livestock but also that of other animal populations. In order to strengthen a cross-sector, multidisciplinary approach to wildlife health management, it is vital to change the perception of decision-makers and society about the work of Veterinary Services.

**The potential for a longstanding and sustainable partnership
under "One Health" and its impact on Member Countries.
FAO, WHO and OIE actions
in the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic**

Ms Tianna Brand, Advisor - Foresight OIE, gave a short introduction and illustration of how the tripartite FAO-WHO-OIE agreement could engage Veterinary Services at regional and at country levels.

Following the discussions in the different working groups and based on the comments expressed in the chat, the Regional Commission concluded that:

- Zoonotic diseases must be addressed with a "One Health" vision, which entails strengthening the regulatory framework and ensuring better inter-agency coordination between Member Countries' human and animal health authorities.
- It is essential for Members to translate the Tripartite Agreement more effectively into national action plans (at both local and country levels). For example, the working model of the Tripartite Agreement should serve as a model for countries to follow in developing formal agreements and setting priorities among the competent authorities at country level, which should result in public policies and concrete actions that make more efficient use of national resources and capabilities and take a holistic, ecosystems approach.
- Working jointly with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) at regional level is key to supporting the implementation of the "One Health" concept, as well as to sharing epidemiological information among those responsible for public health and animal health.
- The OIE's support in facilitating exchanges with other relevant international organisations is of great value to Members.
- Greater political commitment is needed, which calls for concrete support actions by the signatory organisations of the Tripartite Agreement. These actions should encourage national authorities to work together, recognising the advantages of this approach.
- Efficient communication actions are key to promoting a lasting and sustainable partnership under the "One Health" concept, in order to convey the message to all stakeholders, including national agencies, other regional organisations and the private sector.
- The most important thing when it comes to reinforcing the "One Health" approach at national and regional levels is to bear in mind that each and every one of the actors is responsible for taking action at their own level (local, national, regional). For some time now, the OIE has positioned itself in the global arena and, as a result, it now takes part in the major discussion forums that it had never attended in the past. This shows that it is necessary to make a decision and take action, rather than wait for others to react or take the initiative. It is important to engage proactively with key actors and communicate our point of view. For work at the national level, Members have the material that has been developed at the global level, the Tripartite Concept Note and the Memorandum of Understanding. All Members are urged to visit their country-based WHO and FAO colleagues and to use all the material and statements that have been produced to promote the "One Health" approach.

SESSION 2: TECHNICAL TOPICS

**Global Framework for the Progressive Control of
Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs) /
Presentation of Regional Projects:
Classical Swine Fever and Avian Influenza**

Dr Jaspinder Komal, Delegate of Canada and Chair of the GF-TADs Regional Steering Committee for the Americas, presented a summary of the activities of this inter-agency collaboration framework, focusing on specific actions in the Americas for preventing the entry and spread of African swine fever (ASF), through the GF-TADs Standing Group of Experts on ASF.

Next, Mr Efraín Medina Guerra, OIRSA Executive Director, presented the proposal for the GF-TADs Standing Group of Experts on Classical Swine Fever (CSF), detailing the planning of necessary actions to improve the CSF situation, within the framework of a Continental Plan for the Eradication of CSF.

Lastly, Dr Jaime Romero Prada, Specialist in Agricultural Health and Food Safety at IICA, presented the proposal for the GF-TADs Standing Group of Experts on Avian Influenza. He also referred to the most relevant points of the Global Burden of Animal Diseases (GBADs) project, which promotes the implementation of economics tools in animal health. The aim of the GBADs initiative is to demonstrate the economic benefits of animal health objectively, as a way to improve the performance of Veterinary Services and analyse the impact of diseases, which translates into benefits for society.

Following the discussions in the different working groups and based on the comments expressed in the chat, the Regional Commission concluded that:

- Necessary actions in the Americas Region include the definition of priority transboundary diseases, in line with the recommendations of GF-TADs. This requires coordination actions, avoiding duplication of activities between the different organisations and promoting joint actions.
- Apart from the obvious benefits of coordination within the GF-TADs framework, there is a clear need for strategic plans by the Members, with defined and concrete actions and proper follow-up.
- Communication and dissemination of GF-TADs activities to Members and partners also need to be increased, as they are not known in many cases.
- In addition, it is necessary to continue with the international and inter-agency coordination of financial resources, to make more efficient use of resources and avoid duplication of actions.

**Antimicrobial Resistance
and its Impact on Trade**

Dr María Mesplet, Project Officer from the OIE Regional Representation for the Americas, presented the antimicrobial resistance (AMR) activities conducted in the Americas, highlighting inter-agency collaboration, which includes the Tripartite and other regional organisations. She presented the most relevant points of the European Union-funded project “Working together to fight Antimicrobial Resistance”, in which seven Members in the Region are participating, and detailed the forthcoming activities under this project.

Next, Dr Koen Van-Dyck, Head of Unit for Bilateral International Relations at the European Union, gave an overview of the three pillars of the 2017 European One Health Action Plan against Antimicrobial Resistance and the objectives of the project “Working together to fight Antimicrobial Resistance”. He went on to describe the European Union’s Farm to Fork Strategy and its scope with respect to veterinary medicines and AMR, referring to the equivalence of requirements for European Union Member States and their supplying countries, especially as regards to restrictions and prohibitions on the use of antimicrobials.

Following the discussions in the different working groups and based on the comments expressed in the chat, the Regional Commission concluded the following:

- It is imperative for the “One Health” approach and the Tripartite’s global actions to result in country-level actions. This requires Members to develop their national action plans with a proper legal basis, involving all competent authorities and stakeholders in a context of coordination and collaboration.
- The national action plans are expected to focus on surveillance and monitoring of antimicrobial resistance and use patterns. This calls for increased laboratory capacity, as well as enhanced awareness and education on the responsible and prudent use of antimicrobial agents.
- This comprehensive approach requires the participation of the animal production sector, making it necessary to establish public-private partnership strategies aimed at sustainable production.
- Nor should the role of research in the search for alternative therapeutic tools be forgotten, as well as the application of biosecurity measures and good livestock practices.
- Some of the priorities identified include the implementation of AMR surveillance and monitoring systems, measures to ensure the responsible and prudent use of antimicrobial agents, and education and awareness campaigns for all sectors involved.
- It is important and necessary to address the issue of antimicrobial use for non-medical purposes (use of antimicrobials as growth promoters), including antimicrobial use patterns, both at the policy level and with the partners involved, as well as trading partners, as it is quite a sensitive issue that impacts directly on AMR control.

OIE Strategy for Aquatic Animal Health

Dr Alicia Gallardo Lagno, Vice-President of the OIE Aquatic Animal Health Standards Commission, presented the OIE Strategy for Aquatic Animal Health, describing the stages in its development and focusing on its most relevant points.

She discussed the global increase in production and trade in aquatic animals and their contribution to food security, to which diseases are the greatest threat. She also stressed the need for competent authorities in the Region to be empowered to meet these demands.

She explained that the OIE Strategy would improve aquatic animal health and welfare worldwide, contributing to sustainable economic growth, poverty alleviation and food security, thereby supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

She described the objectives, which include updating and applying OIE standards to safeguard animal health and ensure safe trade, building the capacity of Members and improving resilience to disease emergence. While OIE leadership is essential, it requires the support of Members and scientific networks, together with the private sector.

Following an exchange of views in plenary, the Regional Commission concluded that:

- There are great risks for aquaculture and its sustainability because of environmental pollution and its relationship with disease emergence, about which there is, unfortunately, insufficient information. In many cases, the lack of biosecurity measures and systems of surveillance and transparent notification of cases exacerbates such risks, in addition to the lack of properly trained professionals.
- The most relevant points in the Strategy relate to creating and building disease surveillance, diagnosis and control capacity, as well as raising awareness of the importance and usefulness of OIE standards, followed by the recognition of OIE leadership in this area and the importance of active work by the Delegates and National Focal Points for Aquatic Animals.
- Finally, production system resilience was considered to be a way to guarantee food security.

Progress in the implementation of the new OIE-WAHIS system and summary of the disease situation in the Region

Dr Paula Cáceres Soto, Head of the World Animal Health Information and Analysis Department, presented a summary of the status of animal disease notifications by Members in the Americas, including the most relevant epidemiological events during the 2019-2020 period relating to infection with SARS-COV2, foot and mouth disease, classical swine fever and highly pathogenic and low pathogenic avian influenza.

She explained that animal cases of infection with SARS-COV-2 were still rare, as humans were the main host of the current pandemic, reiterating the need to provide the OIE with timely and accurate information.

She added that the submission rates for the six-monthly reports had decreased in the Americas Region in 2019. The drop in the submission of the second six-monthly reports can be partially attributed to the launch of the new OIE-WAHIS system.

With respect to foot and mouth disease, she said that the epidemiological situation in the Region confirmed the great efforts made by Members to control the disease and report appropriately to the OIE.

She also noted that, as initiatives and campaigns had been launched in the Region to prevent the entry of ASF, these measures could have a positive impact on the eradication of CSF.

She added that no outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza had been reported in the Region's wild bird population during the 2019-2020 period, raising some concern about the level of surveillance in wildlife.

Lastly, she said that the upcoming OIE-WAHIS system would feature several tools to better display the information provided and to enhance the use of this information for risk analysis. She stressed that this would only be possible if quality data were entered into the system.

Next, Dr Peter Melens, Deputy Head of the World Animal Health Information and Analysis Department, led a virtual tour of the new OIE-WAHIS platform interface, which now includes panels containing quantitative data on disease cases, timelines, control measures applied, and maps. He stressed the usefulness of the new functions, especially data export and higher-quality maps, which are useful for risk-based decision-making.

Dr Melens reported that OIE-WAHIS version 1 was expected to be released by the end of 2020. The project, which started in 2016, seeks to revitalise Members' reporting capacity and to facilitate access to and analysis of the data by all users. He described the platform's strategic objectives and provided an update on its progress, as well as on management activities during the transition to the new platform and after its launch.

He said that the OIE was committed to giving open access to OIE-WAHIS data, once they had been validated. He also confirmed that the OIE's role as steward of this type of data was to give open access to a strategic resource as a global public good, to enable the international regulatory and scientific community to consult and extract the data, combine it with data from a variety of other sources and analyse the data to help clarify and predict impacts on and prospects for animal and public health.

The OIE is also committed to interoperability and connectivity with national and regional systems to simplify data exchange, avoiding inefficiencies stemming from duplicate data entry and transcription errors.

The success of OIE-WAHIS will be one of the foundations for the development of the OIE Digital Transformation strategy.

Following an exchange of views in plenary, the Regional Commission concluded that:

- It is important to collect and share all relevant information available on animal cases of infection with SARS-COV2 to improve our understanding of the epidemiology of the disease and its public health consequences.
- Given the progress in controlling foot and mouth disease in the Region, Members should continue their efforts to achieve complete eradication of the disease.
- Members are encouraged to step up efforts to eradicate CSF from the continent, as the simultaneous presence of both CSF and ASF could make the early detection, control and eradication of each disease extremely difficult.
- Members are encouraged to continue reporting information on the circulation of avian influenza viruses in the Region, maintaining a high level of spatial and quantitative detail.
- Unlike in the case of terrestrial animal diseases, there are difficulties in collecting information and updating the situation of aquatic animal diseases in the Region.
- As regards to existing constraints on increasing aquatic animal disease notification, it is necessary to build the capacity of field and laboratory personnel, as well as to provide adequate facilities and equipment. These points were seen as the basis for timely and accurate disease reporting.
- Greater interaction with other national agencies and the private sector is needed to increase wildlife disease reporting. It is also necessary to build surveillance and laboratory diagnostic capacity. Increased diagnostic capacity will result in better reporting.
- Members with outstanding six-monthly reports are strongly encouraged to submit them as soon as the new OIE-WAHIS platform is available, for the benefit of the international community and their own transparency.
- The OIE-WAHIS platform will provide users with more and better transparency, speedy notification, quality reports and, hence, better quantitative data.
- The main benefit of the new OIE-WAHIS system lies in making information available for risk analysis and monitoring the animal disease status of trading partners. It was noted that this benefit depended on transparency in timely disease notification by Members.
- Collaborative efforts by Members to provide high-quality, transparent, timely data will ensure the OIE's role as a data steward in the era of "Big Data". All this information will be extremely useful in developing appropriate animal health and veterinary public health policies for the public good.

Required competencies of Veterinary Services in the context of international trade: opportunities and challenges

Dr Francisco D'Alessio, Deputy Head of the Standards Department, gave a summary of the work done for OIE 2020 Technical Item entitled "Required competencies of Veterinary Services in the context of international trade: opportunities and challenges"¹⁷.

He briefly described the content of the Technical Item, which includes issues relating to the World Trade Organization agreements and OIE standards, the role of Veterinary Services, the applicable tools for building trade capacity and the Standards Observatory and online training tools developed by the OIE.

He ended by inviting the participants to review the document in detail, which is available online,¹⁷ as well as to take part in the online discussion forum dedicated to the 2020 Technical Item, which features on the same web page.

¹⁷ <https://www.oie.int/technicalitem2020>

SESSION 3: REGIONAL COMMISSION INTERNAL DISCUSSIONS

Dr Hugo Idoyaga, Vice-President of the OIE Council and Delegate of Paraguay to the OIE, presented several internal matters of relevance to the Regional Commission:

- He began by referring to the elections to the various OIE governing bodies, to be held during the 88th General Session of the World Assembly of Delegates in May 2021. He noted that elections would be held for the members of the Specialist Commissions, the members of the OIE Council and the members of the Bureau of the Regional Commission, as well as for the position of Director General. He added that, as the 2020 General Session had been cancelled, Dr Eloit's term of office as Director General had been extended for few months, until May 2021.
- Next, Dr Idoyaga asked the Delegates present if any country wished to host the 26th Conference of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas.

The Delegate of Peru reiterated her country's interest in hosting the 26th Conference of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas in 2022.

Peru's proposal was endorsed unanimously.

- Lastly, he referred to the Technical Item (with questionnaire) entitled "Public-Private Partnerships", which had been selected at the 87th General Session in 2019 for submission to the 25th Conference. He noted that, owing to the virtual format adopted for the 25th Conference, it had been decided not to include Technical Items (due to the shortened agenda).

Dr Idoyaga consulted the Regional Commission on the Technical Item (with questionnaire) for the next Conference, and the Commission unanimously agreed to keep "Public-Private Partnerships" as the Technical Item (with questionnaire) for submission to the 26th Conference of the OIE Regional Commission for the Americas in 2022.

Closing remarks

Dr Mark Trotman thanked the participants for their attention, as well as the OIE staff for having organised an innovative event, highlighting the opportunity provided by the virtual format for more members of the delegations to participate in the event. Despite the fact that no recommendations had been adopted, he felt that the information shared had pointed the way to concrete progress in actions by the Regional Commission and the OIE in general.

Dr Monique Eloit thanked the participants for two days of interactive and productive discussion. She declared the Conference a success, especially as it was the first institutional meeting to have been held in virtual format. She confirmed that the stated objectives had been met, namely to: maintain the institutional nature of the event; ensure the active participation of Members; and draw concrete conclusions and key messages for Members and their authorities, as well as for the OIE. She also highlighted the fact that, while the virtual format had not allowed face-to-face exchanges and long discussions, it did have an extremely positive side, which was to allow many people to take part, including Members, who would have found it more difficult to travel to a face-to-face meeting. She went on to thank the OIE staff for organising the event and extended special thanks to the Government of Peru for putting itself forward to host the next Regional Conference. She added that the current Conference would provide extremely useful experience for future events, especially the General Session, which would undoubtedly pose a major challenge for the OIE, especially considering the need to develop innovative strategies and tools to adapt the Organisation's biggest event to a virtual format that would facilitate the review and adoption of standards and resolutions, as well as elections to its various governing bodies.

The Conference was closed at 1:00 p.m. (Buenos Aires time).