



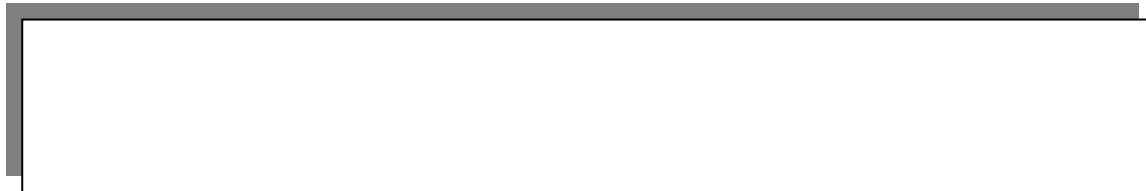
REFERENCE NUMBER: DG(SANCO)/9186/2003 – RS EN

REPORT EXTRACT IN RESPECT OF A FOOD AND VETERINARY OFFICE

MISSION TO ITALY

FROM 17 TO 26 NOVEMBER 2003

TO EVALUATE THE SURVEILLANCE PLAN FOR BLUETONGUE IN SHEEP



1. REPORT SUMMARY

Following the bluetongue outbreak in Italy in summer 2000, in 2001 the Health Ministry asked the regions affected to vaccinate all ruminants. This was not done, with the result that the opportunity to curb the spread of the disease in 2001 was lost.

Since then, the competent Italian authorities have decided to put in place a bluetongue eradication and surveillance plan. The Ministry of Health is responsible for organising the plan at national level, while the technical aspects and coordination are the responsibility of the National Reference Centre for Exotic Diseases (CESME). The Regions remain in charge of overseeing the uniform application of the plan within their own territory. The 2002 eradication and surveillance plan submitted to the Commission in 2001 has been updated for 2003 and provides for a compulsory vaccination and serological and entomological surveillance system for all susceptible animals, and restrictions on the movement of these animals in the regions concerned.

So far there have been two vaccination campaigns (2002 and 2003), in the Southern and Central regions of Italy. In the regions visited by the inspection team (Sardinia, Tuscany and Basilicata), wide variations were observed in the implementation of the

2003 campaign. In particular, there was significant delays in Basilicata and, according to the CESME data, in other regions as well. Furthermore, the required vaccination rate ($\geq 80\%$) was not reached in all the regions concerned. There were also problems with the identification system for vaccinated sheep and goats which meant that, in some of the regions visited, it was not possible to check whether the data obtained were reliable.

Furthermore, although the presence of new serotypes (4 and 16) was confirmed in October 2002, they were not used for the 2003 vaccination campaign.

The third campaign was due to commence on 1 December 2003 but, with one week to go, the regions visited had still not received any information on the availability of the vaccine.

The serological and entomological surveillance system has been put in place in the regions visited and is operating satisfactorily.

The (national and local) laboratories responsible for monitoring bluetongue in sheep are well-staffed with motivated and experienced personnel and have the appropriate equipment for the tasks involved.

During the last epidemic in Sardinia, there appeared to be no compensation system for dead animals, and in Tuscany there were significant delays in the payment of compensation for animals killed in 2002.

To conclude, better organisation of vaccination campaigns could have restricted the spread of the disease in Italy in 2002-2003.

However, the results of sero-surveillance (except in Sardinia since the start of the epidemic caused by serotype 4 in August 2003) show that circulation of the virus is low in the regions affected.

The national BT eradication and surveillance plan has not met all its targets because it was not uniformly applied by the Regions and because the Ministry's powers to impose such application are limited.

8. FINAL MEETING

A final meeting was held in Rome on 26 November 2003 with representatives of the Ministry of Health and the CESME, at which the inspection team presented the mission's observations and preliminary conclusions.

At the meeting, the CCA clarified certain points and provided additional documents and information. It also commented on some of the preliminary conclusions presented.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1. To the Italian competent authorities

- 9.1.1. Undertake an immediate vaccination campaign in the regions concerned, using the appropriate serotypes, in order to prevent any potential spread of BT.
- 9.1.2. Improve the CCA's coordination of application of the surveillance plan, taking account of the shortcomings noted during the mission.
- 9.1.3. Correct the deficiencies in transposing and applying the requirements for identification and registration of bovines and sheep/goats, in accordance with Community legislation.
- 9.1.4. Consider setting up an adequate sheep and goat identification system for implementation of the surveillance plan.
- 9.1.5. Continue with implementation of the BT Contingency Plan.

The Italian authorities are asked to submit an action plan, including a timetable of measures in response to the report's conclusions and recommendations, to the Commission within two months of receipt of the final report.

9.2. To the Commission

- 9.2.1. Consider taking long-term measures to restrict the risk of BT spreading in the Mediterranean region.
- 9.2.2. Monitor action by the competent Italian authorities closely and take action as appropriate.

10. ADDENDUM

In their reply of 6 February 2004, ref. DGVA.VIII-2603-P I.8.d/18 to the draft report, the competent Italian authorities commented on certain factual errors.