

Improving coordination to control African swine fever in the Baltic and Eastern Europe region

A new initiative called **Standing Group of Experts on African Swine Fever (ASF) in the Baltic and Eastern Europe region** (hereafter referred to as 'SGE') was set up under the GF-TADs umbrella to build up closer cooperation between countries infected with African swine fever (Belarus, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Russia, Ukraine) and thereby address the disease in a more collaborative and harmonised manner across the sub-region. The European Commission, the OIE and the FAO complete the SGE member list. The initiative's *modus operandi* was agreed during the launch meeting (Bern, September 2014) and the countries committed to demonstrate greater transparency, by fully respecting their notification obligations to the OIE as well as by sharing data and information on surveillance, prevention and control measures. The European Commission is the main contributor to the initiative; however, the OIE and the countries hosting the SGE meetings also support it financially to some extent.

The ASF situation in wild boar and related prevention and control measures were discussed in depth during the first meeting of the SGE, held in Minsk, Belarus, in December 2014. The recommendations of the OIE–CIC Joint International Meeting on African Swine Fever and other animal health issues at the wildlife–livestock–human interface (30 June – 1 July 2014)¹ served to frame the discussions, emphasising the indispensable collaboration of veterinarians, hunters and wildlife and game management organisation representatives.

See *Bulletin*, no. 2014-4, pp. 104–105



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Two well-known international experts on ASF in wild boar, Drs S. Khomenko (Ukraine) and V. Guberti (Italy), made detailed presentations on wild boar situation, ecology and population management options. The information they provided was most valuable to ensure that the discussions remained science-based. Countries were also invited to present their situation, fostering a straightforward and fruitful regional dialogue. A key recommendation of the meeting was that ASF control in wild boar needs to be based on a clear understanding of the wild boar population estimates, demography and dynamics based on census data. In the absence of such data, 'blind management' of ASF in wild boar is the only

option. Depopulation of importance – especially when the wild boar threshold density at which ASF fades out is not known or cannot be achieved – has been proved to increase the probability of ASF spreading and is strongly discouraged.

Biosecurity measures in different pig production systems is the topic of the second SGE meeting to be held in Tallinn, Estonia, in February 2015. Specific focus will be placed on smallholder (so called 'backyard') production systems, as these are where ASF mainly prevails, due to the absence of biosecurity and to swill feeding practices with possible ASF-contaminated food.

More information on the SGE initiative:

http://web.oie.int/RR-Europe/eng/Regprog/en_GF_TADS - Standing Group ASF.htm

The OIE has developed an e-depository on ASF available at:

http://web.oie.int/RR-Europe/eng/Regprog/en_ASF_depository.htm