

Maisons-Alfort, 22 November 2006

OPINION

of the French Food Safety Agency on four draft memoranda covering certain derogatory conditions for the prohibition of movements within the context of bluetongue

Terms of the mandate

The Agence française de sécurité sanitaire des aliments (Afssa) [French Food Safety Agency] was requested by post on 08 November 2006 for an opinion on four draft memoranda covering certain derogatory conditions for the prohibition of movements within the context of bluetongue. The joint emergency expert group on “Bluetongue” was charged with conducting an expert review on these issues.

Opinion of the joint emergency expert group on “Bluetongue”

The joint emergency expert group on “Bluetongue”, appointed in a decision dated 09 September 2006, was informed of this request on the evening of 14 November 2006, met on 20 November 2006 and has issued the following opinion:

“Context

The DGAI (Directorate General for Food) consulted Afssa on four draft memoranda aiming to lay down certain derogatory conditions for the prohibition of movements applicable to ruminants, in the period prior to the end of bluetongue vector activity, taking account of the fact that, as soon as vector activity ends in north-eastern France, as has occurred in neighbouring States, standstill zones, protection and surveillance zones will be grouped together into a single restricted zone, within which ruminant movements will be free.

- *In France and inside the Community restricted zone F where serotype 8 of the bluetongue virus has developed, two periods for the coming weeks can be distinguished: firstly, the period running until the end of vector activity and, secondly, the period then running from the beginning to the end of their inactivity period. These periods have been defined, along with the corresponding zones, in the opinion of 15 November 2006¹. They correspond to the interval, on the one hand, between the beginning of December 2006 to the end of March 2007 for the northern zone of mainland France and, on the other, between the beginning of January and mid-March 2007 for the southern zone and Atlantic front.*
- *European regulations have defined a restricted zone F, encompassing the restricted zones (protection and surveillance zones) in the four Member States (Germany, Belgium, France, Netherlands) where the bluetongue serotype 8 virus has been identified, as well as in Luxembourg. The distinction between protection and surveillance zone (in accordance with Directive 2000/75/EC) is only evident for France in Decision 2005/393/EC.*

The amendment to Decision 2005/393/EC of 15 September 2006 stipulates that, inside restricted zone F (except for the standstill zones – cf. following paragraph) including for movements between Member States (as provided for in Decision 2006/693/EC of 13/10/2006 amending Decision 2005/393/EC), movements of live ruminants and their sperm, ova and embryos are authorised, but that “in Member States which have established a surveillance zone (France, cf. above), movements in

¹ Opinion 2006-SA- 0306 of the French Food Safety Agency on vector inactivity within the context of bluetongue

this zone may only take place after obtaining authorisation from the competent authority in the place of destination”.

- *Furthermore, with regard to animals (domestic ruminants) located in the 20 km standstill zones around outbreaks (included in the protection zone), irrespective of the restricted zone (A, B, C, D, E or F), their movements are free when they are being transported directly to a slaughterhouse located in the corresponding restricted zone or a holding located in this same restricted zone, when it meets certain conditions: This must be situated (i) in a standstill zone or (ii) outside a standstill zone, and have received:

 - *either approval from the competent veterinary authorities in the places of origin and destination and under the animal health conditions that they lay down concerning measures to control the spread of bluetongue and protection against any vector attacks,*
 - *or a negative result to a bluetongue identification test on a sample obtained 48 hours prior to an animal's departure which must, in addition, be protected from vector attacks at least over the whole of the period since the sampling and not leave the holding of destination, except to be slaughtered after direct transport.**

This last protocol, introduced into the amendment to Decision 2005/393/EC dated 13 October 2006, concerns both internal movements and intra-community trade inside zone F. It is the basis for the first draft memorandum.

- *Each of the four draft memoranda states that, at the end of vector activity, the different zones at present (standstill zone, protection zone, surveillance zone), will be grouped together into a single restricted zone within which movements of ruminants will be free.*

Questions

The joint emergency expert group on “Bluetongue” is charged with examining four draft memoranda on:

1. *The removal of ruminants from a standstill zone for fattening in the protection zone (internal movements and intra-community trade);*
2. *Movements of eight-day-old calves from the protection zone to fattening plants located in the surveillance zone (internal movements);*
3. *Movements of grass-fed calves from the protection zone to holdings located in the surveillance zone (internal movements);*
4. *Movements of ruminants from the protection zone to holdings located in the protection zone (internal movements).*

Method

The supporting committee of the joint emergency expert group on "Bluetongue" produced a draft opinion which was discussed and validated on 20 November 2006.

The review was conducted based on the following documents:

- *Commission Decision 2005/393/EC and its subsequent amendments (particularly the amendment of 13 October 2006),*
- *the available data on the epidemiological situation in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany (EFSA BTV working group, data updated on 20 November 2006, DEFRA on 17 November 2006, European Commission ADNS notification system on 17 November 2006), the available data on the epidemiological situation in France on 20 November 2006.*

Examination of the issues

1. Derogatory conditions applicable to the removal of ruminants from the standstill zone for fattening in the protection zone

- This draft memorandum lays down the implementing conditions of Decision 2006/693/EC of 13/10/2006 (cf. above) amending Decision 2005/393/EC which allows, after obtaining a negative result to a virological test, movements of ruminants from the 20 km standstill zone to holdings located in restricted zone (F) beyond the 20 km boundary defined around an infected holding, for fattening purposes.
- This derogation, given the current organisation of French zones, is only applicable for the movement of all types of ruminant to undergo fattening, from a standstill zone (French or Community) to a protection zone in zone F. French holdings located in a surveillance zone may not be authorised to receive these animals. These movements concern both internal movements and intra-community trade (animals from standstill zones to restricted zones of Member States), they are not subject to authorisation from the States of destination, since ruminants are subject to an **individual protocol** of virological screening.
- The virological screening protocol shall be applied to animals “placed in a disinfected building” and that have been disinfected themselves at least 48 hours prior to the movement and blood sampling that must be taken beforehand. Movement will only be possible if the result of the virological test is negative.
- If the virological screening protocol has been well applied, in accordance with article A.1.c. of Annex II of Decision 2005/393/EC (**protection against culicoides attacks for at least 14 days**), the risk of virus circulation, through viremic animals, may be estimated as nil to negligible. It would therefore be preferable, **in a period of vector activity and existence of outbreaks, to foresee a period of protection with regard to insects (at least 14 days) before the blood sampling, so as to prevent “false negatives” infected for too short a time for the PCR to show positive.**

2. Derogatory conditions applicable to movements of ruminants (including eight-day-old calves and grass-fed calves) from the protection zone to holdings located in the surveillance zone

The memoranda covering:

- a) Movements of grass-fed calves from the French protection zone to fattening plants located in the French surveillance zone without individual testing (serological or virological),
- b) Movements of all types of ruminant from the protection zone to holdings located in the surveillance zone with disinfection for at least 28 days and individual testing (serology),
- c) Movements of eight-day-old calves from the protection zone to fattening plants located in the surveillance zone, subject to an insecticide treatment, continued until the 60th day following the establishment and which may be interrupted “as soon as the end of vector activity is observed”,

do not require any particular comments, in view of the quality of the animals and their economic destination (a and c) or the individual control measures to which they are subject (b).

Conclusion and recommendations

- The announced free circulation of ruminants from Belgian, Dutch and German standstill zones to the French protection zone entails, in a period of vector activity and existence of outbreaks, a risk of the virus being introduced into France, particularly due to the absence of a period of protection from insects (at least 14 days), clearly defined in

article 2 b, B, ii of Decision 2005/393/EC (amendment of 13/10/2006) but not mentioned in the memorandum. The joint emergency expert group on “Bluetongue” therefore recommends that these animals be subject to a period of protection from insects (at least 14 days) before blood tests, so as to prevent “false negatives” infected for too short a time for the test to show positive.

- Furthermore, the notification of a merging of restricted zones in France leads to the possible transportation of animals introduced from the other affected States, from the protection zone to the surveillance zone.

The formation of a single restricted zone F, by grouping together standstill zones and protection and surveillance zones will enable free circulation of ruminants within this zone as soon as vector activity comes to an end. Moreover, for movements from a restricted zone to a bluetongue-free zone inside a Member State, there are derogatory conditions laid down by Decision 2005/393/EC which are valid irrespective of the restricted zone (A to F).

Over the period of vector inactivity within restricted zone F, the bluetongue transmission risk may be estimated as nil to negligible.

However, over the vector activity period in 2007, with the uncertainty surrounding the development of the epidemiological situation in northern Europe, there may be a risk in allowing ruminants from standstill zones to move freely in the single restricted zone (F) such as it is expected to become as soon as culicoid activity ends at the end of 2006. In view of this risk, the joint emergency expert group on “Bluetongue” reinforces the recommendation of continuing to check for the absence of viremia in ruminants from standstill zones (opinion² 2006-SA-0307).

- On the basis of current knowledge, it cannot be anticipated if (and when) the bluetongue virus will once again start to provoke cases and/or circulate through the next period of vector activity in 2007. It would therefore be necessary to examine, before the resumption of vector activity, the nature of a surveillance system set up under the authority of the European Commission (opinion³ of 19 October 2006) so as to assess its ability to detect a re-emergence of bluetongue. On the basis of results obtained and other information collected in this period, measures fostering a rapid and effective response to any significant development observed in zone F through 2007 could be examined.

Key words: Bluetongue, cattle, sheep, culicoides, derogations”

Opinion of the Agence française de sécurité sanitaire des aliments

These are the points of analysis which Afssa is in a position to provide after examining the four draft memoranda on certain derogatory conditions for the prohibition of movements within the context of bluetongue.

The Director General of the Agence française de
sécurité sanitaire des aliments

Pascale BRIAND

² Opinion 2006-SA-0 307 of the French Food Safety Agency on the risk of bluetongue developing over the coming months in northern Europe and the conceivable measures for controlling this disease.

³ Opinion 2006-SA-0 279 of the French Food Safety Agency on a draft protocol for monitoring bluetongue in the European Union.