

Animal diseases: foot-and-mouth disease (repeal. Directive 85/511/EEC and Decisions 89/531/EEC and 91/665/EEC; amend. Directive 92/46/EEC)

2002/0299(CNS) - 13/12/2002 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to revise and improve legislation on EU measures to control outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD). CONTENT : the EU measures for the control of FMD are currently laid down in Directive 85/511/EEC. The "non-vaccination policy" was introduced by Council Directive 90/423/EEC, which also specified requirements for contingency planning and antigen stocks for the production of vaccines for emergency vaccination. In order to protect livestock against infection, it also made modifications to the conditions for intra-EU trade and imports from third countries of susceptible animals and animal products, such as milk and meat. The proposal for a new FMD Directive is based on the experience with classical swine fever in 1997 and the application in 2001 of the current measures for FMD control as well as intensive stakeholder consultation. The proposal to amend Directive 92/46/EEC outlines procedures on how to recover "free of FMD without vaccination status", which is of crucial importance for trade. The present proposal, although its preparation started well before the events of 2001, is therefore also a consequence of the lessons learned during this crisis. However, due to the nature of this disease, there is no perfect solution which could fully accommodate all of the economic, environmental and the ethical desires of civil society and therefore this proposal can only present the best currently available compromise. The structure of the proposal is to follow the sequence of events should an outbreak occur and contains in its final part the measures to be taken in order to prepare for an outbreak. As soon as the presence of the disease is suspected rapid action must be taken so that immediate and effective control measures can be implemented once its presence is confirmed. In addition, this proposal, for the first time since 1992, gives emergency vaccination a central role in tackling an outbreak. However, the proposal does not change the current policy banning prophylactic vaccination. Laboratory tests are now available to differentiate between vaccinated herds and those infected by the virus. In line with OIE requirements, the proposal details the procedure for how to recover "free of FMD without vaccination" status - the best animal health standard in relation to FMD- within 6 months of the last outbreak or completion of vaccination, whichever occurs last. This revised and more flexible procedure is to be used by a country that used emergency vaccination in combination with eradication of infected herds and post-vaccination surveillance testing. Moreover, the proposal adds detailed provisions for placing on the market of products derived from animals of susceptible species, such as meat and milk products, in the case of an outbreak. The draft law also provides for "regionalisation", limiting restrictions to the particular regions of a Member State that are affected by an outbreak. The draft Directive outlines the measures to be taken in order to prepare for an outbreak. The main new elements are: - Veterinary services will be empowered to establish suspect restriction zones and to impose a temporary movement ban on large parts of affected Member States. - The control strategy combines measures to deal with infected animals that have been subject to emergency vaccination. Detailed rules are laid down for how to treat and use products such as milk and meat from animals under restriction and from vaccinated animals. These products are not dangerous to humans; - Provisions are made for diagnostic facilities, in particular a Community Reference Laboratory, including a bank for diagnostic reagents, test kits, etc; - Detailed provisions are laid down for the management of the European antigen bank and for access to this bank by Member States and, where required, third countries. Specific rules are laid down for the confidential treatment of information on the quantities and strains of antigens stored at the bank; - Emphasis is put on preparation of contingency plans, including the preparation for a "worst case" scenario. Contingency plans have to be regularly updated in the light of the results of alert exercises.