

Overview of the 77th General Session

The annual General Session of the International Committee of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) provides for the adoption of resolutions guiding the administration and future work program for the organisation. Resolutions on the revisions to the *Aquatic Animal* and *Terrestrial Animal Health Codes* and their respective *Manuals of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines*, are also presented along with the adoption of resolutions on country sanitary status for four diseases: **foot and mouth disease, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia, rinderpest, and bovine spongiform encephalopathy** that the OIE officially recognizes.

As such, the General Session is the conclusion of the annual work cycle for the development of international science-based standards for the protection of animal, public and eco-system health and for the safe trade in animals and animal products in international commerce.

This year's General Session commenced with an Opening Ceremony on the afternoon of May 24th and had 8 plenary sessions running until May 29th. Approximately 600 participants representing the 174 OIE Members, intergovernmental (FAO, WHO, World Bank, WTO, etc.), regional and international organizations took part in the event.

Guests, honours and international expertise

For the Opening Session of the General Session, the OIE extends invitations to Ministers of Agriculture or Heads of Government of member countries to address the delegates and delegations of the member countries. The invitee list is generally restricted to ten Agricultural Ministers and/or Heads of State and are drawn from the 5 geographic regions of the OIE - the Americas; Europe; Africa; Asia, Far-East and Oceania; and the Middle East.

Elections

The World Assembly of Delegates (formerly referred to as the International Committee of OIE Members) elected a new President of the Assembly of OIE Delegates. Dr. Carlos Correa Messuti from Uruguay was elected President for a three-year term of Office. He succeeds Dr. Barry O'Neil from New Zealand.

In addition, members to the Council (formerly referred to as the Administrative Commission), the Specialist Commissions and the Regional Commissions were either newly elected or re-elected for a three-year term. To note, Dr. Brian Evans was elected for a third three-year term as a Member of the Council. Newly elected Presidents of Specialist Commissions are: Dr. Barry Hill (UK) as President of the Aquatics Commission; Dr. Gideon Bruckner (South Africa) as President of the Scientific Commission; Dr. Vincenzo Caporale (Italy) as President of the Laboratories Standards Commission.

Dr. Alejandro Thiermann (US) was re-elected as President of the Code Commission with Dr. Etienne Bonbon (France) as the newly elected Vice-

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President. Also to note, Dr. John Clifford (US) was elected as Vice-President of the Regional Commission for the Americas.

Speeches

The address by the OIE Past President to the World Assembly of Delegates, Dr. Barry O'Neil (English only)

<http://www.oie.int/download/O%27Neil%20Opening%20Address%20to%2077th%20GS.pdf>

The inaugural address by OIE President – elect, Dr. Carlos Correa (Spanish only)

http://www.oie.int/download/CarlosCorreaMessuti_Speech.pdf

Technical Items

Due to elections this year, only one technical item was presented where normally there are two. – The topics are presented by leading international and regional experts in each field. At the conclusion of the presentations, a group drawn from the member country delegates is formed and tasked to develop a resolution outlining recommendations that are designed to direct the future work of the OIE.

The technical item presented was “*The Impact of climate and environmental change on emerging and re-emerging animal disease and animal production*” and will be presented by Dr. Peter Black (Australia).

The technical item paper can be found in the Annex to this document.

At the 78th General Session in 2010, the first technical item will be entitled, “***The critical contribution of veterinary activities to the global security of food derived from terrestrial and aquatic animals***”.

The second technical items will be chosen by the Administrative Commission members (synonymous to the board of directors to the OIE) during their meetings in February 2009 and 2010 respectively.

As the first technical items require a questionnaire to be filled out, we may need your assistance in identifying experts to help out with completing the questionnaire...stay tuned!

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Agreements signed

Other highlights from the 77th General Session included the signing of agreements between the OIE and other international organisations to coordinate respective efforts in the control of animal diseases, safety of food, the promotion and improvement of veterinary public health, etc. This year, the OIE signed new agreements with the World Customs Organization (WCO); World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO); and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

A listing of the organizations with which the OIE has signed agreements can be found at http://www.oie.int/eng/OIE/actes/en_accords.htm and http://www.oie.int/fr/OIE/actes/fr_accords.htm

News on OIE Members

The complement of OIE Members is now 174 with the recent membership of San Marino and Micronesia.

Official OIE sanitary status recognition of Member Countries

During one of the plenary sessions, the *Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases* presented resolutions recognizing Members' animal health status for Foot and Mouth Disease, Rinderpest, Contagious bovine pleuropneumonia and BSE.

Canada and along with the other Members which were evaluated and categorized last year, were listed on Resolution 22 *Recognition of the BSE status of Members*. This resolution was unanimously adopted by the International Committee and included Members which were evaluated this year: Japan and Colombia were categorized as controlled BSE risk countries.

Resolution 22 also lists Chile as having negligible BSE risk.

Canada's continued disease free status from Foot and Mouth Disease, and Rinderpest was reaffirmed in Resolutions 19 and 20 respectively. The OIE maintains a list of Members, on their website, which have had their disease status, with respect to the four diseases, officially recognized.

Animal Welfare

Over the coming year, the Animal Welfare Working Group will continue with its work plan to develop guidelines with respect to laboratory animal welfare and animal welfare in livestock production and housing.

Also of interest, the recommendations from the 2nd Global Conference on Animal Welfare were presented for adoption by the World Assembly of Delegates; however, the Assembly chose to note the recommendations versus adopting them as the recommendations may not be fully in line with the established standards or the principles included in the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code*.

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Standard setting

Between June 2008 and March 2009, the Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission and the Aquatic Animal Health Standards Commission have proposed new or revised disease specific texts for adoption the General Session. All of these texts were provided to Members for comments, once in September 2008 and again in December 2008. Through the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer, Canada undertook an inclusive consultative process involving several federal departments and agencies, provincial jurisdictions, national industry associations and non-governmental organizations to prepare and submit comments on a number of the chapters for adoption.

The revised texts presented for adoption can be found in the March 2009 reports.

The reports for the Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission can be found at http://www.oie.int/tahsc/eng/en_reports.htm and http://www.oie.int/tahsc/fr/fr_reports.htm

The reports for the Aquatic Animal Health Standards Commission can be found at http://www.oie.int/aac/eng/commission/en_reports.htm

The majority of the proposed texts were adopted as is or with minor changes. Any changes that were adopted during the General Session proceedings will be reflected in the 2009 editions of the *Terrestrial Animal Health* and *Aquatic Animal Health Codes*.

The next round of consultations on new or revised disease chapters, surveillance guidelines and/or general guidelines will commence in June and will run until the beginning of August 2009. Canada's comments, along with other Members' comments, will be considered during the Terrestrial and Aquatic Code Commission meetings this September.

Of interest, during the General Session, the proposed changes to the BSE Chapter (11.6) with respect to Articles 11.6.1 (where the age restriction on deboned muscle meat was removed and the term "protein-free" in front of tallow was removed) and 11.6.15, point 2 a. (where vertebral columns of animals over 30 months of age at the time of slaughter be excluded) were put to a vote. The changes and the chapter were adopted by a simple majority.

It is not often such an event occurs, in fact most of the time standards are adopted by consensus; however, given the continued debate with respect to the science used to improve this chapter and in order to have the chapter adopted, the matter was put to a vote.

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For the **Terrestrial Code Commission**, the following texts are available for comment:

- Anthrax (Chapter 8.1)
- Swine Vesicular Disease (Chapter 15.5)
- New terms in the Glossary section
- Incorporation of compartmentalisation into the FMD chapter (Chapter 8.5)
- The Code Commission will also be re-reviewing the incorporation of the concept of compartmentalisation in the Scrapie chapter (Chapter 14.9) and the Bovine tuberculosis chapter (Chapter 11.7).
- Ad hoc group on laboratory animal welfare

The following reports and documents are available for information:

- Report from the Working group on animal production and food safety
- Report from the Ad hoc group on Salmonellosis
- Report from the Ad hoc group on laboratory animal welfare
- A paper on the Rights and Obligations of OIE Members in relation to International Trade and Disputes

For the **Aquatic Commission**, the following texts are available for comment:

- Infection with abalone herpes-like virus

The following texts are available for information:

- Reports of the *ad hoc* Group on Aquatic Animal Health Surveillance (January 2009)
- Report of the *ad hoc* Group on Safety of Products Derived From Aquatic Animals (February 2009)
- List of contents for restructured 2009 *Aquatic Code*
- Aquatic Animals Commission Work Plan 2009/1010

Future work programme for the OIE

The Delegates to the OIE have been requested by the Director General, Dr. Bernard Vallat to prepare proposals in preparation for the 5th Strategic Plan (2011-2015). The Strategic Plan outlines the future direction for the OIE's priorities and tasks to meet its objectives.

Although the priorities and tasks of the 5th Strategic Plan have yet to be elaborated on, it is expected that there will be a consolidation of the 4th Strategic Plan activities which includes:

- Maintaining and improving the provision of timely and accurate animal disease information.

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- Maintaining and strengthening the role of the OIE as a reference organisation for scientifically-based standards on matters concerning animal health and zoonoses, animal welfare, diagnosis and control of diseases, and sanitary safety in international trade.
- The provision of scientifically-based recommendations on measures for the prevention, control and eradication of animal diseases including zoonoses.
- In cooperation with partners, strengthening the capacity of OIE Members to participate in the development of and the application of international standards and guidelines for animal health, including zoonoses, and animal welfare.
- Strengthening OIE's involvement in policy design and governance related to decision making in animal health and welfare including capacity building, policy research, effective communication and the mediation of potential disputes.

It is also expected that the OIE will consider new directions such as the role of veterinary public health in food security particularly in recognition of the link between the fight against hunger and the fight against animal disease. In addition, the OIE plans on focussing on the implications of climate change on emerging and re-emerging diseases. The OIE has recently set up an ad hoc group to examine the implications of climate change on OIE programs and objectives. The report of the report of the ad hoc group can be found in the Scientific Commission's Report of February 2008. The report can be downloaded from the OIE website, http://www.oie.int/scad/eng/en_reports.htm

A Big Thank You

A big thank you goes to all those who participated in the comment and consultation process on the revised texts. Your assistance in providing science-based rationale and justification as part of Canada's comments on revised texts and guidelines contributes a great deal to the standard setting process. Keep up the good work!

Another big thank you goes to the Canadian delegation that participated in the 77th General Session. It is our sincere hope that your participation increased your understanding of the standard setting process and the expertise needed to support the OIE's strategic objectives to protect animal and public health.

Thanks again!

Final Report

The OIE's report of the General Session and List of Participants has been published and is available on the OIE website. http://www.oie.int/eng/oie/actes/en_rfinal.htm

Contact information

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For copies of Canada's comments on the revised disease chapters of the 2009 Terrestrial Animal Health and Aquatic Animal Health Codes, the technical items and the resulting resolutions passed by the Assembly of Delegates, please contact: Tianna MacInnes, International Standards Officer, Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer, tianna.macinnes@inspection.gc.ca