

Bluetongue: EU measures revised; Restriction zone extended, including into UK for the first time

A Commission proposal to amend the EU legislation on Bluetongue, bringing it more in line with World Animal Health Organisation (OIE) rules, was endorsed by the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health today. The draft Regulation lays down more harmonised measures for the monitoring and control of Bluetongue, and the restrictions to be applied in the case of an outbreak, taking into account recent developments in the disease situation, experience gained in disease control and scientific advice. The Standing Committee also voted in favour of extending the Bluetongue restriction zones to cover parts of South East England and more areas in France, Denmark, Czech Republic and Portugal due to further outbreaks of the disease.

Simpler, more harmonised measures

The Bluetongue situation in the EU has evolved significantly since the first outbreak of BTV-8 virus in Northern Europe in August 2006, and there have been over 23 500 outbreaks of BTV-8 in 2007. There has also been a recent incursion of BTV-1 in Spain and Portugal. Given the current situation and the experience gained in controlling the disease, the Commission decided that it was appropriate to amend the EU measures for Bluetongue, to make them more sustainable, proportionate and science-based, and to bring them more into line with international standards. Under the draft legislation agreed by the Standing Committee today, monitoring for Bluetongue will be compulsory in all infected countries, while Bluetongue-free Member States must carry out a level of surveillance proportionate to the risk. National authorities will have to notify the Commission of any restriction zones established in response to an outbreak, as well as subsequent changes made to these zones. The Commission will list the restriction zones in a simpler and more transparent manner, so as to better inform the public of the situation. The proposal also clarifies the conditions for the movement of animals within and from the restricted zones, and lays down the criteria for applying a seasonally vector-free zone (i.e. a limited period in which measures can be slightly eased due to lack of infectious vector and bluetongue transmission).

Bluetongue in the UK

Member States voted in favour of extending the Bluetongue restriction zones in France, Denmark, Czech Republic and Portugal today, due to further outbreaks of the disease. There will also be a Bluetongue restriction zone in 4 counties in South East England (Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire), following outbreaks of the disease in Suffolk over the past few weeks. The UK authorities have already established protection and surveillance zones (150 km) around the holdings where the virus circulation was confirmed, and disease control measures are being applied.

For more information, see:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/diseases/controlmeasures/bluetongue_en.htm