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Directorate General for  
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REPORT ON THE  
**TASK FORCE MEETING**  
OF THE  
“**RABIES**”  
**SUB-GROUP**

**VILNIUS, Lithuania**  
**26-27 April 2005**

**REPORT OF THE**  
**“RABIES**  
**MEETING HELD IN VILNIUS, LITHUANIA, ON 26-27 APRIL 2005**

**Participants:**

- Vilmos Pálfi (Chairman),
- Members of the Rabies Sub-group: Andrea Höflechner (AT), Niin Enel (EE), Jakava-Viljanen Mia Kristina (FI), Robertas Scerbavicius (LT), Ribanova Tatjana (LV), Jedrt Maurer Wernig (SI) and Roman Matejcik (SK), Jacques Barrat (FR) and Thomas Selhorst (DE)
- F. Reviriego, J.P Vermeersch (COM)

**Agenda:** see Annex 1

**Location:** Vilnius (Lithuania)

**DAY 1**

**Lithuania**

K. Lukauskas, Director of State Food and Veterinary Service ( SFVS) of the Republic of Lithuania officially opened the meeting. An overview on the rabies situation in the country was given. It was emphasized that rabies is still a significant animal and public health problem in Lithuania. It is a compulsory notifiable disease and the SFVS has made a control and risk assessment on the epidemiological situation of rabies in the country.

Oral vaccination trials started as early as in 1983 using the Russian vaccine-bait system. A 25-50% reduction in animal rabies cases were reported, but data on efficacy and safety of the vaccine had not been reported. A second oral vaccination campaign of wildlife started in 1995 according to the Lithuanian National Rabies Prevention Programme. During the 5 year programme (1995 – 2000) 43.000 km<sup>2</sup> territory was covered and 820.000 baits were distributed. The programme was not effective and since 2001 the prevalence of rabies has been increased. The small geographical areas and the short vaccination period were the major factors limiting the success of the programme.

From all the three Baltic countries two lectures were presented, one on the rabies situation, and another on the rabies control.

Petras Maciulskis from SFVS gave lecture entitled Epizootic Rabies in the Republic of Lithuania . It was presented, that since 2000 the number of submitted samples has been multiplied and parallelly the prevalence of rabies too. For rabies examination 57,6% of the samples came from wildlife and 42,40% from domestic animals. Between 1994 and 2004 68,3% of rabies positive cases were found in wildlife and 31,70 % in domestic animals. In wildlife the main reservoirs of the rabies virus were foxes and racoon dogs, while those in domestic animals were cattle (21,9%), cats (9,9%) and dogs ( 7,5% ). The highest number of rabies positive cases was recorded in domestic animals in autumn. The spread of rabies was observed in the country in

the last decade. In 1994 most rabies cases were found in the northern part, while in 2003 the whole territory of the country was involved.

The next speaker, Vaidotas Kiudulas presented the rabies control strategy in Lithuania. Details were presented about the two oral vaccination programmes carried out in the country. In the second programme, between 1995 and 2000 three vaccines, SG-1 (1997-1997, 1999), Lyspulven (1998) and Rabifox (2000) were used distributing in different territories of the country.

The key elements of rabies eradication strategy were determined in five points.

1. Oral vaccination of wild animals , especially red foxes an raccoon dogs with vaccine which should induce sufficient immunity
2. Rabies eradication campaign should last not less than 5 years
3. Compulsory vaccination of dogs and cats
4. Implementation of the identification and registration system for dogs and cats
5. Control of the population of stray dogs and cats

Based on the vaccination area for one campaign the need is 2.247.200 baits, and for the whole programme 22.472.000 baits. The financial resources are planned both from national financing and from EU co-financing.

As part of the eradication program sample collection and laboratorial examination will be also included. For sample collection the responsible person will be the Local State Veterinary Officer.

### **Latvia**

Alda Vizbule gave lecture on Situation of Rabies in Latvia. The highest number, 964 positive cases were found in 2003, while in 2004 those were 443. Since 2000, the annual number of positive cases has been each year over 400. The affected populations were foxes 43%, raccoon dogs 29%, cattle 6%, dogs 9% and cats 8 % of all positive cases. The main reservoirs of the virus are the foxes and the raccoon dogs and these populations have been increasing. The density of the population in 1996 was 1,17 per km<sup>2</sup> , while that in 2003 that was 1,7.

The rabies control strategy was presented. Oral vaccination started in Latvia in 1998. In the first 3 years only limited areas were covered by the programmes, and the number of distributed baits was between 52.100 and 80.000. In 2001 – 2003 the whole country was covered with distributing 300.000 baits per year. The planned vaccination area for 2005-2006 is only 28.000 km<sup>2</sup>, the western part of the country. They have no financial resources to vaccinate the whole territory. From PHARE project 2.619.200 baits for 4 campaigns will be financed, while the aerial distribution will be financed from State budget.

For controlling the efficacy of the oral vaccination sample collection started 3 weeks after the bait distribution. 8 foxes/ 100 km<sup>2</sup> were tested by the 3 recommended method. In one campaign 2400 red foxes and raccoon dogs were examined. Hunters were paid for sample collection.

### **Estonia**

The situation of Rabies in Estonia was presented by Enel Niin. Urban rabies could be observed in Estonia in 1950-1959. Between 1962 and 1967 no rabies was diagnosed in the country. From 1968 the sylvatic rabies appeared and spread in Estonia. In 1968-

1980 altogether 1933 rabies cases were found. 814 cases in 2003 year, 314 in 2004, while in the first quarter of 2005 62 rabies cases were diagnosed. The main reservoirs of the virus are the red fox and the raccoon dog. Between 1981 and 2004, 71% of the rabies cases were detected in wild animals, 23% in dogs and cats and 6% in agriculture animals, respectively. In the laboratory diagnosis of rabies the Fluorescent Antibody Test, the Mouse Inoculation Test and the Virus Isolation in Cell Culture methods are used.

The key point of the Control Strategy of Rabies in Estonia has been the compulsory vaccination of dogs and cats since 1953. The cost of the vaccination has been paid by the State. Based on a 3 year PHARE project, vaccination was performed over 15.000 km<sup>2</sup> of densely populated area. A new, two year project will start in 2005 to vaccinate a territory of 25.800 km<sup>2</sup>. Bait distribution will be made by aircraft and helicopter. In 2006 they are going to apply for a third PHARE project to vaccinate the whole territory of the country.

After the reports from the three Baltic States the discussion resulted in the following conclusions:

1. There is no transboundary coordination and cooperation in Rabies Control Strategy among the three Baltic States and Kaliningrad region of Russia and Poland
2. Before starting an eradication programme the resources have to be available.
3. Due to the financial problems the vaccinated territories were frequently changed.
4. In planning the rabies eradication, first a programme has to be designed on the own territory followed with the optimization with the neighbouring countries.

### **Third countries: Kaliningrad**

The Strategy of Rabies Control in Kaliningrad Region of Russia was presented by N.S Sergeev. The Kaliningrad region is bordered with Poland and Lithuania. The rabies infection in the wildlife is widespread. Between 2000 and 2004 yearly 53-80 positive cases were diagnosed in the Region. The main reservoir of the virus is the red fox. The occurrence of Rabies is the most frequent in dogs and cattle among domestic animals. In 2004 an oral vaccination programme has been started for wildlife. They use the own produced marker labelled vaccine. The bait distribution has been done by hand. In the Region it is compulsory to vaccinate against rabies the dogs and cats.

They deem necessary the cooperation with the neighbouring countries. In the frame of this effort in 2004 two seminars were held with the polish authorities on Rabies control strategy.

### **DAY 2**

Laboratory Control of Rabies in the National Veterinary Laboratory, Lithuania was presented by Eugenijus Jacevicius .

Rabies Diagnostic work in the country is carried out in 10 laboratories. Out of them 4 are State Institutes and 6 are State Laboratory Services.

The Fluorescent Antibody Test method has been accredited. Other tests used in the routine diagnostic work are the Mouse Inoculation Test, the Fluorescent Antibody Virus Neutralisation test, ELISA test and the Marker Detection test.

The Staff of the National Veterinary Laboratory has been trained at AFSSA, Nancy, France.

### **Old EU Member States experience**

The Rabies Control Programme in Finland was presented by Miia Kristina Jakava-Viljanen. Finland has been free of Rabies since 1991.

Cordon vaccination in 20 km depth with bait density of 15-20 per km<sup>2</sup> has been used since 1991 along the Russian border to prevent the spread of Rabies infection from infected areas. In the first years bait distribution was done once a year. The efficacy of the vaccination was controlled by serological method. Since 2004 in Karelia the vaccination has been done twice a year. On the other side of the border the Russian Authorities have vaccinated once a year since 2003.

Thomas Selhorst gave a lecture on the risks at the beginning and implementation of oral vaccination. The German experience has showed that the eradication success increases due to:

- Large scale and long term (~6 years) vaccination
- Cross border coordination of campaigns
- Immunization in spring and autumn plus additional campaign in late spring (optional)
- Aerial bait distribution with 500m flight line distance and 20-30 baits per square kilometre
- Immunization rates above 70%
- Targeted surveillance (rabies detection, control of vaccination success)

And these considered essential requirements of proper rabies eradication programmes.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Conclusions**

Rabies is a serious threat for human and animal health. The disease is widespread and endemic in the three Baltic States in wildlife and causes a significant number of cases in domestic animals.

1. Epidemiologically the three Baltic Member States can be considered as one region. The infection dynamics seems to be similar in all the three countries.
2. Previous vaccination programs carried out in two countries seems to be not sufficiently effective and should be thoroughly modified and improved in the future.
3. More structured and standardized information about the organization and the progress of the programs would be necessary.
4. The exchange of information among the three countries has been established.
5. Experiences in the field showed that the efficacy of used vaccine in raccoon dogs is similar to as that in foxes.
6. In all the three Baltic Member States the shortage of financial resources is major obstacle for implementation of a fully effective, cost efficient, large scale and long term eradication program.

7. In Lithuania the preparedness for controlling the rabies eradication programme in internationally accredited laboratory is sufficient.

### **Recommendations**

The Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian authorities should consider the eradication of rabies as a priority.

1. The three Baltic Member States has to be regarded as one single area in the design of eradication strategies.
2. The necessary financial resources for large scale, long term vaccination programs should be made available.
3. The collaboration has to be further developed among the three Baltic States and extended to the other neighbouring countries.
4. An agreement should be reached among the neighbouring countries to allow a mutual cross border vaccination.

Annex

## **Agenda: Task force subgroup RABIES**

*Vilnius, Lithuania 26 – 27 April 2005*

State Food and Veterinary Service of Lithuania kindly invites the Commission Task force subgroup on rabies a group (10-12 persons) of experts and two experts from EE, LV respectively.

The rabies situation, evolution and eradication programmes in EE, LV and LT will be discussed and evaluated by the experts group and future recommendation will be given. To clarify the situation and future control of rabies in Kaliningrad, representatives from Russia should be invited.

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Preliminary agenda

***Tuesday, 26 April***

9:30 – 10:00	Registration
10:00 – 10:10	Official opening Director of SFVS, Prof. K. Lukauskas
10:10 – 10:30	Task force subgroup Rabies; introduction, tasks and targets Chairman of the subgroup
10:30 – 10:50	Situation of rabies in Lithuania Deputy director of SFVS – Dr. P. Mačiulskis
10:50 – 11:10	Situation of rabies in Latvia Representative
11:10 – 11:30	Coffee break
11:30 – 11:50	Situation of rabies in Estonia Representative

11:50 – 12:20	Discussion
12:20 – 14:00	Lunch
14:00 – 14:20	Situation of rabies in Kaliningrad Region of Russia Representative
14:20 – 14:40	Rabies control strategy in <b>Lithuania</b> SFVS
14:40 – 15:00	Discussion
15:00 – 15:20	Coffee break
15:20 – 15:40	Rabies control strategy in <b>Latvia</b>
15:40 – 16:00	Rabies control strategy in <b>Estonia</b>
16:00 – 16:20	Strategy of rabies control in Kaliningrad Region of Russia ???
16:20 – 17:00	Questions of the members of the task force subgroup

### **Dinner**

**Wednesday, 27 April 2005**

9:00 – 9:30	Laboratory control of rabies in National Veterinary Laboratory, Lithuania Dr. Eugenijus Jacevicius, Head of Virology department NVL
9:30 – 10:00	Rabies control programme in Finland, Dr. Miia Jakava-Viljanen, Vaccines and Virusepidemiology National Veterinary and Food Research Institute EELA Department of Virology, Helsinki, Finland
10:00 – 10:20	Coffee break
10:20 – 10:50	The risks of eradication and during final phases of oral vaccination <b>Experts (Dr. Thomas Selhorst?)</b>
10:50 – 11:20	Discussion
11:20 – 12:00	Questions of the members of the task force subgroup
12:00 – 13:30	Lunch
13:30 – 15:00	Meeting of the task force subgroup Rabies
15:00 – 15:30	Recommendations of the group and final discussion