

Briefing document

Last updated 24/03/2016

EU Animal Health Law

Background

The European Commission's proposal for a Regulation on transmissible animal diseases ("Animal Health Law") was published on 6 May 2013 as part of a [package of measures](#) to strengthen the enforcement of health and safety standards for the whole agri-food chain.

An agreement between the EU Council and the EU Parliament on the proposed regulation was reached on 1 June 2015.

The listing and categorisation of diseases to which the regulation applies was a major sticking point during negotiations. When, in December 2015, the Agriculture Council formally adopted its position at first reading, the UK delegation voted against, due to the number of areas where delegated acts will be used by the Commission to define technical details, such as the list of diseases.

As for the European Parliament, it finally adopted its second reading position in March 2016.

The new Animal Health Law provides a single regulatory framework for rules related to animal health and the control of animal diseases transmissible to animals or humans. Indeed, the existing EU legislation on matters related to animal health consists of about 40 basic legal acts (directives and regulations which lay down general principles on animal identification and disease surveillance) and around 400 secondary acts (implementing rules). These rules from the 1980s and 1990s were often adopted in response to crises and focused on combating diseases rather than on prevention.

EU Animal Health Law

Overall, the key elements of this new animal health law are:

- **A single regulatory framework for animal health** which integrate, streamline and simplify the existing legislation. Intended as a framework, the regulation itself only lays down general principles and basic rules
- **A stronger focus on the prevention of transmissible animal diseases** in kept animals (ie animals under human control) and wild animals and animal products. The new rules put more emphasis on prevention and clarify the responsibilities of farmers, traders, animal professionals, including vets and also pet owners. All farmers, animal owners and traders will be obliged to apply the **principles of good animal husbandry and prudent use of veterinary medicines**. Vets will have to raise awareness of the interaction between animal health and welfare and human health and of antimicrobial resistance. The regulation in that respect supplements two other proposals which are currently undergoing the ordinary legislative procedure in the European Parliament and in the Council, on veterinary medicines and on medicated feed

Briefing document

- **The Regulation introduces a listing, categorisation and prioritisation of diseases.** The diseases which will be subject to specific disease prevention and control rules are listed in the Regulation and assigned different sets of measures based on their importance and impacts. Five diseases (foot-and-mouth disease, classical swine fever, African swine fever, highly pathogenic avian influenza and African horse sickness) are included directly into the text of the Regulation while other diseases are listed in Annex to the Regulation and are amendable by the Commission by delegated acts. The initial list in Annex includes those diseases which currently qualify for EU funding (Regulation 652/2014). It will be amended in the light of the epidemiological situation in Member States and third countries
- **The law empowers the Commission to take urgent measures immediately to tackle emerging diseases** that could have a highly significant impact on public health, agricultural production or animal welfare and health
- The rules take into account the relationship between animal health and public health, with food and feed safety, antimicrobial resistance and animal welfare, including the sparing of any avoidable pain, distress or suffering. The Regulation requires **that animal welfare is taken into account when considering the impacts of diseases and measures to combat diseases**
- Responsibilities for notification, reporting and surveillance of diseases at Member State and EU level are clarified. So are the **basic responsibilities of key actors** (farmers, traders and animal professionals, including veterinarians and pet owners) to ensure the good health of their animals and to avoid introducing or spreading diseases
- **Provisions on registration, approval, traceability and movements are brought together**, laid down separately for terrestrial, aquatic and other animals. The basic principles were already provided for in current legislation: the registering and approval of establishments, responsibilities for registers and record keeping, traceability requirements, notification of movements, content of animal health certificates, etc.

Worth noting:

The Regulation envisages the relaxation of administrative procedures for movements of animals and their products between Member States.

For example, a pig farmer – providing they comply with the rules – could send their pig consignment to a slaughterhouse in another Member State at the exact time they prefer and would not have to wait for the official veterinarian to inspect the consignment and complete the certificate, as is currently the case. Given that there are around 80,000 such consignments in a year, the Commission estimates that **there is the potential for important savings from administrative costs alone, up to €20 million**. Such changes could also mean better welfare for the animals due to reduced waiting periods both at the farm and at the slaughterhouse or the ability to transport them during lower temperatures such as at night-time in summer.

Briefing document

What's next?

An adequate financial framework to achieve the objectives of this policy is provided for in Regulation (EU) No 652/2014, laying down provisions for the management of expenditure relating to the food chain, animal health and animal welfare and relating to plant health and plant reproductive material.

Following its adoption by both the EU Parliament and Council, the Regulation should be published soon in the EU Official Journal.

The Regulation will come into force on the twentieth day following that of its publication in the Official Journal of the European Union and will be applicable in five years.

Several delegated and implementing acts will be adopted by the Commission until April 2019 to clarify technical details and make the new rules applicable. The Commission will consult experts, Member States and other interested parties during the drafting of these acts.