



**FMD Reference Laboratories Network Meeting,
Florianopolis, 09:00 – 12:00, Wednesday 6 December**

Report

Present:

David Paton, John Bashiruddin (Rapporteur) Vladimir Borisov, Alexey Scherbakov, (Ekaterina Akminskaya – interpreter) Ingrid Bergmann, Viviana Malirat	FAO/OIE Reference Laboratory for FMD, IAH-Pirbright, UK OIE Reference Laboratory for FMD, FGI-ARRIAH, Russia
Juan Lubroth	FAO/OIE Reference Laboratory for FMD, Centro Panamericano de Fiebre Aftosa OPS/OMS, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil Animal Health Service, FAO, Rome, Italy

David Paton welcomed all present and everyone introduced themselves.

The OVI, South Africa and Plum Island, USA laboratories had been invited to this meeting by FAO with the consent of the members of the Network. Apologies for absence were accepted from OIE, George Matlho, Botswana and from the OVI and Plum Island laboratory representatives. JB, George Matlho and Lindani Mozola from the Sub-Saharan Regional Reference Laboratory, Botswana (SSRRL) had a separate meeting with JB on Tuesday 5 December where similar points to the ones that follow were discussed. JB conveyed the views of the SSRRL at this meeting. Although the ARRIAH colleagues had to leave the meeting early at 11.00 to get to the airport, their flight was delayed and JB/DP had further discussions with VB and AS at the airport, concerning the workplan for 2007.

The agenda was discussed and agreed:

- 1. Network Annual Report**
- 2. Display and access to common data – ReLaIS website**
- 3. Expansion of Network and MOU**
- 4. Plan of work for 2007**
- 5. Any Other Business**

1. Network Annual Report

JB had circulated a template to gather the information needed from the Network Members and replies had been received from Botswana. The other members agreed to supply the information within two weeks. It was agreed that from now on the report should cover the period from January to December rather than until November as last year. There was a discussion about inclusion of serosurveillance results. It was agreed that these should be included if they provide useful information and if the information is able to be released into the public domain.

2. Display and access to common data – ReLaIS website.

JB gave a powerpoint presentation to show the progress that has been made at IAH with the development of web-based tools for displaying information related to the Network. The provisional objectives and preliminary structure of the website and the relationships between various sources of scientific information and the display engines that will be available through the Reference Laboratory Information System (ReLaIS) website were explained. A prototype of the website was demonstrated and in particular the mapping and phylogenetic analysis tools were shown. The possibility of direct and secure electronic transfer of information between partners' own databases or laboratory information systems (LIMS) was explained. ARRIAH have some plans for the development of a LIMS whereas IAH and PANAFTOSA have systems already. The IAH system has been programmed to transfer data to the ReLaIS system automatically. The proposed timescale for the development of the ReLaIS website is: assessment and modification by IAH by end of January 2007; further development to the point of preliminary release to Members by end of February 2007; and, public release by April 2007.

Discussions were underway between JB and personnel of the FAO and OIE on ways of exchanging relevant data between ReLaIS and their own systems (i.e. OIE's WAHIS and FAO/OIE/WHO GLEWS).

It was considered useful that textual information from reference laboratories that is supplied in a non-English languages should be accompanied by an English language summary. All forms of display should identify/acknowledge the source of the contributions to the database.

The concept for the website was discussed and IB asked about aspects such as: the mechanisms to validate the data included; the need to accompany the laboratory data with relevant epidemiological information; the relevance of harmonizing methodologies involved in the phylogenetic analysis and vaccine matching; the mechanisms of integration with other information networks. It was agreed that its use by the Members should be explored in more detail once the system is up and running – i.e. after April 2007. JL suggested that this could take place in FAO, Rome after the General Session in April.

3. Expansion of Network and MOU

Clarification of whether the Network is an OIE/FAO Network or an OIE Network and the consequent make-up of the Steering Committee has to be agreed between OIE and FAO before this can proceed. OIE and FAO will consider the need to modify the MOU to clarify this issue.

With regard to expansion of the Network, all were in agreement of the need to bring on board other regions not yet represented and that to achieve this, the key players to be invited to join are: Lanzhou in China, Pakchong in Thailand and Mukteshwar in India. Representatives from all of these countries have already expressed an interest in joining the Network and with OIE/FAO agreement, could be invited to the next meeting as candidate Members. These additional laboratories can provide valuable experiences and their enrolment would fit into the model of having a Network based on contribution.

A second model that was considered was to include all National Reference Laboratories for FMD in the Network. This would be based at least partly on the desire of these laboratories to be provided with information, as much as because of data that they can provide. One way in which this could be managed, would be to have a hierarchical system in which the OIE/FAO Reference Laboratories would form the core of the Network and meet annually and represent their National Reference Laboratory Network Members. This would build upon systems already in place, for instance in the European Union, where the Community Reference Laboratory fulfils this coordinating regional role. IB commented that some national laboratories would want to be Members in their own right and not via a Reference Laboratory. This desire could be partly accommodated by allowing National Reference Laboratories to also attend the annual network meeting if they wished to do so at their own expense.

Another discussion was with regard to the scope of the MOU and whether the focus should be broadened to include harmonisation of all diagnostic methods rather than just those related to vaccine selection. This aspect of collaborative work is less sensitive in relation to intellectual property and trade concerns over possible misinterpretation of outbreak data. On the other hand, it could divert the Network's resources away from its initial aims. The participants considered that they were already engaged in these activities. No decision was taken on the matter at this stage and it was agreed that harmonisation of vaccine matching should remain the primary goal for 2007.

The MOU has been signed by IAH, ARRIAH and SSRRL, but not by PANAFOSA. IB had discussed the MOU with COSALFA laboratory representatives/CVOs and with PAHO's legal office. Most of the National Representatives of COSALFA from different South American countries had accepted the objectives of the MOU and have required modifications. One request was that the MOU should include the proviso for all parties to exchange vaccine strains – but this cannot be met by the Reference Laboratories from other regions who do not control access to these strains. IB commented that the limitation in exchanging vaccine strains complicates the vaccine matching

harmonization activities. Other modifications requested relate to the participation of the countries of origin of the samples in the analysis, in which the laboratory data should be analyzed together with the epidemiological history. The legal office of PAHO had advised that they consider the MOU a legally binding document and that OIE/FAO signatures were needed. They had also requested further detailed description of the governance and of work plans and scheduling.

IB commented on the changes requested by the countries of South America to the MOU that could facilitate its acceptance by most COSALFA Members. This will be communicated to OIE/FAO and the Secretariat. In the meantime, there is no mechanism for exchange of viruses and sequences between PANAFTOSA and the other network members and therefore, they will not be able to obtain full access to the ReLaIS sequence database. However, they can continue to collaborate on provision of non-confidential materials and information and in work directed towards harmonisation of laboratory methods. Exchanges of viruses and sequences might also be negotiated on a bilateral basis between Network Members.

4. Plan for 2007.

Four items were identified:

- i) Harmonisation of vaccine matching approaches
- ii) Further web-site development
- iii) Input to the debate over the status and prospects for global eradication of serotype C
- iv) Harmonisation of nomenclature for strains and isolates

It was commented that harmonisation of vaccine strains could also be done on a bilateral basis between different Reference Laboratories, when common vaccine strains could not be exchanged between all Members due to Commercial ownership restrictions and the fact that strains from other regions were not always allowed to be imported by Reference Laboratories. The following three areas of work are envisaged:

- a) SSRL/IAH collaboration to compare r values obtained with SAT serotype vaccines. JL suggested to include Plum Island in the WRL/BVI SAT vaccine matching study.
- b) PANAFTOSA/IAH collaboration to compare r values obtained with South American vaccine strains, namely A24 Cruzeiro, A ARG 2001, O1 Campos, O BFS and C3 Indaial. These viruses are already available in both labs and there will be an exchange of antisera and methods and a selection of common isolates to be matched that are also available in both labs. IB agreed to prepare a short workplan.
- c) ARRIAH/IAH collaboration to compare r values obtained with serotype A Asian/Middle East vaccines against recent field isolates from Turkey and Iran. ARRIAH are planning some cross-challenge studies which will provide a bench-mark to the r value results.

5. Any other business

It was agreed that the next meeting should be earlier in the year and May 2007 was proposed as a good time to discuss the use of the web-site and to review the progress on the other issues. The Network Report required at the end of each year could be facilitated by email exchanges¹.

John Bashiruddin

07 December 2006

¹ Editorial note: it would be useful to explore the feasibility of having teleconference or videoconference link ups. IAH has an videoconference facility.