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**Summary of Activities of the Working  
Group on Wildlife for 2023**

Presented by the Chair of the Working Group, Dr William Karesh

*[Technical Working Document]*



# Summary of Activities of the Working Group on Wildlife for 2023

The Chair of the Working Group on Wildlife, Dr William Karesh, presented an overview of the activities of the Working Group since the previous General Session and the outcomes of the annual meetings of the Working Group, held from 20th to 23rd June 2023, and 28th November to 1st December 2023.

The Working Group discussed the opportunities and challenges for WOA's wildlife health programme. It considered the relationship between wildlife, domestic animal health and human health, and recognised that the lack of a clear definition for wildlife health presented challenges for strategic development and communications.

## Collaboration with International Partners

The Working Group discussed the outcomes of WOA's collaboration with international partners and identified priorities for further engagement. Key partners include the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Wildlife Disease Association (WDA), and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) (WOA collaborates with WCS through the Science for Nature and People Partnership project [SNAPP]).

## Wildlife Trade Guidelines

It was updated on the '*Guidelines for Reducing the Risk of Disease Spillover Events at Markets Selling Wildlife and along the Wildlife Supply Chain*', which were due to be finalised in May 2024.

## Collaboration with the Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission (the Code Commission)

The Working Group continued its collaboration with the Code Commission. Together with the Code Commission, the Working Group identified specific chapters in the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* which were due to be updated and required input from wildlife experts, either because the epidemiology of a disease involved wildlife, or because the chapter presented opportunities to integrate aspects relating to the improvement of wildlife health.

## Communication on the El Niño-Southern Oscillation

The Working Group made a statement on the [El Niño](#)-Southern Oscillation to warn WOA Members about its potential impacts on animal health. An interview with the President, Dr William Karesh about El Niño was published.

## High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza

The Working Group expressed its serious concern about the impacts of high pathogenicity avian influenza on wild animal populations. At the time of the meeting, there was potential for the panzootic to have devastating impacts on wildlife populations under threat in the sub-Antarctic region. The Working Group recommended that WOA support its Members in managing risks from avian influenza to wildlife population. It developed – or was involved in the development – some concrete guidance to support Members with decision making. This included guidance on [the vaccination of species of high conservation value against avian influenza](#) and the '[Practical guide for authorised field responders to HPAI outbreaks in marine mammals](#)', with a focus on biosecurity, sample collection for virus detection and carcass disposal. It also made recommendations to WOA on areas of risk communication and drafted a [statement on avian influenza in the sub-Antarctic](#) region.

The Working Group was also briefed on the development of the Global Strategy for the prevention and control of high pathogenicity avian influenza and agreed to make recommendations when this strategy was available.

### **Scoping Work on the Next Generation Wildlife Disease Reporting System**

The Working Group was impressed by the extensive scoping work which had been carried out to ensure that the next generation wildlife disease reporting system (which would replace WAHIS-wild) was purposeful. It provided feedback on preliminary results of the scoping work. It highlighted that an enabling environment was critical for facilitating the collection and dissemination of wildlife disease data (including emerging diseases) of value for animal health, public health and biodiversity.

### **Network of Collaborating Centres**

The Working Group welcomed the recent establishment of a formalised Network of Collaborating Centres working on wildlife health, together with the development of its own terms of reference and work plan. The Working Group also noted that new terms of reference for National Focal Points for wildlife was finalised but had not yet been disseminated.

### **Baseline and Stocktaking Work**

The Working Group was updated on baseline and stocktaking work, which had been carried out to support the [Wildlife Health Framework](#). This included several external consultancies (wildlife legislation [aquatic animals]) and a stakeholder-needs assessment.

### **Inputs on WOAHS Wildlife Communication Strategy**

Members of the Working Group participated in the production of a number of 'reels' which were disseminated through WOAHS's social media networks to promote the contribution of wildlife health to animal and human health, for example on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#).

Wildlife health was one of the most popular topics on WOAHS's communications platforms, which offered an opportunity for WOAHS to raise its profile.

Finally, the Working Group provided input on the WOAHS wildlife communication strategy and indicators for Monitoring and Evaluation of the WOAHS Wildlife Health Framework.