

Report of the Meeting of the *ad hoc* Group on Biosecurity for Terrestrial Animals

Original: English (EN)

26–28 March 2024
Paris

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1. Background

The *ad hoc* Group was convened by the Director General following the request of the Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission (hereafter 'the Code Commission') to develop a new chapter on biosecurity for terrestrial animals for the *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* (hereafter the '*Terrestrial Code*').

In September 2017, the Code Commission discussed the importance of biosecurity for disease prevention and control and, due to its relevance in both horizontal and disease-specific chapters, agreed to develop a new chapter on biosecurity for the *Terrestrial Code* and added this to its work programme.

In September 2022, the Code Commission requested that an *ad hoc* Group be convened to initially develop a chapter structure, to describe the content of each article and to revise the associated Glossary definitions for the consideration of the Code Commission and the Scientific Commission.

In February 2023, after considering the *ad hoc* Group's work and feedback from the Scientific Commission, the Code Commission agreed that the proposed structure of the new Chapter 4.X., and the overall content were appropriate and requested that the *ad hoc* Group be reconvened to draft a new chapter and to revise current Glossary definitions for 'biosecurity' and 'biosecurity plan', and to propose a new definition for 'swill'.

At its September 2023 meeting, the Code Commission considered the *ad hoc* Group's report and reviewed the draft new Chapter 4.X., the proposed revised Glossary definitions for 'biosecurity' and 'biosecurity plan', and a new definition for 'swill', together with input from the Scientific Commission. The Code Commission circulated the draft new Chapter 4.X. and the revised Glossary definitions and the new definition for comments.

In February 2024, the Code Commission considered the comments received and provided guidance on key areas, and requested that the *ad hoc* Group on Biosecurity be reconvened to undertake a thorough revision of the text in response to the comments received.

2. Adoption of agenda, terms of reference and appointment of Chair and Rapporteur.

Dr Jeroen Dewulf accepted to continue as Chair and Dr Kerry Daly was appointed as rapporteur. The *ad hoc* Group adopted the agenda. The agenda and the list of participants are presented in [Annex 1](#) and [Annex 2](#), respectively.

3. Welcome

Dr Montserrat Arroyo, the WOAHA Deputy Director General, International Standards and Science, welcomed members of the *ad hoc* Group and thanked them for their availability and contribution to this work of WOAHA. She extended her appreciation to their institutes and national governments for allowing their participation in this meeting. She highlighted the importance of the subject, which is critical to many of the Organisation's strategies as well as to Members activities. Dr Arroyo acknowledged the good progress made by the *ad hoc* Group and emphasised the interest shown by Members through the numerous comments received.

Dr Dewulf, Chair of the *ad hoc* Group welcomed the experts and acknowledged the valuable contribution thus far and encouraged members to continue to actively participate.

4. New Chapter 4.X.

The *ad hoc* Group reviewed the considerations of the Code Commission on the comments received on the proposed new chapter, considered the guidance on key areas provided for the *ad hoc* Group and the comments on specific points of the text forwarded for the *ad hoc* Group's consideration.

General considerations

Following the advice of the Code Commission, the *ad hoc* Group discussed some general topics noted by the Code Commission from several comments received, that required a global consideration within the whole proposed Chapter.

The *ad hoc* Group agreed that there was an uneven level of detail between the different articles, which made the text confusing regarding the intended use for multiple scenarios and species. The Group reviewed several concepts, Glossary definitions, and potential contexts in which this chapter could be applicable within the scope of the *Terrestrial Code*. The Group agreed that the text should remain general and should provide general principles and

recommendations to allow for a consistent approach that could be applied to implement biosecurity for a 'population' or 'subpopulation' irrespective of the settings or scale, such as at country, zone, compartment, herd, farms, non-production establishments (e.g. sports clubs, shows), households, or others. The *ad hoc* Group noted that detailed guidance on a certain context or population should be addressed elsewhere, either in a specific chapter (e.g. current Chapters 4.5.; 6.5.) or in other guidance documents outside of the *Terrestrial Code*, as relevant. The *ad hoc* Group amended the text across the proposed chapter to ensure that adequate Glossary terms were used, notably 'population' and 'unit' to remain neutral and to remove unnecessary examples that may bias the understanding of readers.

The *ad hoc* Group noted the recommendation from the Code Commission and agreed with the need to ensure consistency in the description of roles of the Competent Authorities, Veterinary Authority, operators, veterinarians and other stakeholders, noting that these need to be used in a broad way ensuring they remain relevant to the different possible contexts and scenarios. The Group agreed with the overall vision described by the Commission but noted that, under certain specific circumstances, notably related to international trade purposes or the implementation of official activities (e.g. zones within a country), the Veterinary Authority or other Competent Authorities may play an active role in the implementation of biosecurity. The *ad hoc* Group amended the text across the proposed chapter to ensure this was addressed consistently. The *ad hoc* Group highlighted that the intention of the text, notably of Article 4.X.5. was not to prescribe a stringent fix model, but rather to describe an approach that would apply to most situations, and noted that there could always be specific cases that would require different arrangements.

The *ad hoc* Group considered the question from the Code Commission about the scope of the chapter, on whether wildlife should be included and in what context. In line with the rationale described above, the *ad hoc* Group considered that the chapter focused on biosecurity as a part of disease prevention and control programmes, and applied to all animals and all possible populations as relevant to those programmes. The *ad hoc* Group noted that there was no reason for excluding any animal species from the scope of the Chapter, irrespective of whether their phenotype has been affected by human selection or whether they needed human supervision or control. The *ad hoc* Group agreed that it would be the characteristics of the specific population, including the animal species, and its environment, which condition and define the adequate design and implementation of biosecurity. Following the discussion noted above, for each case a critical point would be to identify the specific 'population' that would be subject to biosecurity, and the other animals (i.e. not part of that population) will have to be taken into consideration as important factors. The *ad hoc* Group agreed that this principle would also apply to other contexts, such as companion animals or animals held for leisure, sport, or other purposes. The *ad hoc* Group amended the text across the proposed chapter to ensure this was addressed consistently and the text was presented in a way that would apply to all relevant populations, avoiding specific references to wildlife, commercial, or other terms that may put particular emphasis on a given population.

The *ad hoc* Group noted several comments on the need for consistent use of terminology around 'cleaning,' 'cleansing,' 'disinfection' and 'decontamination.' The *ad hoc* Group considered that 'disinfection' was the appropriate term to use in the context of the proposed new chapter and reviewed the text to ensure that terminology was used consistently throughout the text. The *ad hoc* Group noted the Code Commission's request to review the Glossary definition for 'disinfection' and agreed that a clearer definition would avoid ambiguity and that the current Chapter 4.14. General recommendations on disinfection and disinsection should provide any further specific recommendations. The Secretariat informed that the Code Commission had identified the need to review Chapter 4.14. and its revision was included in the Commission's work programme. The *ad hoc* Group had a dedicated discussion on the revision of the Glossary term and related points that could be taken into consideration for a future revision of that chapter (see item 7 of this report).

Article 4.X.1. Introduction

The *ad hoc* Group, in line with the opinion of the Code Commission, did not agree with a comment to include animal welfare, as it was not a direct benefit of biosecurity.

The *ad hoc* Group did not agree with a comment that biosecurity can help limit the spread of a disease but may have a limited ability to control a disease. The *ad hoc* Group, in line with the opinion of the Code Commission, noted that in this context the term 'prevent' referred to reducing the risk of a disease entering into a population in which it is not yet present, while 'control' refers to managing, limiting or even progressively reducing the impact of a disease already present in a population or in an area, and that for both purposes and highlighted that biosecurity should be a critical component of health programmes to be applied to the whole population or to different subpopulations, as relevant.

Article 4.X.2. Purpose and scope

Comments forwarded by the Code Commission were addressed by the general considerations.

Article 4.X.3. Definitions

After reviewing several comments received on the proposed definitions, the *ad hoc* Group carefully considered the need for such definitions. The *ad hoc* Group noted that 'All-in all-out' was used only once, and its meaning was self-explanatory in that context, that 'fomite' is a common term and that any regular dictionary definition would adequately cover its meaning, and that the different components of biosecurity were extensively covered by article 4.X.8. Taking this into consideration the *ad hoc* Group concluded that while these definitions had been useful in the process of drafting the proposed chapter, they would have little value in the current text and agreed to delete the full article 4.X.3.

Article 4.X.4. Guiding general principles

The *ad hoc* Group agreed with a comment and proposed amendment to the first paragraph for clarity and alignment with the proposed changes to the Glossary definition for 'biosecurity'.

The *ad hoc* Group agreed with a comment that point 2 was already covered by point 4, and also noted that the reference to Chapter 2.1 of the *Terrestrial Code* was not relevant as it refers to Import Risk Analysis. The *ad hoc* Group then proposed to delete point 2.

The *ad hoc* Group considered several comments on the content of this article and proposed numerous amendments to address them. The amendments aimed also at reflecting the general points described above, removing potentially confusing references to risk analyses, and streamlining the content to address only general principles for biosecurity by removing references to other elements addressed elsewhere in the chapter.

Article 4.X.5. Roles and responsibilities

Comments forwarded by the Code Commission were addressed together with the general considerations.

The *ad hoc* Group, in line with the opinion of the Code Commission, agreed with a comment that biosecurity should be encouraged outside of the powers of Competent Authorities. The *ad hoc* Group also agreed that producers should be able to establish a biosecurity plan and implement even without it being a requirement by one or more Competent Authorities. The *ad hoc* Group then considered that the proposed text reflected that, noting that in any case, it should comply with an existing regulatory framework.

Article 4.X.7. Transmission pathways

The *ad hoc* Group agreed with a comment that direct and indirect pathways are the 'overarching' transmission pathways while the numbered points are examples of each. The *ad hoc* Group thus proposed to remove points 1 and 2 and incorporate them into the first paragraph. This change also indirectly addressed other comments referring to redundancies between the different points.

In point 7, the first sentence, the *ad hoc* Group, in line with the opinion of the Code Commission, did not agree with a comment to add 'vectors' after arthropods, as it was considered unnecessary.

The *ad hoc* Group added other amendments for clarity.

Article 4.X.8. Components of biosecurity

The *ad hoc* Group, in line with the opinion of the Code Commission, agreed with a comment to reconsider the recommendations in this article to make them suitable to all relevant populations, rather than specific recommendations which only suit particular groups. The *ad hoc* Group proposed amendments to the text in line with the position explained in the general considerations.

The *ad hoc* Group also considered it was not necessary to provide a rigid definition of ‘internal’ and ‘external’ biosecurity. These concepts were used as a way to organise the presentation of the measures in the text, and sometimes there could be a different way of interpretation for some of them, notable depending on the context or population in consideration.

The *ad hoc* Group agreed with a comment that point 1(a), referring to the introduction of animals, would also apply, as written, to the reintroduction of wildlife from captivity to the wild and the translocation of wildlife from one location to another.

Other comments forwarded by the Code Commission were addressed together with the amendments introduced to address the general considerations.

Article 4.X.9. Biosecurity plan

Comments forwarded by the Code Commission were addressed together with the general considerations.

The *ad hoc* Group added other amendments for clarity and consistency with amendments proposed in other articles.

Article 4.X.10. Training and awareness

In point 1, the *ad hoc* Group agreed with a comment to review the other items and added amendments in line with the points discussed in the general considerations.

In point 2, the *ad hoc* Group agreed with a comment that changes in risk impact the likelihood of infection and this can be caused by much more than seasonal change, and amended the text accordingly. The *ad hoc* Group added other amendments for clarity and consistency with amendments proposed in other articles.

Article 4.X.11. Evaluation and improvement

In point 1, the *ad hoc* Group agreed with a comment to include reference to monitoring technologies (e.g. GPS, RFID cameras, virtual fences, etc.) which can also assist in determining the implementation of biosecurity.

In point 2, the *ad hoc* Group did not agree with a comment to include a specific example of ‘veterinarians’ as an independent party. The *ad hoc* Group recognized that Veterinary practitioners are well suited for this evaluation, but considered that the example added no value while risking limiting the scope. Nevertheless, the *ad hoc* Group amended the text to clarify that this should be in accordance with policies and regulations, in line with the text of article 4.X.5. Roles and responsibilities.

The *ad hoc* Group added other amendments to address the general considerations and for consistency with amendments proposed in other articles.

5. Glossary definitions

5.1. ‘Biosecurity’, ‘Biosecurity plan’ and ‘Swill’

The *ad hoc* Group reviewed the considerations of the Code Commission on the comments received on the revised and proposed new Glossary definitions circulated in the September 2023 Code Commission meeting report.

The *ad hoc* Group considered that no additional amendment was needed as a consequence of the comments received on or the amendments proposed to Chapter 4.X.

5.2. Pathogenic agent

Following the request of the Code Commission, the *ad hoc* Group discussed the development of a definition for the term ‘pathogenic agent’ to be included in the Glossary of the *Terrestrial Code*.

The *ad hoc* Group considered the discussion in the Code Commission in February 2023 that led to this request, other existing definitions in the *Terrestrial Code* and the *Terrestrial Manual* as well as the definition for ‘pathogenic agent’ in the Glossary of the *Aquatic Code*.

In considering the use of the terms in the *Terrestrial Code*, notably in the context of Chapters 1.1 and 1.2., the *ad hoc* Group agreed that the definition should ensure the adequate coverage of all 'agents' that are the cause or contribute to the development of WOAH listed diseases but should not be limited to only those. Noting the diverse nature of pathogenic agents of WOAH listed disease, which include viruses, bacteria, prions and insects, the *ad hoc* Group proposed to use the term 'biological agent' to refer to this broad spectrum within the proposed definition. Nonetheless, the *ad hoc* Group noted that this may not be consistent with the definition for this term in the *Terrestrial Manual*, and highlighted that this would have to be considered by the Code Commission, and potentially discussed with the Biological Standards Commission.

The *ad hoc* Group drafted a proposed definition for the term 'pathogenic agent' to be included in the Glossary of the *Terrestrial Code*.

5.3. Disinfection

Following the request of the Code Commission, the *ad hoc* Group discussed the need to revise the *Terrestrial Code* Glossary definition for 'disinfection'.

The *ad hoc* Group considered that the current Glossary definition was unnecessarily detailed, comprising some recommendations on how the act of disinfecting should be done.

The *ad hoc* Group drafted a proposed revised definition aiming for a simple and clear definition of the term for the purposes of the *Terrestrial Code*. Nevertheless, the *ad hoc* Group acknowledged the importance of providing further recommendations on disinfection in a dedicated chapter and stressed the need to review current Chapter 4.14.

5.4. Isolation

The Secretariat informed the *ad hoc* Group that, in the context of the revision of current chapters 5.4 to 5.7. of the *Terrestrial Code* the Code Commission had proposed the development of a Glossary definition for 'isolation'. The Secretariat noted that this task was initially requested by the *ad hoc* Group responsible for that work but considering the connection with the work of this *ad hoc* Group, its opinion was sought to contribute to the process of drafting such a definition.

6. Code Commission request to consider draft new Article 1.6.4.

Following the request of the Code Commission, the *ad hoc* Group considered an ongoing work by the Code Commission to develop a new Article 1.6.4. in Chapter 1.6. of the *Terrestrial Code*, to address specific situations in which the occurrence of a disease, or the management of pathogenic may not affect the animal health status of a country.

The *ad hoc* Group discussed a draft text being prepared by the Code Commission and provided several points for the Commission's consideration.

7. Initial considerations for a potential revision of Chapter 4.14. 'General Recommendations on Disinfection and Disinsection'

The Secretariat informed the *ad hoc* Group that the revision of Chapter 4.14. 'General Recommendations on Disinfection and Disinsection' was included in the Code Commission work programme and that the Commission had agreed not to launch that work until progressing the development of a new Chapter on biosecurity. Noting the positive progress of the draft Chapter, the Secretariat invited the *ad hoc* Group to provide their initial views on potential aspects that could be taken into consideration for a potential future revision of Chapter 4.14.

The *ad hoc* Group reviewed the current Chapter 4.14. 'General Recommendations on Disinfection and Disinsection' and highlighted the following points:

- The chapter was first adopted in 1976 and was most recently updated in 2014.
- The objective of the chapter is unclear as well as its scope and focus. The content does not seem to reflect current practices. It does not seem appropriate to include disease-specific recommendations in a horizontal chapter. The Chapter could provide general principles and leave the specificities to be dealt with either in the disease-specific chapters or in additional guidance documents outside the *Terrestrial Code*.

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- Current regulation in the field seems to focus rather on the regulation of product registration and management. There is little in terms of how disinfection should be taken into account for disease prevention and control programmes. Such recommendation would be a useful input to Veterinary Authorities, but also for any actors involved in the development and implementation of those programmes.
 - General principles on 'disinfection' could cover, for example, recommendations for the selection and validation of the methods and products to apply, describe the critical steps for implementation, for measuring the quality and the results, for ensuring the relevance of the method to the pathogenic agent of concern, for standardising terminology across the *Terrestrial Code* and to facilitate understanding among different actors.
 - The title of the Chapter includes 'disinsection' but the content does not provide recommendations regarding the control or elimination of insects. 'Disinsection' implies a whole different concept, with different principles, methodologies, outcomes and means for evaluation. Also, this should cover all relevant arthropods in the *Terrestrial Code*, and their elimination, control and prevention should be duly considered in the context these measures would play for vector-borne diseases. Taking this into consideration, the *ad hoc* Group considered that this should be excluded from the scope of the Chapter and dealt with independently.
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Annex 1. Agenda

MEETING OF THE *AD HOC* GROUP ON BIOSECURITY FOR TERRESTRIAL ANIMALS

Paris, 26-28 March 2024

1. Welcome from DDG-ISS
 2. Adoption of the Agenda
 3. Review recommendations for the Biosecurity Chapter from the Code Commission February 2024
 4. Review the draft text of the Chapter article by article, including consideration of comments received
 5. Review recommendations and comments on Glossary terms
 6. Code Commission request to create or revise 2 Glossary definitions (pathogenic agent and disinfection)
 7. Code Commission request to review and comment on new draft Article 1.6.4.
 8. Code Commission request for *ad hoc* Group to review and comment on potential improvements to Chapter 4.14 'General Recommendations on Disinfection and Disinsection'
 9. Any other business
 10. Next steps, next meeting
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Annex 2. List of Participants

MEETING OF THE *AD HOC* GROUP ON BIOSECURITY FOR TERRESTRIAL ANIMALS

Paris, 26-28 March 2024

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