

Preface

World Organisation for Animal Health: one hundred years at the service of animal health

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In 1920, a devastating epizootic of Rinderpest hit Europe originating from the port of Antwerp by transit of inapparently infected zebus from Asia to South America [1]. Although this infection had been known for a long time and animal disease legislation to control and eliminate outbreaks had been initiated in many countries by the end of the 19th century, its epizootic re-appearance was a wake-up call. So, four years later, 28 countries signed an International Agreement on notification of specifically listed animal infectious diseases and to set standards allowing safer trade in animals. Now, one hundred years later, Rinderpest has been eradicated in a heroic effort masterminded by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This striking success was announced in 2011.

Despite this achievement, transboundary animal infectious diseases continue to be a challenge around the globe highlighting that WOA's initial mandate is still highly relevant. This applies not only to peste des petits ruminants, African swine fever, foot and mouth disease and high pathogenicity avian influenza, but also to zoonotic infections with a strong human component such as rabies.

However, WOA's mandate has broadened significantly over the last decades, logically following the earlier development of the Organisation. The 'silent pandemic' of antimicrobial resistance also affects domestic and wild animals impacting their health. Animal welfare goes beyond the classical definition of 'health', i.e. the absence of disease, and entails overall well-being that includes aspects linked to animal behaviour and the environment. This also applies to wildlife, which simultaneously represents major natural reservoirs for infectious agents that are potentially harmful for animals and humans, but is also affected by infectious diseases resulting in population decline and

potential loss of biodiversity. Lastly, while terrestrial animals were central at the origin of WOA, the increase in aquaculture and the acceptance of aquatic animals as a highly relevant contribution to food security brought forward the requirement for international standards in this sector, which WOA took up as a major focus area.

All these important topics are covered in this centenary special edition of the *Scientific and Technical Review*, with a pair of articles per topic: the first article has a 'looking back, looking forward' format and is complemented by a second in-depth scientific 'state of the field' article on the current situation and challenges. The *Review* was first published in March 1982 as a platform to present important information on topics related to WOA's mandate [2]. Thus, it is an appropriate place to also commemorate WOA's centenary. One hundred years after its founding, the Organisation's activities are still essential in setting standards in animal health and beyond. As a major champion of the One Health approach that is based on the intrinsic linkage between human, animal and environmental (ecosystem) health [3] – and in cooperation with its Quadripartite partners: the World Health Organization, FAO and the United Nations Environment Programme – WOA enters the next century of its existence proud of its past successes, but also ready to take on the many challenges that lie ahead.

References

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