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Report on the work of the European Commission for the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (EuFMD)

Executive summary

The European Commission for the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (EuFMD) delivers an extensive programme of activities, supporting foot-and-mouth disease emergency preparedness, response and control in its 39 member nations and in 20 priority European neighbourhood countries. EuFMD activities also support global foot-and-mouth disease control. The Commission's Phase V work programme (2019–2023) was successfully completed, at the end of September 2023. A new strategy for 2023–2027 (“Move FAST – GET prepared”) was adopted by EuFMD member nations, and a grant agreement was finalized with the European Commission for the Phase VI work programme to deliver on this strategy.

In 2024, the EuFMD marks 70 years since its foundation. The Commission has evolved in the years since 1954, focusing on various activities to meet changing circumstances and the changing needs of member nations. In recent years, the EuFMD has greatly extended the breadth and depth of its activities in member nations, across neighbouring countries and more widely in support of global foot-and-mouth disease control. However, it would now be timely to ask what role EuFMD should play in the future – what are its unique selling points and where it adds most value – and plan accordingly. Therefore, the EuFMD Executive Committee has agreed to a comprehensive review of EuFMD activities, and a consultation with significant EuFMD stakeholders is being undertaken to inform the development of a long-term strategy for the Commission and its Secretariat.

Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to review this summary report of EuFMD's activities and to encourage Members to provide inputs into the development of a long-term strategy for the Commission, by providing feedback to a questionnaire survey of EuFMD member nations and neighbouring countries.

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

Queries on the content of this document may be addressed to:

ERC Secretariat

ERC-ECA-Secretariat@fao.org

I. Introduction

1. The European Commission for the Control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (EuFMD) was established in 1954 as an Article XIV Body.¹ The Commission comprises 39 member nations,² which meet in the General Session every two years. It is a specialized regional commission, with its primary mandate being to advise, coordinate and support the activities of its member nations in the control of foot-and-mouth disease. EuFMD member nations have agreed to a Constitution, Rules of Procedure and Financial Regulations,³ which provide the Commission with its mandate and define its structures, governance, means of funding and *modus operandi*.

2. The EuFMD has evolved over 70 years since it was established to meet changing circumstances across the continent and the changing needs of an ever-increasing membership. The history of the Commission might be considered as comprising three distinct periods:

- a. **1954 to 1989:** The Commission was established in post-war Europe, when frequent and severe foot-and-mouth disease outbreaks were a significant impediment to intensive livestock production. One of the key roles of the EuFMD during this period was to coordinate mass annual vaccination campaigns across continental Europe. This concerted effort was ultimately successful in allowing most member countries to become free of foot-and-mouth disease.
- b. **1990 to 2010:** This period started with many Members questioning the need to retain an active commission with a permanent secretariat at FAO, now that most of Europe had achieved the status of foot-and-mouth disease-free without vaccination (as those member countries that were also members of the European Community discontinued foot-and-mouth disease vaccination). However, along with the ever-present risk of incursion from neighbouring regions – where foot-and-mouth disease was still endemic (into a population that was now becoming immunologically naïve) – the continuing evolution of new viral strains and political instability in the Balkans and Eastern Europe were considered sufficient reasons to retain a technical secretariat and to redefine the priorities of the EuFMD. The Commission would now focus on enhancing surveillance in at-risk areas and emergency preparedness of foot-and-mouth disease-free member countries.
- c. **2010 to present:** The Commission expanded the breadth and depth of its foot-and-mouth disease control activities, with a commensurate increase in the financial and human resources of the Secretariat (due to successive grant agreements with the European Commission). This included capacity building and enhanced emergency preparedness in members and neighbouring countries through the provision of real-time training and virtual learning courses, and the development and deployment of tools and systems to assist veterinary services in assessing and managing risk. In addition, the EuFMD made a substantial contribution to global foot-and-mouth disease control in collaboration with other business

¹ An Article XIV Body is a body operating within the FAO legal and administrative structure as per Article XIV of the FAO Constitution.

² The 39 member nations of the EuFMD are Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

³ For more information, please visit <https://www.fao.org/eufmd/who-we-are/constitution/en/>.

units in FAO and with other international organizations, such as the World Organisation for Animal Health. This culminated in member nations deciding to revise the Constitution of the EuFMD in 2022, extending the mandate of the Commission to include the control of other prioritized transboundary animal diseases in member nations. These so-called FAST diseases⁴ are *la peste des petits ruminants*, rinderpest, lumpy skin disease, sheep pox, goat pox and Rift Valley fever.

II. The structures and governance of the EuFMD

3. The structures and governance of the Commission are graphically illustrated in Figure 1.

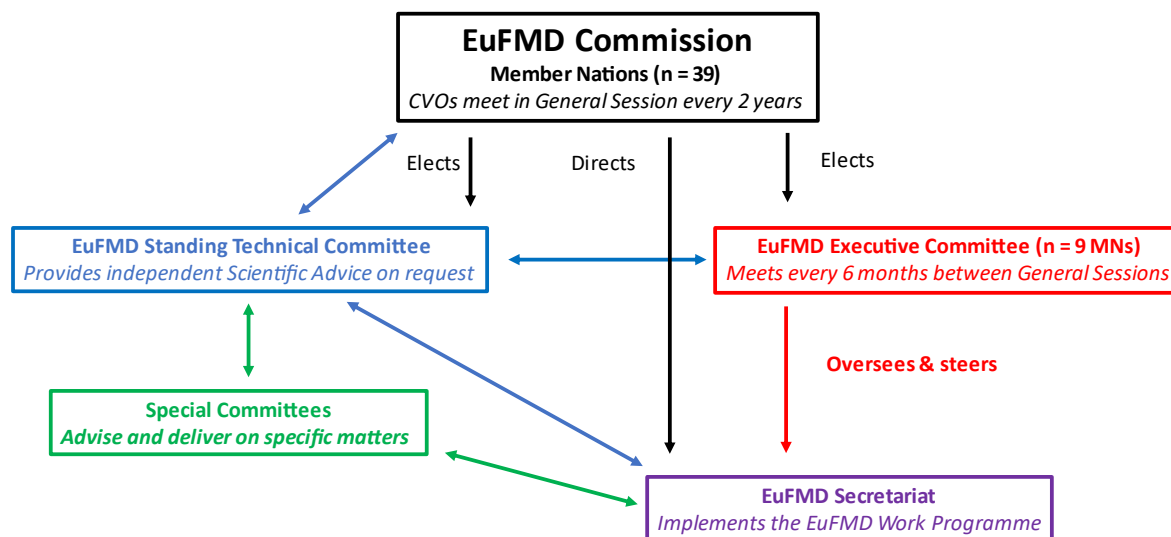


Figure 1: A graphical illustration of the structures and governance of EuFMD

General Sessions of the EuFMD

4. The Commission's member nations meet in the General Session every two years. Most of the delegates are the chief veterinary officers of their respective countries. At the General Session, member nations review the activities of the previous biennium, agree on a workplan and budget for the next biennium, and elect members of the Executive Committee and the Standing Technical Committee.

Executive Committee

5. The Executive Committee, which comprises the delegates of nine EuFMD member nations, meets every six months between General Sessions to guide and oversee the implementation of the workplan. The 102nd Session of the Executive Committee was held on 28 September 2023 in virtual modality. The next (103rd) Session on 12 March 2024 will also be held virtually; however, the 104th Session will be held in person from 26 to 27 September 2024 at the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, in Budapest. FAO is an observer at EuFMD General Sessions and Executive Committee meetings, affording the Organization the opportunity to review the Commission's workplans and ensure synergies and complementarities with its core programmes, such as the Emergency Prevention System for Animal Health,⁵ which contribute to similar goals.

⁴ The term "FAST diseases" is an initialism representing foot-and-mouth disease and similar transboundary animal diseases.

⁵ For more information on the Emergency Prevention System for Animal Health (EMPRES-AH), please visit [https://www.fao.org/animal-health/our-programmes/emergency-prevention-system-for-animal-health-\(empres-ah\)/en](https://www.fao.org/animal-health/our-programmes/emergency-prevention-system-for-animal-health-(empres-ah)/en).

Standing Technical Committee

6. The Standing Technical Committee, which comprises six scientific experts from EuFMD member nations, provides independent scientific advice on request. The Committee met in closed sessions on 20 September 2023 and on 11 January 2024, and it will host its biennial Open Session, a global gathering of foot-and-mouth disease research scientists, in Alcalá de Henares (Madrid, Spain) from 29 to 31 October 2024. The theme of the Open Session in 2024 is on how to mitigate livestock disease risks in a changing world (from megatrends to microlearning). The Session will provide a forum for new ideas, innovation, research and findings on horizon scanning, risk perception and assessment, big data and policies. The aim is to provide a platform for all to share knowledge and experiences and explore together the broader implications of these diseases, including their impacts on global food security and the environment. This Open Session will be especially important this year, as the EuFMD celebrates its seventieth anniversary (1954–2024). Further information on the EuFMD Open Session and the details on how to register are available online.⁶

Special committees

7. There is a provision in the EuFMD Constitution for special committees to be established to deal with specific topics. Currently, there are four in operation: the Special Committee on Biorisk Management;⁷ the Standing Committee on Prequalification of Vaccines against FAST diseases;⁸ the Special Committee on Risk Monitoring, Integrated Surveillance and Applied Research⁹ and the TOM Steering Committee.¹⁰

Secretariat

8. The EuFMD Secretariat, based at FAO headquarters in Rome, is tasked with implementing the workplan of the Commission. The Secretariat is currently staffed by three professionals on fixed-term, annually renewable contracts – the Executive Secretary, Deputy Executive Secretary and Programme Officer at P5, P4 and P2 levels, respectively – and more than 50 consultants hired on various types of temporary contracts, with various durations.

III. Relevant outcomes of the 45th General Session of EuFMD, 4-5 May 2023, Rome, Italy

9. The Report of 45th General Session of the EuFMD is available online.¹¹ At the meeting, EuFMD member nations acknowledged the continuing financial support of the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety of the European Commission through the Phase V¹² work programme (2019-2023) and for the new Phase VI work programme (2023–2027). They recognized the progress in implementing all programme activities and the collaboration with the World Organisation for Animal Health and FAO on improving preparedness, reducing risk and improving control of

⁶ For more information or to register your interest for OS24, please visit https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=aMQ6Ffir0ESB_dnbFeOvIrlj0VbBGh7JLkIESnEg8B7JU_M0tPMVI3N0hNUEE1REdZM0xKRINRUjVBUC4u.

⁷ For more information on the Special Committee on Biorisk Management (SCBRM), please visit <https://www.fao.org/eufmd/who-we-are/structure/biorisk-management-committee/en/>.

⁸ For more information on the Standing Committee on Prequalification of Vaccines against FAST diseases (SCPQV), please visit <https://www.fao.org/eufmd/who-we-are/structure/scpqv/en/>.

⁹ For more information on the Special Committee on Risk Monitoring, Integrated Surveillance and Applied Research (SCRISAR), please visit <https://www.fao.org/eufmd/who-we-are/structure/scrisar/en/>.

¹⁰ For more information on the TOM Steering Committee (SCTOM), please visit <https://www.fao.org/eufmd/who-we-are/structure/steering-committee-tom-sctom/en/>. TOM is a capacity-development support tool that allows countries to monitor the delivery of competency-based education for veterinarians and similar roles.

¹¹ The report is available at <https://www.fao.org/eufmd/meetings-and-events/detail/en/c/1605784/>.

¹² The Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) of the European Commission has supported the EuFMD work programme by successive grant (contribution) agreements since 2005; agreements have been made for periods of two to four years, referred to as phases, from Phase I (beginning in 2005) through to Phase V (2019–2023, just completed) and Phase VI (2023–2027, just commencing).

foot-and-mouth disease and similar transboundary animal diseases. They agreed on the “Move FAST – GET prepared” strategy for 2023–2027 and the need to further improve the support provided to EuFMD member nations through initiatives aimed at enhancing capacity to respond to the incursion of foot-and-mouth disease and similar transboundary animal diseases, with reference to the real-time training programme and specific programmes in areas of EuFMD member nations considered to be at highest risk (i.e. the Balkans).

10. Member nations also agreed with a proposal for a new system to allocate places on training courses. The importance of the Transboundary High-Risk Area Coordinated Epidemio-surveillance Programme (THRACE) was highlighted, as it enhances both the confidence of freedom from foot-and-mouth disease and early detection of FAST diseases. Member nations encouraged further development and adaptation to FAST diseases of EuFMD tools,¹³ and field studies and technical networks to assist in the improvement of emergency preparedness and risk monitoring and to regularly assess the level of uptake and impact.

11. It was agreed that a specific programme be developed and implemented to assist simulation exercises and other initiatives aimed at assessing the level of preparedness of veterinary services and laboratories. In addition, member nations were supportive of specific initiatives to improve the diagnostic capacities of national laboratories, including the ability to quickly scale up diagnostics and other resources during emergencies. They also encouraged further development of capacity for risk-based surveillance in high-risk areas of Europe and neighbouring countries to improve early warning related to FAST diseases and the further development and application of systems to facilitate timely sharing of risk information among countries.

12. While it was noted that foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) remains the core priority of the Commission, member nations agreed with respect to other FAST diseases to focus on Rift Valley fever, sheep pox and goat pox over the next biennium. This was in consideration of their impact on animal and human health, the level of preparedness of EuFMD member nations and the lack of other international initiatives to control these diseases.

13. Member nations agreed with continuing the work on the prequalification of FAST disease vaccines aimed at improving their quality, safety and efficacy. Member nations endorsed continued support for global FMD surveillance and regular reporting of new threats for Europe and neighbouring regions, and agreed that this approach to surveillance and laboratory networks be applied to other FAST diseases.

14. The EuFMD will continue to provide support to the Global FMD Control Strategy and to the Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases FMD Working Group, providing technical assistance and making skills, resources and tools available to support countries in their advancement along the progressive control pathway for FMD.

IV. The work of the EuFMD

The work of the Commission and the food systems approach

15. FMD is a significant threat to food systems, as it leads to severe economic losses, reduces livestock productivity, and leads to trade restrictions and market disruptions. The EuFMD’s efforts to control and eradicate FMD contribute to the resilience and sustainability of food systems by reducing the risk of disease outbreaks. The EuFMD aims to protect livestock health and welfare, promote food security and stability, and support the livelihoods of farmers and other stakeholders in the livestock sector.

16. EuFMD activities contribute to the achievement of seven Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 9, SDG 12 and SDG 17 – and are therefore closely aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹⁴ The EuFMD focuses on: protecting

¹³ The tools are the GET Prepared Wall, the EuFMDiS model, the Risk Monitoring Tool and the Antigen Priority Tool (PRAGMATIST)

¹⁴ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is available online at <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> .

livestock through risk monitoring and mitigation; improving the resilience of the livestock sector to FAST diseases with the implementation of new tools and resources; implementing emergency management and capacity development; promoting gender equality and empowering women in agriculture and rural development; sustaining the control of FAST diseases through tailored support to countries, prioritization and investment; promoting innovation in animal disease control and eradication; and strengthening global disease control through partnerships.

17. The vision of the EuFMD is to ensure that Europe is safe from FAST animal diseases. The main priorities focus on maintaining, rapidly regaining or achieving freedom from FAST diseases in EuFMD member nations; ensuring early warning, early detection and rapid response; reducing the risks of FAST diseases in neighbouring countries; and sustaining the Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases and global intelligence on the other FAST disease viruses.

18. The Regional Priority areas are closely linked to the overarching priorities of the EuFMD:

- a. The mission of the EuFMD is to **maintain, rapidly regain or achieve freedom** from foot-and-mouth and similar transboundary animal diseases in EuFMD member nations, ensuring animal health, sustainable livestock production and safe trade.
- b. The EuFMD's **risk reduction programme** in the European neighbourhood contributes to reducing the risk of FAST disease introduction into Europe and ensure a **risk-based approach** in surveillance and control activities.
- c. The EuFMD works with **national authorities and stakeholders** to develop **tailored** approaches for improving preparedness and control of FAST diseases.

EuFMD Work Programme 2019–2023 (Phase V)

19. At the core of the EuFMD's work programme for 2019–2023 was the three pillars strategy.¹⁵ **Pillar I** focused on improving preparedness for the management of FAST crises by Members and across Europe as a whole. **Pillar II** focused on reduced risk to Members from the FAST disease situation in the European neighbourhood. **Pillar III** focused on sustaining and enhancing progress in the rollout of the Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases strategy for the control of FMD and ensuring the security of supply of effective FMD vaccines.

20. An independent evaluation of the technical delivery of this programme was undertaken during September 2023, focused on four categories of activity: a) capacity development and emergency preparedness of member nations for FAST diseases; b) tools and systems to support the emergency preparedness and response capacities of member nations; c) the contribution of the EuFMD to risk reduction in neighbouring countries; and d) the contribution of the EuFMD to the global control of FMD.

21. The evaluators found the activities of the commission to be highly relevant to EuFMD member nations, neighbouring countries, the European Commission and FAO. The EuFMD is widely recognized and well respected in the prevention, surveillance and control of FMD, and it is now clear that this capability could also support the control of other FAST diseases. They reported that the EuFMD applies a tailored approach to training, decision-support tools, risk-reduction exercises and support for the global FMD control strategy, which contributes to protecting animal and public health and supporting the livestock industry – improving health, increasing productivity and facilitating trade.

EuFMD Work Programme 2023–2027 (Phase VI)

22. The EuFMD Strategic Plan (“Move FAST – GET Prepared 2023–2027”) closely aligns with FAO's work on Sustainable livestock transformation,¹⁶ which in turn is at the interface of the *four*

¹⁵ The EuFMD Phase V Workplans are available at <https://www.fao.org/3/ca7361en/ca7361en.pdf>.

¹⁶ For more information on sustainable livestock transformation, please visit <https://www.fao.org/3/cc7474en/cc7474en.pdf>.

betters of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31:¹⁷ *better production, better nutrition, a better environment* and a *better life*, leaving no one behind. Move FAST is specifically aimed at better production in livestock systems, a fundamental aspiration underpinning the achievement of the other three *betters*. The new strategy for EuFMD also is aligned with FAO’s One Health Programme Priority Area.¹⁸ It builds on the results of the 2019–2023 work programme and has three focus objectives: a) to protect livestock from FAST disease introduction and spread in EuFMD member nations and 20 neighbouring countries¹⁹ (which are considered as having a high risk of FMD, as a result of their proximity to FMD and similar transboundary animal disease risk sources); b) to ensure adequate response to FAST diseases in EuFMD member nations plus Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, given that both of these countries have land borders with EuFMD member nations and are recognized as having a high risk of FMD; and c) to sustain global FMD control in countries that are priorities for progressive control pathway for FMD progress, as indicated in the Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases strategy, with a specific reference and priority to at-risk countries in Europe.

23. These will be delivered through seven action areas to ensure that Europe is safe from the daily threat of FAST diseases: i) risk monitoring; ii) risk mitigation; iii) capacity development; iv) tools and resources; v) global FMD control; vi) FAST control; and vii) vaccine security.

24. The overall impact of the work programme will be strengthened, and better performing national and international FAST disease control programmes will be integrated into FAO’s One Health Programme Priority Area work and national One Health systems. The overall outcome of the programme is expected to be a lower FAST disease risk and better preparedness of EuFMD member nations, thereby ensuring increased safety from FAST diseases in Europe. Overall, the programme is expected to maintain an effective risk monitoring capability; ensure a good level of preparedness for and prevention of FAST incursion; reinforce early warning systems in FAST disease risk areas within EuFMD member nations and other regions; improve the efficiency and effectiveness of surveillance and control programmes; and enhance vaccine security through multistakeholder platform collaborations.

25. The EuFMD response to the recent upsurge in the number of FMD outbreaks in North Africa (and of the incursion of the foot-and-mouth disease serotype SAT2 virus into this region) provides a good illustration of how the EuFMD supports neighbouring countries in reducing the risk to its member nations. The EuFMD is: a) advising veterinary services in the affected countries; b) facilitating a sample shipment for early diagnosis and virus typing; c) providing diagnostic test kits to national laboratories; d) convening a meeting of epidemiological focal points from the affected countries on the regional platform for FAST disease risk information sharing; and e) creating a social platform channel²⁰ linking to the Emergency Toolbox.

26. Funding for the activities of the commission for the period 2023–2027 comprises approximately EUR 700 000 per year from the contributions of EuFMD member nations (the administrative budget) and EUR 1.8 million per year from the Phase VI grant agreement with the European Commission.

Developing a long-term strategy for the EuFMD

27. In some respects, the EuFMD’s success in the present creates its own challenges for the future. The Secretariat, with significant support from the European Commission, expanded rapidly

¹⁷ The Strategic Framework 2022–31 is available at <https://www.fao.org/strategic-framework/en>.

¹⁸ For more information on the One Health Programme Priority Area, please visit <https://www.fao.org/one-health/background/one-health-programme-priority-area/en/>.

¹⁹ The countries that share land borders with EuFMD members are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syrian Arab Republic. Non-European Union members of the Mediterranean Animal Health Network (REMESA) are Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. Countries significant for the epidemic spread of FAST diseases to the above countries are Afghanistan, Mali, Pakistan and Sudan.

²⁰ An invitation to the EuFMD WhatsApp channel is available at <https://www.whatsapp.com/channel/0029VaHkPku2Jl8DJFVfCw3r>.

over the past four years to deliver an ever-increasing range of services for EuFMD member nations and the neighbourhood, while continuing to provide significant input into global disease control efforts. However, the EuFMD now faces a challenge, as the European Commission funding available for Phase VI (2023–2027) is about two-thirds of that granted for Phase V (2019–2023), which will necessarily mean a period of consolidation and a need to reprioritize activities and reallocate resources accordingly. Another challenge for the EuFMD, and specifically the Secretariat, is to redefine its relationship with FAO in the context of the EuFMD’s broader mandate and the restructuring of its host division.

28. Given these uncertainties, challenges and opportunities, it would be timely to consider a long-term strategic vision – extending beyond biennial cycles and four-year grant agreement periods – and provide a road map for how the EuFMD might develop in a more sustainable manner over the next decade. This vision should consider the unique selling points of the EuFMD, including where it most adds value within FAO and with other organizations focused on animal health. It should provide clarity on roles and responsibilities, especially regarding the global aspects of the EuFMD’s outreach, avoiding duplication of efforts but playing to its particular strengths and complementing the activities of and collaborating effectively with other actors.