



**OFFLU Steering and Executive Committee meeting (by zoom)
8 November 2021**

Participants:

Ian Brown, David Swayne, Les Sims, Jiming Chen, Mia Torchetti, Nicola Lewis, Frank Wong, Yanbing Li, Gounalan Pavade, Serin Shin, Lidewij Wiersma

Welcome and Introduction (Ian Brown, SC Chairman)

Ian Brown, the Chairman of the Steering Committee opened the meeting.

1. OFFLU committee current status (Ian)

	Start date	First term end	Second term end
SC members :			
Ian Brown	8 October 2018	7 October 2021	7 October 2024
David Swayne	2 October 2019	1 October 2022	
Les Sims	9 November 2020	8 November 2023	
Jiming Chen	20 January 2021	19 January 2024	
EC members :			
Mia Torchetti	18 October 2019	17 October 2022	
Nicola Lewis	8 Dec 2015	7 Dec 2018	7 Dec 2021
Frank Wong	13 October 2019	12 October 2022	
Yanbing Li	18 June 2021	17 June 2024	

Prof Ian Brown first term in the Steering Committee ended on 7 October 2021 and he conveyed his agreement to continue as the Chairman of the OFFLU Steering Committee for the second term. The parent organisations OIE and FAO accepted and renewed his term until 7 October 2024 as per the OFFLU modus operandi.

Dr Nicola Lewis full term in the Executive Committee is due to complete on 7 December 2021. She represents swine influenza in the Executive Committee. The Committee thanked Dr Nicola Lewis for the support and technical expertise provided for the past six years in the Executive Committee and look forward to receiving her expertise as an OFFLU expert.

Action: The Steering Committee which has the authority to find her replacement will be discussing offline to find a suitable expert.

2. OFFLU Scientist update (Lidewij)

FAO hired Dr Amelia Coggon as an interim consultant to support the September 2021 and February 2022 VCM activities. A vacancy announcement is to be launched soon to fill in the OFFLU Scientist role for more substantially assistance to the network.

Action: The ToR of the OFFLU Scientist will be circulated to the Committee for comments on the job description (Lidewij)

3. OFFLU technical activities update:

Avian influenza technical activity (Frank):

H9N2 nomenclature: The Italy reference lab IZSve which is leading the activity related with the definition of a phylogeny-based classification of H9 viruses has completed the task. All the analyses were implemented in a joined effort with Justin Bahl and his team. A draft report is being prepared which will be shared with the Committee.

Action: It was suggested to have a core small analytical nomenclature review consisting of experts from geographical representation who are routinely involved in H9 to first review the draft report to check the inclusivity of existing naming systems and linkage before sharing it with the committee. The Committee also suggested to derive the experiences from the H5, swine influenza and Newcastle disease nomenclature review process.

OFFLU proficiency testing: The ACDP, Australia invited 14 labs for the 2021 OFFLU proficiency testing and 11 labs enrolled. Three laboratories including a couple of new OIE Reference labs on avian influenza did not participate in the exercise. The current round closed on 29 October 2021 for submission of results and a few laboratories were given extension for further two weeks. ACDP will analyse the results and share the results in early January 2022 with the Committee.

Action: An external independent review of one page summary will be appended to the report providing high level interpretation considering various contexts. OIE and FAO focal points to follow up with a letter from parent organisations to the concerned three laboratories copying the Delegate of the country to express disappointment on the opportunity to participate with the OFFLU network for proficiency testing as a Reference Centre.

WHO working group on diagnostic assays: OFFLU used to attend the WHO working group on diagnostic assays once every two years which discusses the efficacy of diagnostic assays as well as characterization for flu viruses. OFFLU conducted a survey among the veterinary labs on this subject five years back. Now it is time to do another survey approaching the experts in terms of sequencing and NGS capability across the network.

Action: A survey template to be prepared and circulated (Frank and Isabella)

OFFLU- WHO VCM activity (Nicola): The September 2021 VCM reports of OFFLU was published on the website. The VCM activity is rapidly turning into One Health zoonotic activity for the network. It was decided to use the swine influenza data from the VCM as part of a written publication and in this regard the swine influenza contributors to the VCM were approached for their consent to use the data. This will not duplicate the experts own efforts in publishing the data separately. Amelia and Nicola have started drafting the paper and will consult USDA colleagues and then with wider group before submitting for publication.

Action: Drafting of OFFLU swine influenza VCM publication (Nicola, Amelia).

Explore also with avian influenza experts if the outputs from the avian VCM data can be further analysed for publications with full acknowledgements and contributions A document containing various tick boxes for use of the submitted data can be asked to the submitters to get their consent and what are all the things they agree to smooth the process of publication (Nicola, Ian, Les).

OFFLU use of VCM data for assessment of antigenic/genetic variants (Nicola, Les):

OFFLU had several conversations on this topic in the past and it's time now to make a framework to put this activity in pipeline. The VCM antigenic characterization is already going on for public health and this needs to be expanded to cover the poultry following the example of swine. H5 and H9 are the priority. There is a lot of interest recently for vaccination and so it is right time to pilot this activity.

Action: To start with in the short term OFFLU can consider preparing a short report from the VCM reports highlighting the HI tables with associated genetic analysis (Nicola, Ian, Les).

Swine influenza technical activity (Nicola):

OFFLU Swine influenza experts contributed recent data to the WHO VCM September 2021 meeting .

Equine influenza technical activity (Nicola):

The expert panel on equine influenza met in 2021 to update the vaccine recommendations.

OFFLU Influenza A cleavage site document (David) :

The OFFLU cleavage site document referenced in the OIE Terrestrial Manual chapter of AI is updated every year. The document is currently being updated to account for the new sequences associated with HPAI in 2020 – 2021 and will be circulated to all reference labs for consent before publishing.

Action: To post the updated agreed version of the OFFLU Influenza A cleavage site document on website

OFFLU epidemiology technical activity (Lidewij):

The two initiatives of this activity in pipeline were held up due to Covid-19. One on 'FAO HPAI surveillance guidelines which will be reviewed by selected members of this group. Second for a paper on 'Avian influenza, a continuing threat' which will be published in FAO EMPRESi bulletin.

Action: Follow up on these two publications with the group (Lidewij)

OFFLU wild bird technical activity (Gounalan): Considering the high number of wild bird AI events, a call was organized for discussing the current epidemiological and molecular information. Avian and wild bird experts from all the regions of the world joined this call to provide a global situation update.

https://www.offlu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/OFFLU-call_Nov2021.pdf

Action: To have regular calls to maintain the momentum.

OFFLU socio-economics technical activity (Gounalan)

Action: Need follow up with Dr Jonathan Rushton on GBADs and impact of H9N2 to human and animal health.

OFFLU network SWOT analysis (Gounalan):

Action: OFFLU network evaluation survey to be presented in the next meeting.

4. OFFLU statement on avian influenza (Ian Brown)

OFFLU experts were circulated with a statement document summarizing what is happening globally in terms of epidemiological and molecular findings at high level.

Action: Finalise the document quickly with comments from key experts and post it on the website

5. International Alliance for Biological Standardization (<https://www.iabs.org/>) meeting on AI vaccination (David Swayne/Les Sims)

The committee was updated on the proposal of IABS meeting on AI vaccination which is being currently discussed and scheduled to take place in later part of 2022 at OIE Headquarters. Many of the OFFLU experts are serving in the scientific committee and regular calls are being arranged to provide inputs in finalizing the programme.

5. Criteria for adding OFFLU contributors

The OFFLU Secretariat received a request from an expert in Europe expressing interest in joining the network.

Action: As per the advice of OFFLU committee, the Secretariat will follow up further to get more evidence and in which OFFLU technical activities the expert would be interested to join and provide expertise.

6. Next meeting

The next Steering and Executive Committee meeting will be scheduled during middle of January 2022 and the Secretariat will circulate a doodle to fix the date.