



OFFLU STEERING AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

11 January 2024 (13h – 15h Paris/Rome time)

Participants:

Ian Brown, David Swayne, Mia Torchetti, Frank Wong, Yanbing Li, Timm Harder, Gounalan Pavade, Amelia Coggon, Lidewij Wiersma, Madhur Dhingra, Gregorio Torres, Mariana Delgado

Apologies: Marcela Uhart

1. Update on OFFLU committees (status of term):

The Commission was presented with the status of term for the Steering and Executive Committee for information.

	Start date	First term end	Second term end
Steering Committee			
Ian Brown	8 October 2018	7 October 2021	7 October 2024
David Swayne	2 October 2019	1 October 2022	1 October 2025
Marcela Uhart	30 January 2024	29 January 2027	
Jiming Chen	20 January 2021	19 January 2024	19 January 2027
Executive Committee			
Frank Wong	13 October 2019	12 October 2022	12 October 2025
Mia Torchetti	18 October 2019	17 October 2022	17 October 2025
Timm Harder	17 February 2022	16 February 2025	
Yanbing Li	18 June 2021	17 June 2024	

Dr Marcela Uhart from Argentina joined the OFFLU Steering Committee as the new member replacing Dr Les Sims. Dr Jiming Chen, who completed the first term in the Steering Committee agreed to continue the second term.

Action: OFFLU Secretariat to convey the confirmation email to Dr Jiming Chen for the second term.

2. FAO update on OFFLU Scientist, PhD students involvement (Lidewij Wiersma)

Ms Amelia Coggon, the OFFLU Scientist is currently pursuing Ph.D and so will move down from full time to contribute to specific activities of OFFLU until a new recruitment is done to fill the OFFLU scientist. Until the recruitment process is done, FAO offered to involve recent post docs or PhD students as interns on a one-day-per-week basis for involvement in the technical activities. Their role would be to support the chairs and cochairs in smooth and active functioning of the technical activities by bringing relevant topics



for discussion and drafting documents so that the group can comment. At present, other than Lidewij and Amelia, other candidates that will be involved include Lorcan Carnegie for VCM activities, Lineke Begeman supporting the wildlife group, Fabien Filaire supporting the applied epidemiology group. And looking for candidates to assist the socio economic and swine influenza groups. Within the next months or so, steps would be taken to take on board all the candidates.

The Commission supported the idea of involving PhD students for OFFLU technical activities but stressed the importance of filling in the full time OFFLU Scientist as soon as possible.

Action: *FAO to finalize a number of PhD student's roles in the various technical activities and to fill in the full time OFFLU scientist.*

3. Update discussion on AIM project, where it is at and what are its short- and longer-term objectives going forwards for 2024 (Ian Brown)

AIM 1 is about just raising some standard international panels of sera and doing some bilateral assessment between APHA (UK) and the IZSve (Italy) labs. That was successfully completed and then moved to AIM 2 (Phase 1) which focused on cartography. Data was taken having normalized and standardized procedures which is not a straightforward tasks as small variabilities can have quite a big impact on cartography itself. With due diligence the cartography work was completed. The panel was very strongly focused on clade 2.3.4.4b which is at the moment of interest globally although other countries have been vaccinating against other clades.

The current status is that APHA have shared panels with ACDP (Frank Wong) and SEPRL (Erica Spackman) who are working through these panels to fill in gaps. Once that work is completed, the group will reconvene again to focus on other clades beyond 2.3.4.4.b as there are only small numbers of sera left in the panel at the moment. Based on ACDO and SEPRL results, further sera will be made and redistribute those panels. To build a much bigger map of the Gs/G lineage, a continuous review of the evolution of 2.3.4.4b clade viruses is needed which is causing a big challenge particularly if you the virus gets spill over from mammals to birds. APHA needs to produce a final report on Phase 1 before 30th April 2024. Already the first technical report on AIM project was published on OFFLU website in October 2023.

Phase 2 (AIM 3) work has started and contract signing with APHA is under progress. An interim report to be submitted in April 2024. Considering the delay in technical issues and administrative formalities, an extension to phase 2 projects will be asked. With phase 2 funding foreseen until August 2024, the Committee asked the parent organisations to look for further funds for sustainability of the project.

With the first technical report on AIM published, the Committee discussed the ways to evaluate the usefulness of information by the different stakeholders and feedback for improvement.



Two issues were raised at the meeting. One is that many stakeholders in different regions are not well informed about this AIM project and the project currently focuses on 2.3.4.4b which is not a big interest in some regions where other clades are also dealt with.

Action: *Start building other clades into the AIM project other than clade 2.3.4.4b as we move forward.*

To communicate on AIM project more actively through FAO/WOAH media channels and other ways including training courses, through survey to country offices and countries to check if the AIM project information is useful and its impact and feedback for improvement.

A webinar could be organized involving country representatives, private and veterinary pharmaceutical industries.

OFFLU experts to publicize the AIM results in their presentation in various international fora.

4. OFFLU VCM updates (Amelia Coggon)

Currently Francesco Bonfante (IZSVE) for avian influenza, Amy Baker (USDA) for swine influenza and Amelia Coggon (FAO) represents the OFFLU network in the WHO VCM. Funding for the third participant is an issue that needs to be sorted out. Lorcan Carnegie is being trained in taking up the VCM work and for a smooth handover in the future. Participation for the September 2024 meeting which will be held in Melbourne, Australia needs to be worked out later.

In 2023, we had an increase of data contributions with a lot more geographical representation than previously. Obviously, this is due to the increased AI outbreaks in Latin America and OFFLU was able to build partnerships there and keep encouraging people to share data. From OFFLU network in the previous and September 2023 meeting, some CVVs recommended. There exist some problems in sharing of viruses from animal health labs recommended as a CVV and WOAHO-FAO-WHO working and sending out a letter to the Nagoya focal point of the competent authorities in Ghana for action. For the VCM process, H5 nomenclature is being used while for the AIM report it is not used, and so it is creating problems.

The OFFLU Secretariat informed the Committee that WOAHO/FAO signed an extension of five year agreement with WHO for VCM contributions running from January 2024 to December 2028.

Action: *Organise an Avian Influenza call for situation update and link with VCM data discussion for February 2024 meeting. FAO is planning some data sharing webinar under early warning project and will promote VCM data sharing for flu.*

Drop a note from OFFLU to Todd and Tommy and inform them on the non-update of H5 nomenclature and the constraints faced to operate effectively. Inform that OFFLU has vested interest in the nomenclature being updated and timely and offer support for technical expertise.



5. OFFLU avian influenza technical activity updates (H9 nomenclature, proficiency testing) (Frank Wong)

The H9 nomenclature paper submitted for publication is facing delays for publication and the issue will be followed up.

ACDP will be sending out proficiency testing panels this year and the list of participating laboratories confirmed with OFFLU Secretariat and reaching out to 14 different laboratories. In the next few months, the ACDP PT team will be following up on that. Currently only WOAHA/FAO Reference Centres are participating in this exercise but if any interested other labs are willing to participate, they could be considered provided the shipping costs are borne by them. The objective of the participation in the OFFLU PT which is global in nature needs to be considered by these labs or they could opt for regional PT programs conducted by the reference labs.

6. OFFLU wildlife technical activity (Gounalan)

Thijs Kuiken (Netherlands) and Andrew Breed (Australia) act as chair and co-chair of this technical activity. A new core group of experts was confirmed for this technical activity which include Michelle Wille (Australia), Laura Roberts (South Africa), Jonas Waldenström (Sweden), Marcela Uhart (Argentina), Julianna Lenocho (USA), Dave Stallknecht (USA), Ruth Cromie (UK).

The OFFLU ad-hoc group on HPAI H5 in wildlife of South America and Antarctica published statement in December 2023 <https://www.offlu.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/OFFLU-wildlife-statement-no-II.pdf>. The Committee appreciated the timely and excellent document published by this expert group.

7. OFFLU swine influenza technical activity (Gounalan)

WOAH will be hosting a technical in-person meeting for the OFFLU swine influenza experts in April 2024. The current chairs Janice Zanella (Brazil) and Amy Baker (USA) will be contacted for preparation of the agenda and experts to be invited.

Action: OFFLU Secretariat to confirm the dates for the meeting, issue invitations, agenda preparation and organization of the meeting.

8. OFFLU inputs to WOAHA AI resolution implementation framework (Gregorio/Gounalan)

After the AI resolution adopted in May 2023 WOAHA General Session, a two years implementation framework was developed by WOAHA Headquarters in collaboration with Regional and Sub-regional offices. This is basically a work plan with certain indicators, and we are consulting all our stakeholders including OFFLU, and the idea is to really coordinate all the activities with all players including FAO so that we deliver and respond to the resolution adopted. Some examples include the policy paper on AI vaccination that was published recently, AI manual chapter updates, revision of OFFLU website, collaboration with IABS for vaccination and surveillance meeting etc. OFFLU has been mentioned in various recommendations and the Secretariat will contact for follow up on this.



Action: The Committee supported this initiative and asked to put forward proposals that need technical expertise from OFFLU.

9. OFFLU inputs to GFTAD AI strategy document (David/Gounalan)

The committees were updated on the progress of the GFTAD avian influenza strategy revision. Following internal review of the drafted strategy by WOAHA and FAO staffs, an external consultation will be done with global partners including OFFLU, regional communities and countries.

Action: OFFLU distribution list including the contributors will be shared with the draft document for external consultation.

10. WOAHA – IABS avian influenza vaccination and surveillance meeting October 2024 (Gregorio/David/Gounalan)

International Alliance for Biological Standardisation (IABS) who organized an AI vaccination meeting previously in 2022 at WOAHA HQ, is again organizing a follow up meeting focusing on AI surveillance in vaccinated populations and this time in collaboration with WOAHA in last week of October 2024. IABS will be sending out 'save the date' with information about this meeting soon to countries, Reference Centres and other stakeholders for registration. The Scientific Committee is preparing an agenda for the meeting.

Action: OFFLU experts will be involved in necessary presentations including the AIM project updates.

11. FAO webinar course on AIV (Timm Harder)

FLI, Germany contributed to a FAO webinar course on AIV which was previously restricted and now open for public. This could be put on the OFFLU website. Also, Lidewij and David Swayne are working on vaccines, stewardship based on Les Sims work and hopefully that will be launched in the next months. A kickoff webinar will be organized and information to be disseminated through OFFLU network.

Action: OFFLU secretariat to provide the necessary links on the OFFLU website under 'Training' tab.

12. Next meeting: Doodle to be circulated for fixing it in April 2024