



## OFFLU STEERING AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

**19 March 2025 (13h – 15h Paris/Rome time)**

### **Participants:**

Ian Brown, Marcela Uhart, David Swayne, Jiming Chen, Mia Torchetti, Frank Wong, Timm Harder, Gounalan Pavade, Lidewij Wiersma, Yuka Moribe, Mariana Delgado, Gregorio Torres, Nick Lyons and Ashley Banyard for AIM update.

### **1. OFFLU new governance proposal**

The current [OFFLU modus operandi](#) for the Steering Committee, Executive Committee, Technical Activities and the role of OFFLU Secretariat, OFFLU Scientist and WOAHOFAOWHO focal point officers were formally adopted and in place since June 2013. In the OFFLU global technical meeting held at FAO headquarters in July 2024, it was discussed that the OFFLU governance needed to be revisited based on the experience gained on the functionality of the Steering and Executive Committees and it was agreed to develop a new OFFLU governance structure.

Accordingly, a new OFFLU governance proposal was put forward for comments from the Committees. The new proposal will consist of an OFFLU Steering Committee with a Chair, Vice Chair and three members to be selected from the Technical Activity chairs or senior independent experts for decision making processes. The term for experts serving on the Steering Committee will be of three years and then discussed at the end of the term for further continuity of a second term but not exceeding six years in total. The Steering Committee will provide strategic direction for OFFLU network and in reviewing, endorsing or approving programs and initiatives for various Technical Activities. The Steering Committee can nominate or propose names of experts for vacancies or succession, which must then be ratified by the parent organizations with a letter of appointment. If needed, OFFLU Secretariat can seek the advice from WOAHOFAO Delegates on potential new members and submit the candidates to the Steering and Executive Committees for consideration. The FAO and WOAHOFAO representatives consisting of focal points officers, OFFLU Secretariat and Scientist will also participate in the Steering Committee meetings.

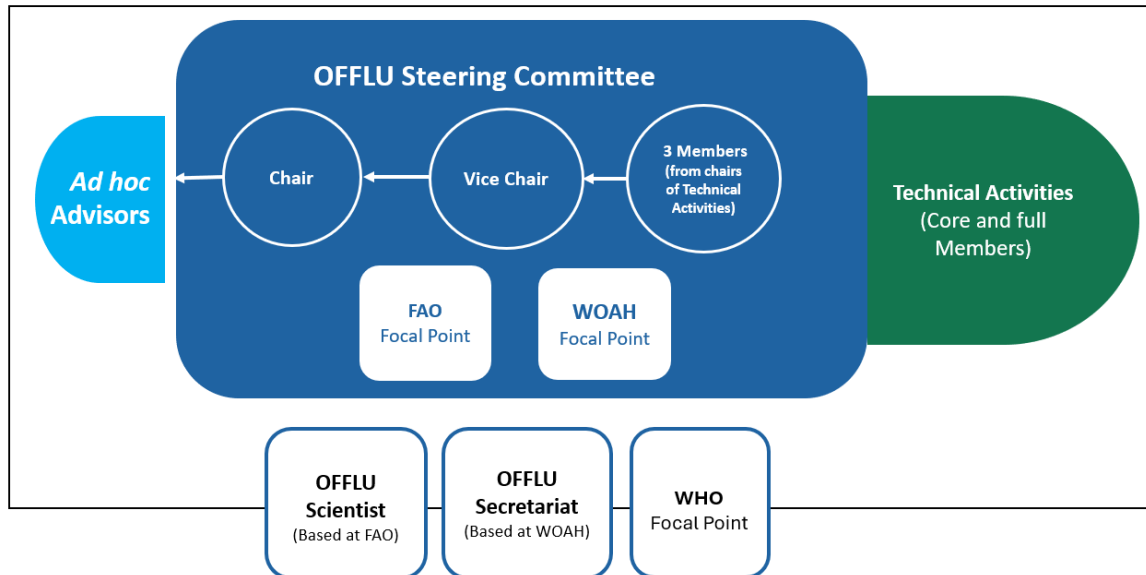
In addition, all the Technical Activities Chairs will operate like an Executive Committee as per their specific terms of reference agreed and approved by the Steering Committee, and individual joint meetings could be held between the Steering Committee and the Technical Activity chairs as needed for updates and follow up.

A new component called 'ad hoc advisors' was created to accommodate those experts who completed their full terms on the Committees but have more time and expertise to contribute significantly to the

network activities. The WHO focal point officer will act as a point of contact with WHO for communication and to ensure that lines of communication stay open between OFFLU and WHO.

The new OFFLU governance structure will come into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2025.

## OFFLU Governance



### Action:

1. The parent organization to identify the next Chair of the new OFFLU Steering Committee to succeed Prof Ian Brown from 1<sup>st</sup> November.
2. The nomination proposal of Dr Timm Harder as member of the new OFFLU Steering Committee to be taken up for approval with Parent organizations.
3. A call out seeking nominations for the other two vacant positions of the new OFFLU Steering Committee from the Technical Activity chairs.
4. Amend the OFFLU modus operandi to reflect the discussed new OFFLU governance structure and draft terms of reference for ad hoc advisors and each of the components.

## 2. Status of the current OFFLU Committee structures:

The Commission discussed the status of terms for the current Steering and Executive Committee in the context of the new OFFLU governance proposal.

Prof Ian Brown's extension term as Chair of the OFFLU Steering Committee will expire on 31 October 2025 and he expressed interest in being part of the 'ad hoc advisor' group in the new governance structure from 1 November after his current term ends. Dr Marcela Uhart is the vice Chair of the Steering Committee in the current structure. Likewise Dr David Swayne whose full term expires on 1 October also expressed interest to participate in the 'ad hoc advisor' group. Dr Timm Harder first term in the current Executive Committee ended in February 2025 and the Steering committee agreed for his extension until the new

governance structure is adopted. The Committee also proposed Dr Timm Harder as one of the candidates to be considered for the three Technical Activity members in the new OFFLU Steering Committee structure. The Committee also noted that Dr Mia Torchetti and Dr Frank Wong's full terms ends in October 2025 at the end of the current committee structure.

	Start date	First term end	Second term end
<b>Steering Committee</b>			
Ian Brown	8 October 2018	7 October 2021	7 October 2024 Extension until 31 October 2025
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
<b>Executive Committee</b>			
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	

### 3. FAO update:

Regarding funding, FAO reported budget reductions from USAID that created uncertainty about staff contracts, though Lorcan's position as OFFLU scientist stays on. Nick Lyons will take over as the FAO focal point for OFFLU jointly with Lidewij Wiersma. Subsequent updates suggest that efforts are ongoing to maintain the FAO focal points' involvement in various OFFLU Technical Activities.

### 4. AIM project updates and future (Dr. Ashley Banyard, APHA, UK)

The avian influenza matching (AIM) project evolved from POULVAC (AIM1 – proof of concept, establishing methodological approach, development of core panel reagents, sharing with partners) in 2022/2023 into AIM2 (expansion of testing contemporary strains, antigenic cartography) in 2023/2024 and AIM3 (expansion of panel with additional reference reagents, testing and sharing of panels with partners) in 2024/2025. The main labs involved in various stages of the project include APHA (UK), IZSve (Italy), ACDP (Australia) and SEPRL (USA), supported by OFFLU committees, scientists and experts. The key objective behind this project was getting a harmonization of tools and approaches across the different regions to understand the antigenic reactivity of different viruses as they are emerging and to be reactive to try and get hold of these viruses from different countries where novel clades or novel variants of existing clades are emerging.

To date, the project has tested over 159 characterized strains and nearly 27 reference antigens and antisera produced and characterized, predominantly from clade 2.3.4.4b. Despite efforts to broaden engagement, certain clades and regions remain underrepresented, but future plans include employing reverse genetics to address virus access limitations. AIM3 initiative has relied heavily on in-kind support from APHA and other partners, surpassing initial budget estimates. For the future continuation of the project beyond the current funding cycle, APHA is drafting a concise concept note outlining objectives, budgets, and in-kind resources, ensuring momentum continues for exploring with potential donors. The Committee members informed some associations or calls that could be approached like Home - Global

Funders Consortium, Animal health Europe, Pandemic fund call, Health for animals, IABS, Gates foundation, CEPI etc.

*Action:*

1. APHA (UK) to submit the internal summary report of AIM 3 (phase 2) to WOAHP by end of April 2025.
2. Raise awareness about the project with different stakeholders including countries, vaccine manufacturers, industry etc. and how the data is being used and the utility of it to different stakeholders.
3. A clear concept note detailing the objectives, budgets and in-kind resources needed for future project continuation and to explore funding with potential donors or funders.
4. A follow up impact evaluation survey with stakeholders to ask for feedback about the project usefulness, how it is used and any other requirements.
5. Plan a session for AIM presentation in the 11<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Avian Influenza, Canada in June 2025 where there will be pharmaceutical industry and an international audience from different countries.

## **5. OFFLU VCM February 2025 meeting updates**

The Vaccine Composition Meeting (VCM) recently focused on the antigenic assessment of H5Nx avian influenza viruses. Clade 2.3.4.4b (H5N1) remains dominant and well-covered by current candidate vaccine viruses, but divergence within clade 2.3.2.1a—particularly between Indian strains and those from Bangladesh—led to a recommendation for a new candidate vaccine virus. Further work may consider a clade 2.3.2.1g (Indonesia) candidate, pending additional isolates. Submissions of H7, H9, H10, and swine influenza viruses were also reviewed. Core support for the VCM comes from various OFFLU collaborators and related organizations.

<https://www.offlu.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/OFFLU-Summary-F2025-VCM-Final.pdf>

*Action:*

1. Data call letters for the next September 2025 VCM to start in June 2025.
2. Discuss with WHO about the nature of funding for WHO VCM and if OFFLU VCM activity could be included as a joint effort for pandemic preparedness/one health activities.

## **6. OFFLU Avian Influenza Technical Activity**

The Committee discussed the request from ACDP, Australia to align the scope of OFFLU proficiency testing with the regional PT program. Aligning the two programs will help ACDP become more efficient, which is increasingly important for cost-saving measures. Here are the differences in the testing scope between the two programs:

OFFLU	Regional Terrestrial -Avian Panel
Accredited activities assessed by this PT	Accredited activities assessed by this PT
1. testing for AIV by real time PCR (eg matrix PCR);	1. testing for AIV by real time PCR (eg matrix PCR);
2. testing for AIV H5- and H7-subtype by real time PCR or other applicable method;	2. testing for AIV H5- and H7-subtype by real time PCR or other applicable method;

3. qualitative and quantitative reporting of above assays.	3. testing for APMV1 (M- and F-gene) by real time PCR; 4. qualitative and quantitative reporting of above assays.
Non-assessed activities for self-review by participants AIV cleavage site pathotyping to assign HP/LP	Non-assessed activities for self-review by participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- testing for AIV N-types</li> <li>- testing for AIV H9- subtype</li> </ul>

The OFFLU committee fully supported the scope of the OFFLU PT panel to be aligned with the regional terrestrial avian panel from the next round.

The Committee was informed about the progress on the Avian Influenza Technical Activity on the development of a [global consensus H5 influenza genotyping framework](#).

#### **7. OFFLU Wildlife Technical Activity (Dr Marcela Uhart)**

The OFFLU Wildlife Technical Activity experts are working on a document summarizing the impacts of HPAI on wildlife worldwide, covering the entire period from the emergence of 2.3.4.4b through the end of 2024. The document will be finalized and published on OFFLU website soon.

#### **8. OFFLU applied epidemiology Technical Activity update:**

The Applied Epidemiology Technical Activity is preparing guidance for veterinary services and cattle farmers on prevention of potential HPAI transmission involving cattle. The group's preliminary work revealed knowledge gaps in traditional risk assessments, prompting a new approach that ranks transmission pathways while accounting for socioeconomic factors. These pathways include viral introduction to a cattle farm, within-farm transmission, and cross-species transmission (including to humans). A draft map detailing the routes is complete, and a PRISMA-based literature review will refine rankings, with multiple contributors set to participate.

#### **9. OFFLU socio-economics Technical Activity ToR and workplan**

The Steering Committee commented that work on vaccine hesitancy is a really important issue in the socio-economic space and supported the idea of the Chair of the group to take up this work.

#### **9. OFFLU swine and equine influenza Technical activity**

The swine and equine influenza groups are well established with good modus operandi and have regular technical meetings to exchange data and maintain the momentum.

*Action:*

Secretariat to coordinate with chairs of the Technical Activities to arrange the next meeting based on funding availability.

#### **10. OFFLU commentaries:**

Dr. Lorcan Carnegie proposed two OFFLU commentaries: one on poultry vaccination—highlighting new technologies and strategies in the context of evolving HPAI epidemiology, emphasizing accurate vaccine matching, appropriate coverage, and varied surveillance approaches informed by VCM/AIM insights—and another on HPAI in cats, underscoring recent cases in both domestic and captive large cats worldwide, drawing comparisons to earlier outbreaks.

#### **11. OFFLU website and share point updates**

The Commission was updated on the progress of the new website's development. The service provider is currently working on the live website for user acceptance testing (UAT). In April, the Steering and Executive Committees, along with the Chairs of the TAs, will be consulted regarding the live website. The website is scheduled to launch at either end of May or by June.

The Secretariat has developed a SharePoint site for OFFLU experts to ensure all documents are saved in one place and to facilitate simultaneous collaboration on the same document. Access to the SharePoint site will be granted to the experts at a later date.

*Action:*

1. The mockup new OFFLU website will be shared with OFFLU Steering and Executive committee and technical leads of all activities for comments before launch.
2. To check with the service provider to enable tracking which OFFLU activities are getting the most attraction or hits and pages which are accessed frequently.

#### **12. OFFLU side meeting at 11<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Avian Influenza, Canada, June 2025**

Utilizing the opportunity of 11th International Symposium on Avian influenza, St. John, Canada, which several influenza experts from various disciplines are expected to attend, OFFLU will host a special half-day side meeting on 23rd June (14h – 16.30h) at the same venue.

*Action:*

Agenda of the meeting to be prepared involving presentations from key OFFLU technical activities.

#### **13. Next meeting:** Doodle to be circulated for scheduling it during July 2025