

## Rapid advice 09-2019 of the Scientific Committee established at the FASFC on the risk of introduction of African swine fever (ASF) in pig holdings associated with a resumption of forestry works in zone II (ASF-contaminated wildlife)

### Terms of reference

In the context of the African swine fever (ASF) outbreak in wildlife (wild boars) in the province of Luxembourg and its geographical spread, the Scientific Committee is requested to give a rapid advice on the risk of introduction of ASF in pig holdings associated with a resumption of forestry works in Zone II (ASF-contaminated wildlife). These forestry works consist of:

- soil preparation, including spreading of amendments;
- plantations and sowing;
- pruning of branches and trees;
- marking and thinning of trees;
- harvesting (production) trees (other than coniferous trees affected by bark beetles (Scolytidae))

This work is still prohibited at the date of this opinion (ministerial decree of the Walloon Region of March 13, 2019) to limit the spread of ASF in wildlife (wild boars). There are, however, facilitations in forest management for the treatment of forests affected by bark beetles (due to phytosanitary urgency), provided that biosecurity measures are respected.

### Method

The rapid advice is based on previous opinions of the Scientific Committee in regard to the ASF outbreak in wildlife (wild boars), on expert opinion and on data from the scientific literature.

### Conclusions and recommendations

In the risk assessment, the Scientific Committee evaluated not only the risk of introduction of the AVP virus in pig holdings but also the risk of further spread of the virus in the wild fauna, since the latter may result in the former risk having to be re-evaluated in the event of geographical extension of ASF outbreaks in wildlife.

At the date of this opinion, the risk of introduction of ASF into pig holdings associated with a resumption of forestry works is considered as "**low**". Indeed, the risk is not inexistent because of the risk of indirect transmission through tools and people.

The risk of further spreading of ASF in wildlife (wild boars) to non-contaminated areas through the resumption of forestry activities as described above is greater than the risk of introduction into pig holdings and is estimated as "**moderate**" (level 3 in the risk qualification scale which has 4 levels) due to the risk of indirect transmission via people and tools. The number of contractors carrying out the intended forestry work is limited, which means that they have to move to many different operating locations throughout the country. These exploitation sites form the natural habitat of wild boars and are often geographically remote. Given the invasive nature of the forestry work, there is a considerable chance of coming into contact with contaminated materials (carcasses, droppings) in zone II. In addition, the ASF virus has a long survival time in biological materials and thus in the environment. Due to these two factors, there is a considerable risk of the virus spreading through this work.

The Scientific Committee is therefore of the opinion that the resumption of forestry work in zone II, as mentioned in this opinion, increases the risk of spreading ASF in wild fauna. This risk can be limited if preventive measures such as thorough cleaning and disinfection of used tools and biosecurity measures for persons working in the contaminated zone are introduced. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that the compliance with biosecurity measures can be sufficiently controlled by the risk managers due to the size (both in terms of places and frequency) of all activities. Therefore, the Scientific Committee recommends not to resume the forestry works mentioned, other than those that cannot be delayed for phytosanitary reasons such as the elimination of trees infected with bark beetles. It is up to the risk managers to determine which works cannot be postponed, but the Scientific Committee recommends that they are carried out under the same biosecurity measures and strict controls as is currently applied during the elimination of trees infected with bark beetles.

As stated in previous opinions, the Scientific Committee draws the attention to the need to continue the control of ASF in wild boars in the contaminated zone. The control measures that need to be continued in the long term to limit the risk of further expansion of the epidemic are in order of importance:

- ensuring that no contact is possible between infected wild boars and domestic pigs in the contaminated zone. This amounts to strict in-door confinement of pigs and avoiding any form of outdoor access for all pigs, including the so-called "pet pigs";
- the search for cadavers of wild boars and their removal for destruction;
- the compartmentalization of wild boar populations (via a network of fences) and their reduction in the contaminated area as well as in the adjacent areas (enhanced observation zone and vigilance);
- maintain the highest level of awareness in regard to biosecurity among all stakeholders (agents who insure ASF control, hunters, farmers and foresters, citizens, tourists) in the contaminated zone and strict compliance to biosecurity rules (especially external) in all pig holdings.

This advice may need to be revised in function of the epidemiological evolution of the ASF epidemic in Belgium. The advice is given taking into account the available and made available data by the risk managers and taking into account all uncertainties regarding the risk factors associated with ASF wild fauna epidemics.

The Scientific Committee regrets, when drafting this opinion, that it has not been given full and transparent access to all available data on the current state of ASF distribution and control measures for ASF. This incomplete information can have an influence on the quality / completeness of the advice.

The full text is available on this website in dutch and in french.