

OIE global conference on Veterinary legislation – Djerba, Tunisia 7-9 December 2010

During the 7-9th December 2010, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) with the support of the Tunisian government and co-funded by the European Union and Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, organised a first global conference on Veterinary legislation which was held in Tunisia and, I had the opportunity to be part of the South African delegation that attended the said conference. The conference was attended by OIE member delegates with representative from their respective Veterinary statutory bodies. The objectives of the conference was to

- Raise awareness of the requirements of an effective veterinary legislation which covers all matters under the mandate of the OIE,
- Brainstorm on the challenges and tools needed to transform international standards and guidelines on veterinary legislation and
- Provide practical guidelines on how the OIE members could mobilize governments and donors for modernizing national veterinary legislation, educating veterinarians (both private and public) on their role and responsibilities and, promoting the key role of veterinary statutory bodies

The conference had four sessions which covered the presentations on the global and regional perspective by representatives from the World Trade Organisation, World Health Organisation and OIE regional representatives, the national perspective (domestic challenges and opportunities) on the development and implementation of veterinary legislation, solutions and tools to improve veterinary legislation and capacity building to support strengthening of veterinary legislation. From all presentations, the general perspective highlighted was that

- Veterinary legislation was the pillar of good governance and needed to evolve accordingly to deal with new challenges and developments
- Veterinary legislation covered primary animal health including zoonoses; disease prevention, reporting and control; sanitary import measures and export certification of animals and animal products; control of veterinary products; animal welfare; and veterinary statutory bodies
- While legislation reflects the sovereign integrity, there was a need for global harmonisation and thus the need for international standards or guidelines on veterinary legislation. When countries are developing their legislation, they must look at international standards and analyse the impact on international agreements, there must be no discrimination, be transparent and promote free trade (suppression of barriers through negotiations)
- Many countries have old legislation with several challenges identified and, needed assistance to update their respective veterinary legislation accordingly
- The Performance of Veterinary Services (PVS) pathway in particular the PVS tool as developed by the OIE, was available to assist member countries in identifying, analysing and developing corrective measures for weaknesses identified including veterinary legislation and, the OIE already has experts to assist member countries in developing new legislation. A number of countries have already requested assistance from the OIE (108 countries out of 177 member countries with 28 countries

specifically requesting specifically assistance on veterinary legislation of which 16 thereof were African countries)

- Various donors such as the FAO, EU and Australian government, were insisting on the PVS tool as the basis for assisting any country on improvement of veterinary services including development of their veterinary legislation

At the end of the conference, delegates adopted about 18 recommendations which would serve in the next general session of the OIE during May 2011 whereby various delegates of member countries would decide upon the recommendations. The proceedings and the recommendations will be published on the OIE website in the near future and a CD will be forwarded to participants however I thought that I should highlight some of the recommendations hereunder

1. That the OIE continue to provide the PVS pathway for efficient and effective veterinary services and all associated steps including the veterinary legislation support programme, twinning programme, gap analysis and PVS follow up missions
2. That the OIE improves standards and associated PVS critical competencies on veterinary products, dealing with capacities in the production, registration, distribution, and use of veterinary products to provide guidance to the OIE member countries wishing to update their legislation and secure human and financial resources required to implement appropriate modern legislation on this subject
3. That the OIE adopts the currently proposed Veterinary legislation guidelines as standards in the Terrestrial Animal Health Code. In my opinion, I believe that it is premature for the OIE to adopt the guidelines and standards before there is appropriate training of focal points in various countries and, some countries might already use the standards as trade barriers. Therefore the proposed guidelines should remain as guidelines for some time until various countries could update their veterinary legislation. This will in my opinion be an important decision in the coming general session in May 2011. I therefore propose that members of the profession discuss on the proposed guidelines and submit inputs to the council which would be forwarded to the Chief Veterinary Officer in our country
4. That the OIE further strengthen its activities in providing capacity building to Focal points, to support the National delegate to meet his/her rights, obligations and responsibilities and to strengthen the capacities of OIE member countries particularly developing countries to participate in the standard-setting process. Governments and relevant organisations and donors should provide adequate resources for support programmes using the guidance of the OIE
5. That the OIE extend the current concept for Laboratory twinning programme and prepare a project to be submitted to donors for a pilot twinning programme between Veterinary statutory bodies in developed and developing countries
6. That the OIE continue its work on veterinary education and present final recommendations on Day 1 competencies and quality of veterinary education at the general assembly
7. That Members who recognise the urgent need to modernise the national veterinary legislation consider requesting an OIE veterinary legislation identification mission at the same time as they request a PVS gap analysis. It is important to note that South Africa has to date not requested the OIE for PVS pathway analysis (among the few within SADC member countries) and I hope that the Chief veterinary officer would

soon discuss with various stakeholders in our country on the reasons so that we could all have a common understanding. Whereas I personally support the PVS pathway of the OIE, I also have certain reservations and it would be critical that we discuss the issue and have a South African perspective on the issue

As already indicated, the above are but a few of the adopted recommendations and we will in future distribute the final adopted recommendations to members of the profession.

Lastly I would like to thank our Chief Veterinary officer for the nomination to be invited by the OIE to the conference and I believe that we are on the right track by promoting collaboration between the state, private sector, statutory body and farmers on improving animal health, animal welfare, public health, food safety and ultimately food security in our country. Not only did we participate in the deliberations but we improved communication with the world particularly taking into consideration the world veterinary year in 2011

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