



OFFLU STEERING AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

25 April 2024 (13h – 15h Paris/Rome time)

Participants:

Ian Brown, Marcela Uhart, David Swayne, Mia Torchetti, Frank Wong, Timm Harder, Gounalan Pavade, Amelia Coggon, Lidewij Wiersma, Mariana Delgado.

Apologies: Yanbing Li, Gregorio Torres

1. Welcome and update on OFFLU committees (status of term):

Prof Ian Brown welcomed Dr Marcela Uhart, the new OFFLU Steering Committee member.

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	

Prof Ian Brown's second term in the OFFLU Steering Committee ends on 7 October and the parent organisations FAO and WOAHA will discuss on the way forward before the next meeting. Dr Yanbing Li term in the Executive Committee ends in June 2024 and the Steering Committee will discuss it by email for deciding the second term extension.

2. Update on AIM project (Amelia/ Ashley)

OFFLU AIM pilot project was completed (AIM 1) and the report published on the website in October 2023 <https://www.offlu.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/OFFLU-AIM-REPORT-2023.pdf> involving APHA (UK) and IZSve (Italy) labs.



Then moved to AIM 2 (Phase 1) which focused on cartography. With due diligence the cartography work was completed. The panel was very strongly focused on clade 2.3.4.4b which is of interest globally although other countries have been vaccinating against other clades. To fill this gap, ACDP (Frank Wong) and SEPRL (Erica Spackman) labs were brought into the project and APHA shared panels with these laboratories and protocol harmonization was carried out although antigenic characterization was pending. APHA carried out more HI testing enhanced analysis by selecting more candidates to expand the characterization of 2.3.2.1a clade. Also in AIM 2, all of the viruses that were isolated were sequenced systematically, because in the pilot project there was problem where some of the viral isolates were exactly the same as the clinical material. The funding for the AIM 2 (Phase 1) finished in December 2023. The technical and financial report for the phase 1 was submitted to WOAHP by APHA, UK lab.

Then AIM 3 (phase 2) project started which is currently underway. Sera that needs to be raised has been identified and will be raised in AIM 3. ACDP and SEPRL labs will be testing some viruses that they have and expand the clade and identify any other gaps. An updated report will be released in June 2024 and will include increased breadth of clades and a few more vaccine antigens represented. In June/July, a webinar will also be organized to inform and educate various stakeholders on AIM project and its outputs. The funding for the AIM 3 (phase 2) got extension to January 2025 by APHA, UK lab.

Action: A webinar to be organized in June 2024 on AIM project and to be followed by release of an updated report. Include AIM presentations in the IABS-WOAH vaccination meeting in October where various vaccine manufacturers and WOAHP Delegates are expected to be present.

3. H5N1 in dairy cattle update and OFFLU follow ups needed (Mia)

Genomic analysis over 8500 high quality sequences from domestic birds, wild birds and mammal performed to help understand the ongoing outbreak in USA. Phylogenetic analysis is focused on real-time analysis to assist in understanding epidemiology as well as to assess potential transmission and sources of virus (vSNP and GenoFlu) <https://github.com/USDA-VS>. Updated the Genoflu tool with B3.13 genotype. Genetic markers for mammalian adaptation are monitored for persistence and potential transmission events. Sequences for the 2022 and ongoing outbreak have been released on GISAID (n=1336) and Genbank associated with publications. This data set is highly representative of the outbreak, in which over 70% of the outbreak sequences fall within 7 genotypes. Additional sequence data will be available in NVBI by next week.

Virus isolates representing new reassortments or with genetic changes of concern are utilized for animal pathogenicity and transmission studies. 17 select agent shipments to registered entities including CDC have been completed since 2022 in support of that work. CDC and ARS collaborators have immediate access to data for additional monitoring such as antiviral resistance markers.

Following reports of a multistate drop in production for dairy cattle, testing at National Animal Health Laboratory network partners identified influenza A. Sequencing identified a sporadically detected 4 gene reassortant (B3.13 per Genoflu) descended from the previously predominant genotype g3.2. Prior to this



event, the B3.13 genotype was first observed in wild birds in November 2023. The few progenitor wild bird viruses were identified in the Pacific and central flyways. The sequences rapidly released on GISAID are highly representative of all sequences. The available phylogenetic analysis and epidemiology suggest a single introduction followed by secondary spread. The pathobiology of the virus in cattle and mechanism of spread are still under investigation. The whole genome sequence for virus found on recent commercial poultry premises in different states indicates it is the same strain that is affecting dairy cattle. The phylogenetic data and available epidemiological data support spread from dairy premises to poultry.

Action: *The current OFFLU statement of H5N1 in cattle to be updated based on current available information. FAO requested OFFLU inputs to an article prepared on H5N1 situation in cattle. WOAHA emerging disease ad hoc group prepared a document collating risk questions and research gaps on the H5N1 cases in cattle and wanted to be shared with OFFLU for comments. The Steering Committee asked the Secretariat to share the Terms of reference of this emerging disease group to understand its function and role for better support.*

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

From FAO side, Amelia Coggon (OFFLU scientist) and Fabien Filaire (Avian influenza focal point) are already involved in OFFLU activities. Lineke Begeman and Lorcan Carnegie involvement are being finalized. Lineke already assisting the wildlife and Lorcan after completing his PhD in November 2024 will be available for OFFLU. FAO have identified short time funding to involve these PhD students in the OFFLU activities this year and will look for additional funds for next year involvement.

5. Update on OFFLU global technical meeting in July 2024 (Lidewij Wiersma)

Save the date for the OFFLU global technical meeting on 2 – 4 July 2024 at FAO Headquarters was sent to OFFLU steering and executive committee, technical activity experts and contributors. Invitations soon to be issued. The tentative format and agenda of the meeting was explained to the committees. One of the main objective of the meeting was to update the terms of reference of various technical activities and membership, plan of action and how to strengthen collaborations and activate these activities.

Action: *The agenda will be shared with the OFFLU Steering and Executive Committee for detailed comments to finalise. Invitations to be issued for the participants.*

6. IABS-WOAH meeting on avian influenza vaccination and surveillance (David Swayne)

The Committee was updated on the progress of the planned technical meeting on Vaccination and Surveillance for HPAI in poultry: Current situation and perspectives, in October 2024 at WOAHA Headquarters. <https://www.iabs.org/~documents/route%3A/download/2278/>. Many of the OFFLU experts are in the scientific committee and to be invited as speakers.



7. OFFLU VCM update (Amelia Coggan)

The September 2024 VCM meeting is planned to be held in Melbourne, Australia and Francesco, Amy and Amelia will represent OFFLU and present the avian and swine influenza data. Data request letters for sequences will be sent in the beginning of June. Virus selection will be carried out by mid-July, the OFFLU teleconference for the contributors planned for end of August, the WHO teleconference in the beginning of September and then the meeting itself scheduled during the third week of September.

***Action:** The Secretariat and OFFLU Scientist will coordinate for issuing the data request letters to all laboratories and preparation for the collation and analysis of the data for September VCM.*

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

The H9 nomenclature paper publication activity that was ongoing and led by IZSve, Italy in collaboration with a team of experts for the past one year submitted the work for publication in EID journal which was accepted. The OFFLU Steering and Executive Committee congratulated the whole team and especially Dr Isabella Monne who led the work for the successful efforts of establishing the nomenclature and acceptance for publication.

The ACDP, Australia coordinated OFFLU proficiency testing has initiated the work for this year proficiency testing activity. The OFFLU Secretariat has been contacted for reconfirming the status of participating laboratories. And the panels will be shipped to laboratories soon.

***Action:** The OFFLU Scientist will follow up on the H5 nomenclature work with Todd Davis and Tommy Lam for updates and then share the document with OFFLU committees for comment*

9. OFFLU swine influenza technical activity (Gounalan)

WOAH hosted a technical in-person meeting for the OFFLU swine influenza experts on 3 - 4 April 2024. Swine influenza experts from various regions participated in this meeting and presented the surveillance data and ongoing research updates. Dr Chiara Chiapponi (IZSLER, Italy) was elected as the new co-chair of the swine influenza group replacing Dr Janice Zanella (Brasil). Dr Amy Baker will continue as the other Chair.

***Action:** The meeting summary to be finalized and posted on the website.*

10. OFFLU document on protocols and guidelines for addressing AI (Gounalan)

The OFFLU Secretariat presented an ASF document titled, "Addressing African Swine Fever Protocols and Guidelines for Laboratory Diagnosis" drafted by the WOAH ASF reference laboratory network and asked the OFFLU committees if a similar document for avian influenza could be developed under OFFLU as per the recommendation of Biological Standards Commission.

The OFFLU committee reviewed the document and advised that the avian influenza reference lab experts are currently fully engaged in the complete revision of the WOAH Terrestrial Manual chapter on avian



influenza and so will be difficult to devote time for this additional task on the same subject. Also the Committee felt that the Manual chapter on avian influenza will quote various protocols and guidelines for laboratory diagnosis with suitable references and so advised the OFFLU Secretariat to have discussion again with avian influenza experts to define the purpose, need and feasibility to develop an another document like the ASF one.

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

The committees were updated on the progress of the GFTAD avian influenza strategy revision. Following completion of the internal consultation, an external consultation was opened to three categories – first category is global partners where OFFLU was involved for comments; second category involving Members/countries and third category is regional communities and stakeholders.

Action: OFFLU Secretariat to give a reminder to the OFFLU expert community to send their comments on the draft strategy document.

12. OFFLU website development (Mariana)

The committees was updated on the progress to develop a new OFFLU website. A call for web developers was published the first week of April and will be closed in first week of May. The project will be initiated in the first half of 2024 and includes improvements on the appearance and also on the functionality of webpage. The project includes design development and then the maintenance. During the July 2024 global technical meeting, the technical updates on the website will be provided to the participants for initial feedback and comments. The aim is to have the website released to public by end of 2024.

Action: The OFFLU committees to be updated regularly on the development of the website and involve the Committee members and technical activity experts for comments.

13. Next meeting: Doodle to be circulated for fixing it in November 2024