DRAFT

Statement on the Schmallenberg Virus Situation Issued by the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH) – 11 January 2012

The information presented by Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium at the meeting of 11 January 2012 show that a newly detected virus has circulated in the second semester 2011 amongst livestock ruminants causing unspecific clinical signs in cattle and congenital malformations, mainly in sheep and more seldom in cattle and goats.

The Member States and the Commission acknowledge the efforts made by these three Member States to provide the best possible scientific information on the risks posed by this virus, in full transparency.

The virus in question belongs to the *Bunyaviridae* family, genus *Orthobunyavirus* and has been tentatively named "Schmallenberg virus". This virus belongs to a vector-transmitted group of viruses making direct transmission from animal to animal unlikely. However, vertical transmission from dam to newborn via the intrauterine route does occur as with other similar viruses. This group of viruses very often are associated with mild clinical signs of disease or with subclinical infection in ruminants.

So far, cases of disease have been detected in 20 farms in Germany, in 52 farms in the Netherlands (in sheep, and one case in goat), and in 14 farms in Belgium (in sheep, only). No clear geographical clusters of these cases has been shown, so far. This may suggest that the subclinical cases of infection in ruminants may be many more. Although the congenital malformation in newborn animals have been detected recently and are still detected in these days, they are most likely caused by transmission of virus by insect vectors that occurred in summer and early autumn, during pregnancy.

There is no evidence that the Schmallenberg virus is able to spread to humans. The Member States and the Commission took note of the preliminary assessment carried out by the European Centre for Disease prevention and Control (ECDC) on the zoonotic risks of the Schmallenberg virus which indicates that "it is unlikely that this new virus can cause disease in humans, but it cannot be completely excluded at this stage[1]".

The Member States and the Commission recognise that the information on this new virus is still fragmented and mostly extrapolated from data available on genetically similar viruses in the *Orthobunyaviridae* genus (Simbu serogroup, like the Akabane virus). The situation needs to be reassessed once new data will be available. Awareness should be improved amongst veterinary services and stakeholders in order to better understand and address the possible risks associated to this new virus.

Given this virus is transmitted by means of insect vectors, further virus circulation in the current winter is unlikely to occur. This will allow to gather further data and to plan further actions in view of a possible reoccurrence of disease in spring and summer.

The Member States and the Commission consider that it is therefore necessary to continue field investigations and surveys on this virus that would generate data on which the possible disease control measures should be based. They therefore agree to develop a guidance document on virus surveillance as a matter of urgency.

The Member States also invited the Commission to investigate on the possible way to provide financial support to the above investigations.

[1] http://ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications/Publications/231112_TER_Risk_assessment_Schmallenberg_virus.pdf