11th Meeting of the Advisory Committee

City of Luxembourg, Luxembourg, 8 – 10 May 2006

Draft Resolution 5.2

Bats and Rabies in Europe

The Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement on the Conservation of Populations of European Bats (hereafter "the Agreement"),

Recalling that the Agreement's Conservation and Management Plan recognises that bats depend heavily on artificial structures for roosting and that their conservation depends on favourable human attitudes (Inf.EUROBATS.MoP2.14AnnexA, para 19);

Recalling that the Agreement's Conservation and Management Plan also encourages Parties and Range States to cooperate in the conservation and management of bats and their habitats (Inf.EUROBATS.MoP2.14AnnexA, para 24);

Noting the occurrence of Lyssaviruses (European Bat Lyssaviruses - variants of rabies viruses) in certain European bat species and that these bats may live in close association with humans;

Noting the negative public opinions that these viruses may encourage and their influence on bat conservation, including the association with sylvatic (or classic) rabies virus in the perspective of the medical and veterinary communities, the media and the general public;

Noting that European Bat Lyssaviruses (EBLVs) might be under-reported in bat species across Europe as prevalence is routinely reported only in countries that have a regular surveillance programme;

Noting the extremely rare incidence of these viruses in humans or other non-bat wild and domestic mammals;

Noting the need to understand the dynamics, epidemiology and pathogenesis of these viruses and their distribution, hosts and incidence in European bat species;

Noting the results and recommendations of the European Workshop on Bat Rabies, Vilnius, Lithuania, 16 May 2004 (EUROBATS.BatRabiesWorkshop.Report);

Noting the Conclusions and Recommendations of the First International Conference 'Rabies in Europe', Kiev, Ukraine, 15-18 June 2005;

Noting the recommendations of the EU Med-Vet-Net Workpackage 5: Molecular Epidemiology of European Bat Lyssaviruses (which aims to obtain, sequence and archive EBLV isolates from countries throughout Europe, and to set up a database to register submission details and sequence data for EBLV isolates);

Noting the facility to test for these viruses through passive surveillance of a) bats involved in biting or scratching incidents in humans (or their companion animals), and b) all or any dead or sick bats, or through active surveillance through sampling of blood and/or saliva from wild caught animals;

Urges Parties and Range States to:

1. *Establish* a national bat rabies surveillance network in close collaboration with bat specialists, which should be based on a passive surveillance programme (i.e. through submission of bats found dead, sick, injured or grounded);
2. *Support* education efforts that reflect the best scientific advice available regarding the human health risks associated with bat rabies;
3. *Support* efforts to avoid overreaction to incidental bat bite exposures and to develop policies for determining the fate of bats involved in contact incidents with humans (and domestic animals such as cats);
4. *Ensure* that reasonable advice on precautions to avoid infection is available and implemented (including re handling and possible post-exposure), including for the maintenance of colonies in buildings where rabies-positive bats have been recorded;
5. *Follow* the advice of the EUROBATS bat rabies workshop regarding vaccines and vaccination and post-exposure treatments (including the use of blood testing to assess titre levels if considered appropriate), rabies vaccination should be compulsory or at least highly recommended for all people regularly handling bats;
6. *Maintain* collaboration with bat workers in the field, with respect to protocols for sampling and submission of specimens;
7. *Maintain* the use of standard record forms for the submission of bats for testing (Annex 1);

8. *Ensure* that the identification of submitted bats is confirmed by an appropriate authority;

9. *Ensure* that all test results are recorded, both negative as well as positive results;

10. *Attempt* to find a long-term depository for the tested specimens;

11. *Continue* efforts to develop national databases of bats tested, rabies exposures, treatments and outcomes;

12. *Adopt* recommendations of Med-Vet-Net regarding protocols for passive and active surveillance, the maintenance of appropriate databases of submissions and results, diagnostic tests, and of data of bats tested and viruses found (Annex 2);

13. *Ensure* comprehensive results of bats tested are submitted to WHO;

14. *Note* that some laboratories are able to carry out analysis of samples for countries where facilities are not available (especially for detailed virus typing);

15. *Make* results of scientific and epidemiological reports available in terms that are easily understood by the general public.

Annex 1. Standard form for submission of bats for rabies testing.

A standard form for bats submitted for rabies screening should include:

1. lab use only individual reference number
2. name and contact details for person or body submitting specimen
3. name and contact details of finder (if different from 2)
4. species, age, sex of bat if known
5. date and time of finding
6. date and time of death
7. location of finding (including address if appropriate)
8. map reference to finding locality
9. circumstances of finding (e.g. brought in by cat, found on lawn/pavement, seen hanging on wall for some days)
10. symptoms or condition when found (e.g. unable to fly, found dead)
11. cause of death if known (e.g. killed by cat, euthanised, died in captivity)
12. details of any biting or scratching incident (human or animal)
13. contact details of any human or animal contacts involved in 12
14. contact details of any vet or medical doctor involved in 12
15. for lab use: date received, date tested, record of tests carried out (e.g. FAT, RTCIT, MIT, RT-PCR)