**Ensuring animal welfare during depopulation for disease control in the Nordic-Baltic countries**

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The Nordic-Baltic Veterinary Contingency Group (N-BVCG) consists of members from the veterinary authorities of the Nordic and the Baltic countries. The main purpose of the group is to improve cooperation, communication, and exchange of information and experiences between the veterinary authorities within the Nordic-Baltic Region, in the context of contingency planning and during animal disease emergencies. For this session, information about killing methods planned and used in the member countries was collected through a questionnaire in order to share good practices and allow learning from each other.

Depopulation of farm animals is a vital part of disease control measures and eradication in many highly contagious animal diseases. In addition, killing of wildlife has been seen as necessary for combating some diseases. The council regulation (EU No 1099/2009) on the protection of animals at the time of killing sets the legal basis for killing methods and other regulations during depopulation in all Nordic and Baltic countries. Ensuring animal welfare during depopulation cannot be overlooked, even though conditions for killing might be difficult, resources for the actions not easily available and/or sometimes the regulation cannot be followed. With good contingency planning, standard operation procedures and frequent exercises it is possible to improve good animal welfare during depopulation. Most experience in the Baltic countries on depopulation has been gained from killing pigs with electricity and CO2 and in the Nordic countries from occasional depopulation of poultry with CO2 or killing fish. There is lack of experience in depopulating cattle farms in the member countries. There are differences in the backgrounds of the personnel used in depopulation activities and in the training available for the teams, as well as whether or not there are existing contracts with private partners. Sharing information, as well as maybe personnel and equipment, in addition to arranging joint exercises, are considered important in order to improve animal welfare and effective disease eradication in the member countries.