Updated Outbreak Assessment #12

African Swine fever in Eastern Europe

4th December 2017

Ref: VITT/1200 ASF in Eastern Europe

Disease Report

Since our last update in August 2017, the numbers of cases of African swine fever (ASF) reported in wild boar and domestic pigs in Europe and western Eurasia have increased and are summarised in the table for the period from August 2017 to late November 2017.

The key points are:

**Poland** has reported African swine fever (ASF) in wild boar some 100 km further west than previously recorded in that country with 17 outbreaks in wild boar in the second half of November (see map below). Specifically, on 17 November an infected wild boar was reported at each of two locations in Legionowski. These were followed by detection of a further 4 infected wild boar in one place on the 20 November in nearby Warszawski. In the last ten days of November another 14 cases were detected (each a single infected wild boar) in the Warszawski and Legionowski and Piaśczynski regions. Since the first cases in May 2014, multiple outbreaks of ASF in wild boar and backyard pigs have been reported in eastern Poland in the vicinity of the border with Belarus (see map below). However, this is first time that the disease has been found further west.
Lithuania reported ASF in wild boar in a new infected area on 21 November 2017, representing an expansion of range. New restriction zones within Lithuania will be discussed at the forthcoming EU Standing Committee meeting.

In the Czech Republic, the control measures in place including a 45km perimeter fence and the shooting of all wild boar in the area, appear to be containing the spread (see figure below), although there is no sign that the case rate is slowing down.

Russia has reported four wild boar cases in Kaliningrad region which is the exclave region on the Baltic coast. This is not a surprise given the high infection pressure in wild boar in the wider region, but the cases are not on the border regions. There have also been 90 reports of ASF since the beginning of August with 77 of those in pigs and 13 in wild boar. Of the pig outbreaks, two were large pig farms with more than 10,000 pigs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of outbreaks since August 2017</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic pigs</td>
<td>Wild boar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>225</td>
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<td>81</td>
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<td>Lithuania</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>13</td>
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</table>

**Situation Assessment**

The ability of ASF to spread geographically across long distances has been demonstrated countless times in Eastern Europe and more recently in June 2017 with the detection of infected wild boar in the Czech Republic. This month, ASF has jumped some 100 km west in Poland with 17 outbreaks in wild boar in a region near Warsaw. This represents a considerable geographical jump and not only highlights the potential of this virus to spread unpredictably within Eastern Europe but also raises concerns for expansion into neighbouring Germany and Western Europe. In addition ASF has been reported in a new region in Lithuania and in the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, representing further expansion of its range in wild boar within Eastern Europe. Generally, these “jumps” arise because of illegally feeding contaminated meat to wild boar but there is more recent evidence that some wild boar have tested positive for antibody suggesting they survive
initial infection and may be acting as a reservoir host. Hunting may also drive wild boar to disperse which may be contributing to spatial spread (FAO, 2017).

The wild boar detections in the Warsaw region are in an area of relatively low wild boar population density (European Commission, 2016). However, multiple backyard outbreaks have occurred in 2017 in regions of similar wild boar population density in the east of Poland along the border with Belarus. Furthermore, any westward movement of ASF in Poland is a concern because of the high domestic pig population densities in the west.

The outbreaks in Poland have previously been a result of poor farm biosecurity and some have been attributed to shared grazing with cattle where wild boar have had access (PAFF, 2017). In response Poland announced additional control measures on pig farms, such as keeping pigs apart from other livestock. Other measures included control of meat products in hand luggage of travellers returning from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine and increased checks on the main transport routes with these countries (PAFF, 2017).

ASF outbreaks have occurred in commercial and backyard pig holdings across much of Ukraine in 2017. Interestingly there appear to be few wild boar cases in contrast to the situation in the Baltic States. Of concern are those in the western region of Ukraine bordering south-east Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. In response to this the Hungarian authorities have further increased their surveillance along the border with the Ukraine (PAFF, 2017). These include the systematic searching for dead wild boar in all hunting areas, sampling of all dead wild boar and burial and disinfection of the wild boar at the site where it was found dead. Pig keepers must report all dead pigs regardless of whether ASF is suspected or not and Official Veterinarians are obliged to sample all dead domestic pigs.

According to Traces, the EU Electronic Trade Notification System, there have been no recent consignments of live pigs from Poland to the UK. In terms of pig meat, no consignments have been reported in Traces from the restriction zones in Poland, but this does not preclude meat from pigs or wild boar produced outside the existing restriction zones (as described in the Annex of 2014/708/EU). In terms of pig meat, the UK imports a significant percentage of pig products from Poland (7% of total pork imports for 2016). This is mainly in the form of processed hams and shoulders and sausages. Polish registered powered vehicles (over 3.5 tonnes) accounted for 21% of vehicles (466,000 vehicles over 12 months) travelling through UK ferry ports in the third quarter 2017, the largest share of any country, therefore fomite spread is also a concern.

As a reminder, the EU disease control measures require designation of risk areas as Part I (wild boar at risk, but no cases found), Part II (wild boar testing positive but no spill over into domestic pigs), Part III (cases in wild boar and occasional spill over into domestic pigs) and Part IV which concerns the island of Sardinia only. Consignments of live pigs, live wild boars, meat of either source and animal by-products of either source are only
allowed under certain derogations. For a full explanation, see European Commission Implementing Decision 2014/708/EU.

Conclusion

The geographical jump of ASFV westwards in Poland in late November is a concern because of the high density of domestic pig production in north-west Poland and the subsequent risk to the pig industry in neighbouring Germany and Denmark. Together with the expansion in range in Lithuania and Kaliningrad, this signifies a spread in geographic distribution of ASF, a possible drop in biosecurity awareness and therefore a further increase in the weight of infection in East Europe.

The risk of ASF introduction to the UK was previously raised to “low” in August 2017. This was because despite the relatively low level of trade in live pigs, there could be a substantial movement of people, vehicles and personal imports of pork products from Eastern Europe including the Baltic States, Poland and the Czech Republic. This risk is showing no sign of decreasing, although at this stage, there are no changes in circumstance which warrant an increase in the risk level. The ASF virus persists well in cool temperatures and therefore winter is often a season of increased risk when it is more difficult to cleanse and disinfect vehicles.

The current risk of ASF introduction to the UK is therefore still judged to be “low”, although the situation is being kept under review.

We would like to highlight to all pig keepers that ensuring pigs are not fed catering waste or kitchen scraps or pork products in general thereby observing the swill feeding ban and reporting any clinical signs of suspect disease promptly to a veterinarian are all very important biosecurity measures. Anybody returning from the affected EU MSs should avoid contact with domestic pigs, whether commercial holdings, small holdings, areas with feral pigs or wild boar, until they are confident they have no contaminated clothing, footwear or equipment. Pig keepers and veterinarians should remind themselves of the clinical signs for ASF, which may not always be immediately obvious, as this virus appears to have reduced pathogenicity according to some disease reports.

Please see https://www.gov.uk/guidance/african-swine-fever for more information. We would like to remind the public that any feeding of meat products, including the feeding of swill, kitchen scraps and catering waste, to wild boar or feral pigs is also illegal.

We will continue to monitor the situation.

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References

All disease reports are available from the OIE WAHIS database.


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