



VETBIONET

Veterinary Biocontained facility Network for excellence in animal infectiology research and experimentation

Deliverable D6.5
Launch of the structure that will replace VetBioNet after current period of EU funding on the basis of the Sustainability Plan

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Table of contents

1. Summary	3
2. Introduction	3
3. Results.....	4
Development of the VetBioNet-ERG	4
Demonstrating the value of the VetBioNet-ERG	5
Launch of the VetBioNet-ERG	5
4. Conclusions	6

1. Summary

Objectives:

Deliverable D6.5 relates to Task 6.2 (*Definition of a Sustainability Plan for the future of VetBioNet*) and Task 6.4 (*Creation of an ERG to support the future of VetBioNet*) and progresses from D6.3 (*Draft plan outlining for strategies for VetBioNet sustainability*) and D6.4 (*ERG Agreement drafted for partners willing to commit themselves after the end of EU funding*). The present report sets out the creation and launch of a European Research Group (ERG) as the principal structure replacing VetBioNet (i.e. the VetBioNet project consortium) after the current period of EU funding under Horizon 2020.

Rationale:

A Sustainability Board comprising five VetBioNet partners (MRI, INRAE, AU, WBVR, FLI) was established to provide leadership on matters relating to network sustainability. The members of the Sustainability Board led the discussions relating to the concept of the ERG structure, its purpose, how it will function and its membership. An ERG draft document was developed and presented to members at the annual meeting in Brussels in November 2022 and later drafts and requests for comments were presented during the second stakeholder/sustainability workshop at the final meeting in February 2023. This draft is now ready for signing by those partners and stakeholders wishing to participate.

Teams involved:

This activity involved the VetBioNet Sustainability Board members from MRI, INRAE, AU, WBVR and FLI with additional support from UNNOT. All network partners participated in the development of the final draft of the ERG document.

2. Introduction

A range of options were available for sustainability of the VetBioNet project. These were discussed by the Sustainability Board and the wider management group, and it was agreed that the strategy to move forward in the short run would focus on the formation of an ERG. This ERG structure would maintain key aspects of the networking activities and allow the consortium to be formally recognised as an infrastructure network in its participation in large integrated infrastructure projects such as ISIDORe (Integrated Services for Infectious Disease Outbreak Research, Horizon Europe, 2022-25).

An ERG is a co-operation instrument formed between parties and tailor made by its members. There is no requirement for a financial contribution for the creation of the ERG. An ERG can

operate with in-kind contributions and seconded staff from its members. The formation of the VetBioNet-ERG will:

- allow VetBioNet to respond with an existing network to multi-partner funding applications in a manner similar to ISIDORE;
- maintain VetBioNet resources, databases and website and facilitate contacts and scientific exchanges of researchers;
- sustain collaborative activities such as exchanging key reagents, methods and staff;
- ensure harmonisation and complementarity through coordinating meetings, conferences and workshops devoted to themes relevant to the VetBioNet-ERG.

The aim of this deliverable is to complete the development of the ERG document, present it to members, project partners and invited stakeholders at the sustainability workshop held at the final VetBioNet meeting and to launch the VetBioNet-ERG structure following the end of the current round of funding.

3. Results

Development of the VetBioNet-ERG

The draft VetBioNet-ERG document was shared between all partners and presented to stakeholders during the Sustainability Workshop (February 8th, 2023) at the project's final conference in Tours, France. The workshop was attended by 58 participants: 40 onsite and 18 online. An introduction and agenda for the workshop was provided by Keith Ballingall (MRI, WP6 VetBioNet Sustainability lead).

The workshop included presentations by seven invited speakers representing research infrastructures or networks operating in the field of infectious diseases and/or animal health. These included: ERINHA/ISIDORE – Audrey Richard (ERINHA, Director of Operations), TRANSVAC – Stefan Jungbluth (EVI, Head of Business Development), EVAg – Bruno Coutard (AMU, EVAg Coordinator), Infravec – Kenneth Vernick (Institut Pasteur, Infravec Coordinator), EATRIS – David Morrow (EATRIS, Senior Scientific Program Manager), AQUAEXCEL – Marc Vandeputte (INRAE, AQUAEXCEL Coordinator) and, EUP AH&W – Hein Imberechts (Sciensano, CWG AH&W Coordinator).

The presentation of the ERG concept, its structure, organisation and management was followed by a round table discussion of its pros and cons. The final presentation allowed a discussion of the draft VetBioNet-ERG document. It was concluded that the creation of an ERG will allow VetBioNet to maintain the key elements of its networking activities, and that this

sustainability option will help to identify or create new funding opportunities. Following discussion of membership requirements for the VetBioNet-ERG it was agreed that membership should be open to other infrastructures or networks with interest in livestock infectious disease research. ERINHA expressed an interest in being part of VetBioNet-ERG.

Demonstrating the value of the VetBioNet-ERG

Prior to its formal launch, the value of a structure that encompasses much of VetBioNet and its partner organisations is clear with aspects of VetBioNet incorporated into the ISIDORE (Integrated Services for Infectious Disease Outbreak Research) project.

ISIDORE brings together 154 partner organisations including 15 VetBioNet partners (INRAE, WBVR, FLI, APHA, MRI, INIA, IRTA, EDI-IVI, PIWET, AU, ANSES, UEDIN, EMC, InSCREENeX, NOLDUS), in providing services to advance research on epidemic-prone infectious diseases. VetBioNet, represented by INRAE, has a key role in this project by (co)-leading the “ISIDORE Sustainability” work package and two service work packages (WP11 “Ex-Vivo Models”, WP14 “In-Vivo Models”). WP11 “Ex-Vivo Models” and WP14 “In-Vivo Models” services are on high demand in the ISIDORE project, and the VetBioNet service providers offer the largest and most diverse service portfolio in these two work packages. While ISIDORE maintains parts of the VetBioNet activities by offering Transnational Access to the network’s infrastructure capacities, it focuses on human epidemic-prone human infectious diseases rather than veterinary infectious diseases.

To avoid losing those important parts of the expertise represented in VetBioNet which focus on veterinary infectious diseases, VetBioNet has engaged in discussions surrounding the candidate European Partnership, Animal Health and Welfare (EUP AH&W). EUP AH&W has recognised VetBioNet as a key stakeholder and a potential contributor in its Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda.

The VetBioNet-ERG was recognised as a key contributor in association with TRANSVAC in the delivery of a workshop “Aerosol administration, devices and methods used in respiratory infection studies” which took place in the Netherlands on the 30th to the 31st of March 2023.

Launch of the VetBioNet-ERG

The launch of the VetBioNet-ERG will take place once the contributions of individual partners are defined which will allow the partnership agreement to be signed by those VetBioNet partners wishing to contribute. We expect this to be completed before the final review meeting with the commission on the 2nd of June 2023.

4. Conclusions

Development of a VetBioNet-ERG will allow VetBioNet to participate as an existing network in multi-partner projects or funding applications, similar to the ISIDORE project and the proposed EUP AH&W. The aims, structure, and mode of operation of the VetBioNet-ERG have been defined in Deliverable D6.4. The formation of the VetBioNet-ERG will also allow options to be explored for becoming a legal entity to facilitate involvement in future project applications. The development of partnerships with other European RIs addressing veterinary infectious diseases within the framework of One Health will be key to future sustainability of VetBioNet and the ERG shall serve as a springboard for the preparation of additional joint funding proposals or other concerted actions.