ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE STAKEHOLDERS GROUP

BLUETONGUE DISEASE MEETING

15:00, 8 NOVEMBER 2007, PENTLAND HOUSE, EDINBURGH

Present

Name	Organisation		Name	Organisation
Colette Backwell	SG and Chair		Keith Redpath	SBCA
Charles Milne	CVO Scotland		Ian Mathers*	NBA
Neil Ritchie	SG		Hamish McBain	NBA
Mike Lamont	SG		David Whiteford	SFQC
Beverley Williams	SG		Kim Willaby	MRI
Alastair Douglas	SG		Jim Thompson	NSA
Derick McIntosh	AH Agency		Hamish Waugh	NSA
Brian Pack	ANM Group		George Milne	NSA
Andrew Wright	IAAS		Nigel Miller	NFUS
Aileen McFadzean*	SBF		Andy Robb	NFUS
Mike Flynn	SSPCA		Bob Carruth	NFUS
Alan Jess	SAMW		Jennifer Hewitt*	SRPBA

* By teleconference

Introduction

1. Colette Backwell welcomed stakeholders to the meeting and explained that the purpose was to give details of the recent European Commission bluetongue Regulation, give a background to the bluetongue disease situation and invite comments on what bluetongue disease control strategy Scottish Government should pursue.

2. Charles Milne gave a presentation updating the bluetongue Scottish stakeholder group on the facts about bluetongue disease, how it is transmitted, the present situation on vaccination and the possible actions open to Scottish Government on how it could be controlled. [The presentation is attached with these minutes].

3. Beverley Williams updated the group on the Commission's bluetongue regulation (No.1266/2007) and explained what response and control measures Scottish Government might be expected to implement. [Presentation attached].

<u>Background information on Bluetongue virus</u>

4. The following is background information provided to the group about bluetongue virus and how it is spread.

Information about bluetongue virus

- Animal disease only, affecting ruminants– no risk to humans or pigs.
- The disease is generally spread by a vector i.e. midge (*Culicoides sp.*) (recent studies have also shown transmission through semen).

- The disease was initially spread by the tropical midge (*C. Imicola*) but NE Europe has seen the virus spread by other midges.
- Midges can spread the disease at the rate of around 15 km per week. Animal movements can spread disease over longer distances.
- As an example of how quickly the disease can be spread, in Northern Europe there were 18 cases reported on 18 July but by 3 months later that had risen to over 30,000 cases.
- There are 24 strains of bluetongue virus.
- The strain BTV8 is the strain affecting Northern Europe.
- 20 % of sheep in Northern Europe that have been infected with BTV8 strain have died.
- SFQC estimated the cost of a test for BTV is between £47-£85.
- Ability of bluetongue virus to over winter will depend on level of disease present at the time and on how cold the winter is.
- Virus does not replicate effectively below 15^{o}C.
- Bluetongue virus affects growth rates, causes long term problems with infertility, and can cause wool break.

Information about the vector

- A midge suction trap which ran for one day in Glencoe trapped over 3.5 million midges.
- Midges generally do not fly below 7^{o}C.
- The tropical midge (*C. Imicola*) has a 20 % success rate of transmitting BTV8 – studies are underway looking at how effective midges in Scotland are at transmitting disease, but given 1 cow can be bitten as much as 10,000 times in one day, midges do not need a high level of competence to act as vectors.
- Infected animals can assist the spread by moving long distances and then being fed on by midges at the destination.

Information about the Vaccine

- Vaccines are strain specific and have a shelf life of 12 months in which they must be used.
- 3 drug companies are working on a vaccine.
- Vaccine being tendered for is effective against the strain BTV8 and is a dead vaccine (not attenuated live vaccine).
- No marker vaccine available yet.

<u>Re-naming of bluetongue zones</u>

5. Defra have renamed their bluetongue zones bringing them in line with new Commission Regulation. Bluetongue zones are much larger than other exotic diseases reflecting that the disease is spread by a vector i.e. the midge. Slide 5 of CVO Scotland's presentation refers.

<u>Commission's Bluetongue Regulation</u>

6. Bluetongue legislation includes Commission Decision 200/75/EC, Commission Regulation 1266/2007 and the Bluetongue (Scotland) Order 2003. Between them they set out the required disease controls and required exemptions to restrictions. Requirements include the introduction of a minimum protection zone of 100 kilometres around the infected premises with a 150 kilometre minimum surveillance zone. Presentations outlined the main points regarding movement out of a restricted zone to slaughter/for breeding/for further production and movement of genetic material out of a restricted zone.

7. Issues highlighted include:

- need for information from vector surveillance to determine the length of the vector free period;
- need to specify how protected from vectors animals must be;
- need for a reliable testing regime;
- waiting for a vaccine.

8. In light of these issues movement exemptions required by regulation may only be practical for small numbers of high value animals.

Pros and cons of Scotland as a bluetongue restricted area.

9. The group compared the estimated economic burden to Scottish industry if Scotland was kept free, and if it were declared a bluetongue restricted zone to facilitate movements north and south of the border. If Scotland was declared a bluetongue restricted zone then resulting EU (particularly on movements) restrictions would last for at least two years. This would have a serious impact on the large export market to Northern Ireland. There is only a small export market to third countries. Fortunately, if Scotland was bluetongue free animals would be able to transit a bluetongue area whilst maintaining its export status, and could be able to move animals into a restricted zone for domestic purposes.

10. Industry were agreed that the best way forward would be to try and maintain Scotland as a bluetongue free area for as long as possible. This would allow free movements within Scotland and free trade with EU, including NI.

11. The group did not discuss how Scotland might respond to a finding of bluetongue in Scotland in detail except to suggest slaughter of initial suspects. In England this had no effect in controlling the spread of disease but that's not to say it couldn't work in Scotland eg if the disease was imported via the movement of a single infected animal. The group was asked to consult with their members as to how Scotland might respond if bluetongue was to spread as far as the Forth Valley eg do we declare the area North of Scotland a free area?

12. NSAS noted that midge activity was not only affected by daylight hours but weather conditions. However it was agreed that factoring weather conditions into any general movement licence conditions would be impractical.

Movements to Scotland for slaughter from Bluetongue surveillance zone

13. A protocol agreement enabling Scottish slaughterhouses to accept animals from the bluetongue surveillance zone is being discussed and could be available around the beginning of December when midge activity will much lower. There will be specific additional conditions applied such as cleansing and disinfection of vehicles and removal of manure. It is likely that movements before dawn (when midge is active) will not be permitted and that slaughter will have to take place before dusk. SAMW agreed to consult its members on this issues as slaughterhouses further north could be precluded from this arrangement because of travel distances. **Action Point SAMW.**

14. IAAS asked why it would not be Scottish Government policy to spray insecticide on animals as well as the vehicles as there were some sprays permitted by FSA without a withdrawal period for slaughter. CVO Scotland explained that some insect repellents could actually attract midges – but agreed to look into the issue of insecticides.

Action Point CVO (S).

Vaccination

15. Some key information about the current bluetongue vaccine:

- Difficult to differentiate between a vaccinated animal and an animal that been infected with bluetongue virus.
- European Commission would not allow vaccination in a free area. Nor is it allowed in the Surveillance zone.
- Vaccine companies have indicated that sheep will require 1 vaccination and cattle two. An annual booster would then be required fro sheep and cattle. If this was missed the vaccination would have to be restarted.
- At present it is not possible to determine how quickly animals will develop immunity.
- Costs of vaccine may be between 40 and 60p per animal but this will be dependant on economies of scale.
- The vaccine is strain specific and has a shelf life of 12 months.

16. For a bluetongue vaccination programme to be effective, 80% uptake would be required within the target area. Stakeholders in general agreed that if vaccination was to be compulsory then the government should pay for this, but if it was a commercial decision by the producer then it would be reasonable to expect the producer to pay. NFUS noted the European Commission may fund the cost of vaccine and half the cost of administration in an emergency in the first year. CVOs will meet in the week beginning 12 November to discuss the vaccination strategy and the possibility of vaccination with a view to ring fencing the disease.

17. It was also suggested that the UK industry could pay to support individual farmers. However any vaccination programme needs to be on a GB basis as part of a wider national vaccination strategy aimed at controlling disease within the current protection zone. Industry felt that as vaccination benefits the whole industry Government should pay.

18. As vaccine supplies were limited it was agreed that a targeted use of the vaccine in affected areas would help stop the spread of the disease.

19. IAAS invited Scottish Government to begin enquiries now to vaccine manufactures for supplies. Colette Backwell explained that Scottish Government already had access to vaccine supplies should it be required.

Research

20. Scottish Government is funding research into the midge population looking at the species that are present in Scotland, quantities and each species competency in spreading disease. A separate project is looking at the economic impact of different disease control scenarios in Scotland.

21. NFUS were keen to see midge trapping continue until February to give a clear picture of midge activity. CVO Scotland was keen to see some of the traps move into areas like cattle sheds during the winter to see whether midge population are active in these areas where the climatic conditions would better suite midges.

Summary of main points of discussion

- A GB Strategy is essential in containing the spread of disease, including any vaccination programme;
- Attendees agreed that the best strategy was to keep Scotland free from bluetongue virus and its associated restrictions for as long as possible.
- If Scotland is declared a 'bluetongue area' it will impact on trade for at least two years – biggest trade implications for Scotland would be loss of trade with Northern Ireland;
- There is likely to be a limited supply of vaccine over the short term period, so concentrating the vaccine resources where the disease is will help stop the spread of the bluetongue virus further;
- Controls on animal movement out of the surveillance zone will also help slow the spread of disease. Group members agreed to consider the points raised in the meeting and discuss these further with their members;
- Any vaccination programme should probably be compulsory to make it effective.
- If it is a commercial decision to vaccinate – industry should pay, but if it is compulsory as a form of ring fencing to protect the wider industry, government should pay.

Scottish Government Rural Directorate
23 November 2007