

ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE STAKEHOLDERS GROUP

BLUETONGUE DISEASE MEETING

15:00, 6 DECEMBER 2007, SAUGHTON HOUSE, EDINBURGH

Present

Name	Organisation		Name	Organisation
Colette Backwell	SG and Chair		Alan Jess	SAMW
Charles Milne	CVO Scotland		Keith Redpath	SBCA
Neil Ritchie	SG		Hamish McBean	NBA
Debbie King	SG		Tim Baily	SFQC
Alastair Douglas	SG		Kim Haywood	NBA
Nick Ambrose	SG		George Milne	NSA
Mary Church	SG		Nigel Miller	NFUS
Paul Honeyman	AH Agency		Bob Carruth	NFUS
Barti Syngé	SAC		Allan Wilson	IAAS
Brian Pack	ANM Group		John Bell	SCBA
Mike Flynn	SSPCA			

Introduction

1. Colette Backwell welcomed stakeholders to the meeting and explained that the purpose was to give an update on the current situation regarding bluetongue in the UK, details of the forthcoming bluetongue legislation, and to discuss vaccination and communication.

Disease update

2. The increase in number of cases of BTV8 in England has slowed, with a current total of 66 infected premises. These are all in the same area, in South East England. The decrease in cases is due to midge activity reducing with the colder weather.

3. A new concern is that BTV1 has reached part of northern Spain and southern France. There is a risk that within the next year this new PZ may overlap with France's existing BTV8 PZ. This poses a potential risk to the UK in light of discussions regarding the potential joining of the UK PZ with France's BTV8 PZ in order to better facilitate trade. If this goes ahead, the UK would be at greater risk of the BTV1 strain entering the country. This is a problem because vaccination against, or antibodies to, one strain does not protect an animal against further strains of the disease.

4. Work is progressing on protocols for testing for the disease, in order to enable animals to move more freely in and out of the Protection Zones. It will be a legal requirement to test animals within the PZ prior to movement. There are two kinds of testing: PCR testing which detects virus present in animals; and another test, an ELISA, which detects antibodies. The former is expensive, the latter much cheaper. The former is permitted 2 weeks after the commencement of a vector free period, whereas the latter which picks up the ruminants

response to infection is permitted after 4 weeks. Related to this, the concept of a transmission free period, as opposed to a vector free period is being developed and will be incorporated into development of policies to allow animal movements. The SG will update the group on the progress of this work.

5. The Scottish Government has extended the research on the Scottish midge populations and species to areas further north than originally thought necessary. In the light of the theory that midges slow their activity, and essentially 'hibernate' over the winter, this research will now continue over the winter months. The research does not currently differentiate between mature and newly hatched midges, but this is something that may be investigated in the future. Tenders have now been received for research into the economic impact of different disease and disease control scenarios in Scotland.

Bluetongue legislation

6. The Scottish Government is in the final stage of drafting the Bluetongue (Scotland) Order 2007, and hopes that it will be signed by the end of next week. The reason for putting out a new Bluetongue Order is to include the new Commission Regulation on Restricted Zones (RZ) which are binding on all EU Member States, and on Scotland under the Scotland Act 1998. Measures in the new order include a legal requirement to notify on suspicion of disease, and the power to declare Temporary Control Zones. This latter is particularly useful in relation to bluetongue, as the period in which uncertainty as to whether the disease is circulating in the midge population is significantly longer than it takes to confirm the presence of other diseases such as FMD. The order also includes restrictions on vaccination in line with the Commission's view that vaccination can only take place within a Protection Zone.

7. Stakeholders noted that movement restrictions based on testing must be policed, and suggested that test results for cattle could be added to passports. CVO Scotland explained that there was a significant body of work to be done on this and other licensing conditions (led by Martyn Blissitt); he also requested estimates of how many animals (including pedigree animals) would need to move from the RZ

Vaccination

8. Colette Backwell asked the group for their views, in the light of Defra's tender for 10-20 million doses of bluetongue vaccination, on vaccination procurement strategy for Scotland and asked CVO Scotland to set out the key issues.

9. CVO Scotland informed the group in relation to a point raised at the previous meeting, that there are no insecticides currently on the market that effectively repelled midges from animals, without a withdrawal period.

10. CVO Scotland went over some of the key issues relating to vaccination. Currently, there is no vaccine for BTV8, and there is a risk that one won't be developed before disease spreads to Scotland. Although vaccine is being developed, once complete, it will still have to be tested and an application submitted before it can be licensed for use by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate. However, there are now 8 companies involved in developing vaccine, which makes chances of having a vaccine ready for use by next year, higher.

11. Given the experiences in mainland Europe and in England there is now a greater understanding of how the bluetongue virus may behave in 2008. It is likely that the disease will recrudescence in July in the same area in England. Spread of the disease left to midges is slow (approx 15 km per week) and midge activity slows by November therefore there is a potential 4 month window for new infections next year. Movement controls are very important in preventing spread of the disease, as animal movement can significantly speed up the spread of disease through the transport of infected animals. Therefore, it is possible that the disease will reach Scotland next year. If it does, it is likely to follow a similar pattern of activity as in England this year, i.e. low prevalence, in a small number of herds and flocks (estimated a maximum of 100 premises in a worst case scenario). The real threat to Scotland is anticipated to be in 2009.

12. When a vaccine is developed, it is likely to cost in the region of £7-10 million to vaccinate all susceptible animals in Scotland. The Commission does not allow for vaccination outwith the Protection Zones. This means Scotland cannot vaccinate animals as a preventative measure. In light of this, and the 1-year shelf life of vaccines, it is necessary to carefully balance the costs and risks of tendering for, or underwriting a supply of vaccines for next year.

13. Neil Ritchie noted that in the light of these costs and risks it would be difficult to justify public expenditure on vaccination for next year. However, there would be opportunities in the future to purchase vaccine if necessary.

14. CVO Scotland indicated that mathematical modelling work on the effectiveness of vaccination was being carried out, results were preliminary and the methods required further development. However he felt that it is possible that dependent on the vaccine strategy adopted and uptake, vaccination may slow down rather than prevent spread of the disease.

15. NFUS hoped that the vaccine would be more effective than this. They also raised the question of contingency planning, in the form of having an extra 2 million doses of vaccine for use anywhere in the UK that may need it as an emergency measure. CVO Scotland confirmed that this was covered in that Defra's tender includes the staggering of the purchase of vaccines, and therefore, a portion of the doses tendered for will be available for longer than a calendar year.

16. There followed a discussion about whether the vaccination strategy should involve voluntary or compulsory vaccination. The group was strongly in favour of compulsory vaccination. The group also felt that although Defra's Core Group are in favour of a voluntary scheme, there was some divergence between this group and members of the industry in England and Wales. The group felt that a UK wide strategy would be most effective, and that it would be very useful to have a UK dialogue on this. The Scottish Government agreed to take this suggestion to the other UK administrations, and Colette Backwell asked industry to likewise approach their counterparts elsewhere in the UK. **Action point ALL**

17. The group discussed financing of vaccination, and agreed that this should be approached on a partnership basis.

18. The discussion then moved on to the Commission's policy of not allowing vaccination outwith the Surveillance Zones. The group felt that this approach was unhelpful and the industry would prefer to vaccinate as soon as a vaccine was ready to prevent the spread of

disease. CVO Scotland agreed with this position and confirmed that they had on 3 occasions challenged the EU position to Defra, who had taken this to the Commission, and would continue to lobby to that effect.

Communication

19. The Scottish Government highlighted that ongoing work on contingency planning was being undertaken. Three new industry information leaflets were being produced, and the SG will circulate to the group for comments. The SG would also welcome suggestions from the group on any more material that could usefully be produced. CVO Scotland had suggested a leaflet for industry outside Restricted Zones, and this will be undertaken.

20. The SG also emphasised the importance of the group communicating information on bluetongue to their members. CVO Scotland, SG and SAC all offered the use of presentations and other materials to the group for use in informing their members.

21. Colette Backwell summarised the main conclusions of the meeting.

22. Brian Pack suggested that, based on these, it would be useful to put together a statement of the group's position on vaccination. SG agreed that this would be helpful and agreed to create the first draft. **Action point SG**

23. NBA suggested it would be useful to produce a layman's guide to the vaccination. CVO Scotland pointed out this would be premature before the vaccine was ready and licensed, but it would certainly be something to consider in the future.

Summary of main points of discussion

- It is the group's view that there should be a UK vaccination strategy, which the industry will invest in in a partnership approach.
- The strategy should be two-fold: a first round of vaccination to stop the spread of the disease, followed by complete vaccination if the first step fails.
- There should be a UK contingency store of a small amount of vaccine.
- The only sensible approach is complete vaccination, within and outwith the PZ, therefore the industry and SG/CVO Scotland should continue to lobby the Commission to change their position.
- There is a need for UK dialogue: the industry will talk to UK colleagues, and SG will talk to Defra.

Scottish Government Rural Directorate
17 December 2007