

**PRODUCER STAKEHOLDER MEETING ON A POST MOVEMENT REGIME FOR
BLUETONGUE
18th January 2008, Pentland House**

PRESENT

George Milne (NSA)
Nigel Miller (NFUS)
Bob Carruth (NFUS)
John Bell (SBCA)
Keith Redpath (SBCA)
Ian Mathers (NBA)
Hamish McBean (NBA)
Karen Smyth (SRPBA)

Charles Milne (CVO Scotland)
Neil Ritchie (SG – Chair)
Beverley Williams (SG)
Alistair Douglas (SG)
Roy Paterson (SG)
Paul Honeyman (AH)
Rupert Hine (AH)

Apologies:

Brian Pack (ANM Group)
Andrew Wright (IAA)

INTRODUCTION

1. The Chair welcomed people to the meeting, which had been organised to obtain views on post-movement regimes for animals leaving a bluetongue restricted zone from organisations representing producers.
2. Before focussing on the main purpose of the meeting, a brief update on some wider issues was given.

ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMES

3. Scottish Government (SG) informed the Group of the recent development that the European Commission had concerns with the current format of the Animal Health and Welfare Management Programme. SG has been forced to temporarily remove the scheme from the Scottish Rural Development Plan in order that the implementation of other schemes was not further delayed.
4. SG are confident that after further discussion with the Commission the scheme will be re-introduced to the SRDP later in the year, although this may not be in time to allow new entrants for 2008. Meanwhile, existing AHWMP commitments will be honoured for their full 5-year terms, and new funding for animal health and welfare is available through the new Rural Priorities competitive funding scheme.

BLUETONGUE UPDATE

Imports

5. CVO Scotland (CVOS) informed the group that the farm at Kirkcudbright that had received an infected import from Germany in December is still under restrictions pending a successful outcome of the second round of tests next week. Both the imported animals and those kept within the same air-space are being tested. It is not considered necessary to test all

animals on the farm as the infected import arrived during a vector free period. A midge trap installed on the site on 31st December has confirmed that no midges are presently active in the area.

6. Further information has been received from Germany:
 - The animals imported were tested some time before the movement was made.
 - One animal in the intended batch was found to be positive and was excluded from the movement.
 - The condition under which the movement was made was protection from vectors – by the use of insecticide. The Commission has confirmed that this is not sufficient for the purposes.
7. There are potential issues around:
 - The length of time between testing and the movement
 - The potential for a mix-up of the animals within the batch – were we mistakenly sent the positive animal?
 - The robustness of the pre-movement test used.
8. Portugal, Spain and Italy have also received infected imports from Germany and are strongly supporting the pressure put on Germany to tighten procedures. Bilateral meetings with Germany have been held this week and more are due next week.
9. Overall there have been very few imports coming into Scotland from continental restricted zones, the most recent being a movement from France to the Aberdeen/Inch area. Negative post-movement test results were obtained on 17th January. This appears to suggest that the message about careful sourcing of stock is getting through.

Disease spread

10. CVOS noted that BTV8 is still spreading across northern Europe. In addition, BTV1 is spreading north in Spain and south west France. These strains are two of the most virulent, with relatively high levels of clinical symptoms and mortality. There is some concern that the two strains will eventually overlap, particularly as there is no cross-protection between the two strains, or their vaccines. Some countries in southern Europe who have been strictly controlling bluetongue for several years to protect the rest of Europe are less than satisfied with the attitude of some of their northern European counterparts.

EU vaccination conference

11. CVOS reported on some key points. Information from countries who had undertaken vaccination campaigns showed that disease incidence can be significantly reduced through vaccination. However, a 65% vaccination rate achieved by voluntary means is not enough to achieve control - vaccination rate needs to achieve 80% before becoming effective.

12. The Commission has agreed to co-fund emergency mass vaccination campaigns (100% of the cost of the vaccine and 50% of the cost of administering it). Member states will design their own vaccination campaigns, but these must comply with the Commission's view of an emergency mass vaccination to get funding; i.e. it needs to be either compulsory, (or the Commission must be convinced that vaccination will reach 80% target rate through voluntary

means); it needs to be administered by official vets; and the vaccinated animals need to be identified.

13. The Commission remain adamant in their decision to not allow vaccination in a free area. SG continue to lobby the Commission, however, there remains little point in spending £5 million on vaccine whilst Scotland is disease free. This will be kept under review and if we decide vaccination is required SG can either add on an order to Defra's with Intervet, or approach one of the other 7 companies working on a vaccine. Assuming that the vaccine development goes to plan, it is not thought that supply will be an issue.

MOVEMENTS OUT OF A RESTRICTED ZONE

14. The main focus of the meeting was what procedures the Scottish Government should put in place to protect Scotland from the risk of bringing up infected animals from the restricted zone in England. CVOS started by highlighting a few factors to consider:

- The rules regarding movements are laid down in the Commission Regulation, in force since the 26th October 2007.
- The UK declared a vector free period (VFP) on the 20th December: Animals can be PCR tested to move 14 days after this date (4th Jan), and can be ELISA tested to move 28 days after this date (18th Jan).
- Pre-movement testing (all PCR to date) has found four infected animals, highlighting the fact that given the frequent lack of clinical signs, we are uncertain as to exactly where the disease is present in England.
- Both PCR and ELISA tests used in the UK are extremely robust, with a 99.9% sensitivity and specificity; i.e., out of 1000 infected animals, 999 will be picked up.
- There is no capacity for post-movement testing using PCR – initial tests performed are ELISA, with a PCR only being run if the ELISA is found to be positive. ELISA tests can only be performed 10 days after arrival.
- Figures on sheep movements:
 - Sept 06-Dec 07: 6483 to slaughter in 292 batches (mainly May/July 07)
 - July 06 – Dec 07: 9057 to live (mainly March/April 07)

15. CVOS reiterated that the most likely route of disease spread over long distances within the UK is by the movement of animals, and said that it was important to ensure the best possible use of limited resources in managing the risk to Scotland of animals from England. Given the robustness of the pre-movement tests required, his advice was that the most important action to take was to check that all animals coming to Scotland had been tested, and had been found negative.

16. To address this, SG have made it a requirement that all farmers receiving animals from a UK restricted zone should inform them within 3 days of their arrival, along with details of the Annex III conditions the animals have moved under and what pre-movement testing has been undertaken. In addition to forcing farmers in receipt of animals to think about the status of the animals, this will also allow cross-checks to be made with the lab regarding testing, and with CTS/SAMU regarding movements. This cross checking will pick up any moves made without pre-movement testing, which present the biggest risk to Scotland. Post movement tests would then be performed and appropriate action taken.

17. The Group were supportive of the arrangements being put in place; however, they felt that they did not go far enough. Assuming that England are successful in their vaccination

campaign later this year and disease spread by midges is reduced, Scotland has a chance of remaining free from bluetongue. With this in mind they considered it essential to stop infected animals coming in, primarily by post movement testing animals from restricted zones within the UK. Additional tools could be to charge the farmer for the tests and to fine farmers for non-compliance. An import tax was also suggested, however, SG reminded the Group that tax powers were reserved and pointed out that the UK is a single epidemiological unit and that legally Scotland has more control over imports than over moves within the UK.

18. CVOS responded that the key aim was to remain bluetongue free until a vaccine is available to control any disease arriving in Scotland – though he agreed with the group that if Scotland could remain totally free this would be even better. He pointed out that introducing post movement tests without any scientific evidence for their requirement ran the risk of Scotland being taken to judicial review to answer charges of putting a trade barrier in place.

19. The Group raised the point that there is considerable uncertainty regarding the exact end of the VFP, and that post-movement testing was needed as a safety net during this period.

20. CVOS agreed that the exact timing of increased midge activity was uncertain, but said that a date for the end of the period would be set 28 days before historical data from midge research estimated midge activity to start. At present it was thought that the end date would be around 28th February. However, he also noted that from 60 days after the VFP started (i.e.18th February) animals are allowed to move without pre- movement testing as they are considered to be non-viremic and therefore safe. He suggested that it might be easier to justify post movement testing over this period, particularly as there was uncertainty regarding the over-wintering mechanism of bluetongue.

21. The Group thought that bringing in post-movement testing for 10 days at the end of the vector free period would be confusing for people. They considered that a standardised approach of post movement testing throughout the whole VFP would be better. They reminded SG that the agreed aim was to keep bluetongue and the associated restrictions out of Scotland for as long as possible and suggested that SG should be as strict with their controls as they can get away with.

22. CVOS suggested that although there were legal risks to SG imposing post movement testing without scientific evidence for the need, producers moving livestock to Scotland could arrange for their own post-movement testing if they were concerned.

23. The Group were sceptical about the ease of such a farmer-led arrangement. They also made the point that routine post movement testing is already in place for TB. CVOS said that TB tests are only 80% sensitive, meaning that 1 in 5 infected animals are missed, rather than the 1 in 1000 for bluetongue. There is therefore a clear benefit to testing twice for TB that is absent for bluetongue testing.

24. **In summary, the Group felt:**

- The risk posed by bluetongue is greater than for TB
- Disincentives should be provided for livestock moves from restricted areas into Scotland.
- For those moves that are made, the system should, preferably by post movement testing:
 - make farmers be as careful as possible;

- provide a safety net.

25. **In summary, the CVOS' position was:**

- Routine post movement testing is not required due to the sensitivity of pre movement tests.
- Using testing as a disincentive raises legal risks for Scotland
- The cost-benefit of post movement testing is not in industry's favour.

26. SG agreed to take the output of the discussion to Cabinet Secretary for a final decision.

Action: NR to advise Cabinet Secretary of the stakeholder views and CVOS' advice on post movement testing.

Action: CVOS to arrange for a veterinary risk assessment for post movement testing.

27. CVOS said that there were several factors that would need to be worked out before post-movement testing could be implemented, including:

- There would need to be restrictions placed on the animals on arrival.
- Discussions with private vets would be needed re manpower

28. The Group also suggested that:

- The requirement for notification should be before the movement is made, not after.
- There should be fines on illegal moves.

Action – SG to consider further improvements to the post movement checking regime and to scope out those resources needed for any post-movement testing.

29. CVOS noted that if post movement testing was put in place, it would be a short-term measure covering movements during the VFP until vaccination is available. Although he warned that if Scotland does manage to remain bluetongue free, some mechanism may have to be put in place again next winter since vaccination will only occur within the protection zone.

STRATEGY NEXT MIDGE SEASON - SCENARIOS PROJECT

30. CVOS noted that when disease starts again after the VFP has ended, the Group will need to review whether it is still appropriate to keep as much of Scotland free of restrictions as possible, or whether we should become a protection zone in order to vaccinate.

31. SG are currently funding a short research project looking at the economics of a variety of responses to bluetongue incursion scenarios, the most likely of which are either through the movement of animals, or through the gradual movement of midges over land from England (15-20km per week). The key outputs of this work are expected by the end of March and it is hoped that the information will help the Group in their discussions.

COMMUNICATIONS

32. SG informed the Group that they were issuing a press release that day on the new notification system and risks of bringing in livestock. They were also working on a list of

issues for stakeholders to use, and drafting a letter to go to livestock producers updating them on various bluetongue related issues and reinforcing the need for caution.

33. The Group suggested a number of additional messages that should be put in the letter:
- Information on the post movement regime for animals from a restricted zone and what will happen re non-compliance.
 - A clear indication of where the zones are in England (map, pre-fix codes etc).
 - The message that not all disease has been identified and that is could be equally risky to source animals from a free area next to a restricted zone when vectors are active.
 - Still vital that any suspicion of disease is reported

Action: SG to add in the above points to the letter for producers

34. SG reminded the Group that comments were still welcome on the draft bluetongue leaflets previously circulated.

Action: all to provide any comments on the leaflets to SG asap.

35. SG noted that the UK forum on vaccination is likely to be in the first week of February, which fits in with the intended submission of the UK vaccination strategy to the Commission later in February. The Group reminded SG that there were bull sales in that week and that a day should be picked avoiding these to ensure a good turnout.

Action: SG to ensure a suitable date is picked and to inform the Group of the details asap.