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Dear Ian

Consultation on the Defra Contingency Plan for Exotic Notifiable Diseases of Animals

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this year's review of the contingency plan. The Farm Animal Welfare Committee has just a few observations to make.

Availability and identification of adequate expertise

We would like to be assured that the plan includes a mechanism for making sure that the expertise in the identified roles/posts is available in sufficient number, especially with the restructuring of veterinary input with the movement of vets in Defra to AHVLA. The titles of groups involved are not defined for their peace-time job in the document, does someone check that the groups and people exist and continue to exist?

We are told that vets with expertise in welfare that are currently embedded in the Animal Welfare Policy Team will be available to advise on welfare and culling during an epidemic and will liaise with the AHVLA welfare lead, although the veterinary resource available to the Animal Welfare Policy Team is being reduced. There should be sufficient veterinary input available to meet these obligations in an outbreak.

The importance of regular planning exercises in conjunction with industry

The large practice exercises for major disease events are very important for understanding of roles and readiness. Specialist industry and related (e.g. culling) knowledge can augment these exercises as it is essential in real events.

Members of FAWC have experience of the positive impact and importance of smaller government-led practical disease control exercises held in conjunction with industry. The expert knowledge and the collaboration of industry players is essential to the

successful operation of contingency plans and their involvement in exercises will ensure their role is understood and can be activated quickly. We recommend an even greater link with all aspects of industry in these practice exercises.

Highlighting the welfare issues created by movement restrictions and whether the current delegation to industry to manage the issue is adequate

In past disease events political decisions have been taken by GB administrations to implement and financially support welfare disposal schemes. The current plan places responsibility for the welfare of animals under restriction on keepers, which is perfectly correct, but where the scale of events expands pressure might again grow for additional support. Some thought might be given to this issue, perhaps by the newly announced Animal Health and Welfare Board, clarifying the likely responsibility of owners and the role of the state before an outbreak when decisions can be taken under pressure.

Finally, with the devolved administrations we note that this document is for England only, we gather that similar documents exist for Scotland and Wales and recommend that a statement on how the bodies will work together in a time of crisis is included in the document.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely

Meryl Ward

Meryl Ward
FAWC Disease Working Group Chairman