

Notes of the 'UK Equine Disease Coalition' meeting
Thursday 23rd May 2019
BHA, 75 High Holborn, London WC1V 6LS

Attendance:

Martyn Blissitt MBI (Scottish Government)
Mark Bowen MB (BEVA)
Marion Collins MC (Scottish Government) *
Shane Collins SC (DAERA)
Francesca Compostella FC (RSPCA)
Eleanor Glendenning EG (Defra)
Gordon Hickman GH (Defra) *

Liz Kelly LK (World Horse Welfare)
Ben Mayes BM (FEEVA)
Keith Meldrum KM (World Horse Welfare)
Richard Newton RN (AHT)
Roly Owers RO (World Horse Welfare) – Chair
Helen Roberts HR (APHA)
Simon Rolfe SR (Welsh Government)

External attendees: Amanda Piggot AP (BHA) * – by telephone

Apologies:

Alastair George AG (APHA), Josh Slater JS (RVC/Horse Trust)

1. RO welcomed everyone to the meeting especially the first-time attendees: Martyn Blissitt, Marion Collins (by telephone), Fran Compostella and Amanda Piggot (in attendance as meeting host). RO thanked AP and Joanne Crawforth (BHA) for hosting the meeting and making all the necessary arrangements.
2. Notes on the previous meeting – Thu 8 Nov – were agreed as an accurate record subject to the correction of a minor typo.
3. Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.
 - a. AHS vaccine update. RN noted the recent announcement from the International Horse Sports Confederation (IHSC) that the IHSC working group had 'identified an inactivated multivalent DIVA AHS vaccine candidate'. This announcement gave little other detail and it is unclear which technology this candidate vaccine would be based on – but this initiative is likely to involve a South African group (including John Grewar) looking to restore direct equine exports to Europe. RN suggested we keep in contact with the FEI on these developments. **RO to action**
 - b. BBSRC support for AHS vaccine development. RN said that he had discussed this matter further with RO, highlighting that the UK was in a good position to initiate progress on vaccine development (most crucially on helping identify a commercial partner) but was clearly not prioritising this – it was noted that Javier Castillo-Olivares had left Pirbright to try to further his AHS vaccine development work elsewhere. Following discussion, it was agreed that despite the current political environment it would still be worthwhile writing to the Minister Lord Gardiner, especially given that this summer's Spending Review is the time to bid for funding for equine exotic disease research and we know that the Minister has a personal interest in this matter. Letter to be co-signed by RO and RN. **RN to action**
KM noted that the PQ discussed at the last meeting had been tabled with a MEP but had not been asked. Given the current elections to the European Parliament this would now have to wait until the new Parliament was sitting. KM also noted that the planned FVO visit to South Africa had still not been confirmed.
 - c. DARD strategy development. SC reported that Deloitte had completed an economic analysis of the equine sector in Northern Ireland with input from the all island governing bodies of Horse Sport Ireland and Horse Racing Ireland. This had been a far more involved process than planned and included a consultation with over 800 responses. Final analysis is being

undertaken and an equine strategy (and associated action plan) should be complete by the end of the year. SC confirmed that the analysis would be made available.

4. Terms of Reference (ToR). RO referenced the updated ToR tabled with the meeting papers to incorporate the role of the Equine Exotic Disease Core Group, following suggested wording from EG. The amendments were agreed.

RO noted that HR had been in contact with Linda Evans at the Donkey Sanctuary regarding joining the Coalition. This was agreed.

5. Disease update

a. Equine Influenza. RN briefly overviewed EI situation:

- 2 EI outbreaks in 2018 – involving Florida Clade 1 virus for the first time since 2009
- First cases in 2019 on 2 Jan – and within week number of cases had exceeded total in 2018. On 6 Feb active virus identified in racing yard – which led to cessation of racing for 6 days
- Vast majority of cases in unvaccinated animals – especially in non-TBs imported from Ireland – but there has been some in vaccinated animals involving all 3 vaccines on market currently. Two of the three vaccines contain the Florida clade, with good efficacy
- Situation in UK mirrored across northern Europe – including France, Ireland, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands and Italy
- OIE expert surveillance panel met in April and decided there was insufficient evidence to justify update to current vaccine recommendations – but keeping decision under review
- The equine sector had a significant responsibility to promote responsible precautions especially with start of summer activities – and there is concern that the EI issue has gone off the radar of many now that it is no longer headline news
- Cases still being diagnosed on a regular (almost daily) basis in non-TBs
- Also noted significant outbreaks of EI in West Africa – in Nigeria followed import of polo ponies. Significant deaths, especially in donkeys, reported in Niger

General discussion included:

- BHA – AP reported that BHA Vet Committee had recommended continuing with 6 monthly vaccine boosters – current BHA Board decision (of 8 monthly interval) just for 2019 and will be reviewed for 2020
- HR thanked the Animal Health Trust and the Levy Board for their support and considerable efforts over the past few weeks – the Equiflu website is very helpful
- All agreed that it was important not to specifically highlight vaccine ‘breakdown’ as this would only decrease owner compliance with vaccination – and that collectively we needed a unified message around the importance of vaccination
- RN confirmed that in his view a 6 monthly booster was still valid
- There may be increased numbers cases in the summer as horse movements increase
- RO mentioned Lord Gardiner’s recent query (at a meeting with the British Horse Council (BHC) Board) about what the sector felt were the key learnings of the recent EI outbreaks – RN referred to his presentation to the National Equine Forum in early March – most crucially it serves to stress the importance of the EI surveillance scheme
- VMD is collating information re vaccine efficacy – vets encouraged to complete adverse reaction report forms

b. Equine Viral Arteritis. HR/EG reviewed the current situation:

- 3 positive stallions identified in Dorset, 1 stallion in Devon. EVA virus identified by PCR in semen of all 4. Still no agreement with owner on what to do with these 3 stallions in Dorset– Dorset owner keen on exporting one animal to Spain
- Testing ongoing on 2 seropositive horses in Staffordshire (1 PCR negative) – and 1 horse in Hampshire identified through tracings from one of the 3 high risk shows
- 1995 EVA Order came about following 1993 outbreak to manage long-term shedding of infected stallions – hence emphasis on stallions and not mares, foals etc as the HBLB CoP was being observed
- Tracings had identified 3 high risk events from summer 2018 – and from this 66 high risk movement of animals through respiratory transmission – these tracings should be complete soon. MBI referred to an article on EVA in the Government Veterinary Journal in 1996 covering the emergence of EVA in 1993 and the efforts made to control the disease (author Bob Davies)

General discussion included:

- Current cases had highlighted the disconnect between the 95 Order and the HBLB Code of Practice (CoP). KM outlined further background to the Order and how the current situation differs – especially with owner resistance to testing
- Core Group meetings have worked well
- Clear that reserve powers (as with CEM Order) are needed to deal with owners who choose not to comply with the CoP
- GH highlighted Defra's frustration with lack of progress – and noted that if the owner continues to not comply with the CoP that the only power left for Defra is to publicly name the stallions and the premises. However, Defra are committed to reviewing EVA policy and associated regulation once current situation resolved
- HR noted that the use of the Central Equine Database (CED) to assist with tracings had not been ideal and that there are lessons to learn for the Equine ID team. There is an opportunity to rectify these shortcomings through the current Equine SI being considered
- KM raised concerns that Defra might consider de-listing EVA considering recent events – but HR noted that EVA is listed within the Animal Health Regulation – and as the UK is looking for equivalency (whatever happens with EU Exit) then delisting should not be considered a risk. EVA is currently covered by the EU conditions for the collection of equine semen and this is likely to continue with the new implementing regulations made under the Animal Health Regulation but is not covered by the conditions for trade of live horses between the Member States
- RN said that the AHT are offering subsidised EVA testing – although MB noted that the main cost to the owner is the cost of the private veterinary surgeon attending and taking samples
- MB queried whether there would be a possibility of raising a case under the Animal Welfare Act given that the owner was not taking steps to protect animals from disease. It was agreed that the chances of success of this type of prosecution would be low but could be a useful tactic
- GH stressed the importance of vets submitting samples completing full details – inc. full name, passport number etc. It was agreed that this could be made a BEVA AI scheme requirement
- RN confirmed that the next Defra/AHT/BEVA Quarterly Disease Report would include an EVA article by James Crabtree – highlighting that it is not just a reproductive disease

- c. West Nile virus (WNV). RN raised the recent issues of vets having difficulty being able to obtain rapid agreement from APHA to submit blood samples to exclude WNV infection. HR felt it was more an issue with the APHA helpline and operators not being aware of the current agreed arrangement. This should be resolved through updating the operating manual that AG is currently working on. Agreed that this would be a good opportunity for BEVA to promote to its members.

2018 had been an exceptional year for WNV in Europe but has been a quieter start to 2019 possibly due to cold, dry spring. MB noted that FEEVA have been promoting WNV awareness to its members. Defra continues to carry out dead bird surveillance where die offs occur, currently ~300 birds/year are tested.

- d. Strangles. RN noted that the Horse Trust funded Surveillance of Equine Strangles (SES) initiative was now live and reporting findings through the Defra/AHT/BEVA quarterly equine disease surveillance reports. A feature article on the scheme appeared in the Vet Record (16 Mar edition) and a dedicated webpage is being created.

6. Regulatory update

- a. Equine ID and CED. LK said that the Devolved Administrations are looking to implement 2015/262 in similar ways. There are some differences in wording across the different legislation. It is important for this process to be seamless to owners, regardless in which country they lived. The CED is linking with ScotEquine ID, with all information from the 5 PIOs based in Scotland being loaded to CED and all information on CED re horses with a Scottish postcode address being loaded to ScotEquine. The sector is also working with Equine Register and the semi-feral populations (especially New Forest and Dartmoor) to enable a practical and compliant solution for their issues – it is practically very difficult to provide animals over 12months old coming off the moors with a full passport immediately. Currently looking at a digital system using smartphones.
- b. Animal Health Regulation. Latest draft of the Delegated Act Implementing Regulations (inc. Equine ID and registration of premises) is currently being consulted on. KM noted that there are some concerns – e.g. on records for movements only being required for movements lasting longer than 30 days. Records would only be valuable for disease tracing purposes if they cover overnight and longer stays away from the home premises. HR stressed that this regulation was a minimum level for all the EU – individual countries can require more stringent reporting. It was agreed that the requirement for horses registered with foreign PIOs needing to re-register with a PIO in the country where each horse is kept needs to be promoted to both owners and PIOs. LK noted that in the UK this process should be simple through the CED and Equine Register should have a user friendly method in use soon.
- c. Animal Welfare (Licencing of activities involving animals) (England) Regulations 2018. BM outlined the progress of the RCVS Working Group on Riding Establishments including the requirement for establishments to have a biosecurity plan and individual health plans for each equine. He is currently writing the templates and will forward them to EDC for comment.
- d. Traceability Design User Group (TDUG). RO reported the latest feedback from Jan Rogers, equine sector member of the TDUG. The TDUG is continuing to influence the development of the service and has provide considerable input into the design of the company that will deliver the multi-species Livestock Information Programme (LIP). Like the CED, the LIP has a mandatory element and a value element. Defra have allocated £3.5m for the project in the next financial year. As previously reported, equines are some way down the line with coming on board with the LIP, but it is anticipated that the CED will feed into the programme. The current contract with Equine Register ends in 2023.

7. EU Exit. Much of the Defra focus had been on No Deal planning until early April. For the moment at least there is more business as usual within the department in advance of the next deadline at the end of October. It was agreed that Defra engagement over the past few months, especially through the Stakeholder and Vet Forums, had been excellent. RO also noted that even though any decision will need to be taken again by the Commission, it was encouraging that the UK had been categorised as a List A Third Country had we left the EU with no deal on 12 Apr.
8. Biosecurity Behaviour Change Project. LK outlined the latest progress with the project. BHS, BHS Scotland, Blue Cross, Redwings and World Horse Welfare are supporting the livery yard visits (each yard being visited has a minimum of 6 horses with separate owners) – 5 yards have been visited to date and the plan is to carry out at least another 5 visits (with yard owner/manager and two liveries on each yard) and then review. Once this phase is complete, we will engage the Behavioural Insights Team again and look to identify a potential behavioural change action that we could pilot later in the year – and measure interaction and compliance. HR expressed her interest in the project and how it might be used in other species, especially with back yard keepers of livestock.
9. Equine Medicines. Little to report. LK noted that a considerable amount of no-deal planning had been undertaken by the VMD and pharmaceutical companies.
10. Update from related groups/initiatives
 - a. Animal Health and Welfare Board for England. Nothing significant to report.
 - b. British Horse Council. RO noted that David Mountford (BEVA) had taken over as Chair of the BHC Board with Jeanette Allen (Horse Trust) acting as Vice-Chair. The next meeting of the full Council is at Defra on 10 Jun. RO noted that the Board were keen to rekindle engagement with the Devolved Administrations.
 - c. Equine Stakeholder Group for Scotland. Last met in November – date not set for next meeting.
 - d. AHT Equine Industry Committee. The Committee meetings in February and September – next meeting 4 Sep. RN noted that the September meeting had often been coupled with the HBLB CoP Review meeting in the morning – however the next CoP Review meeting is taking place on 25 Jun due to amount on the agenda – and he is keen to maintain Defra and APHA engagement with these meetings.
11. AOB
 - a. EIA Control Strategy: EG said that Defra are currently undertaking a review of this strategy and will circulate this around the group for comment shortly.
 - b. Sport horse imports: BM highlighted that his practice was experiencing a surge in imports recently and queried what panel of diseases should be routinely tested and what labs purchasers should use. It was agreed that this should be context specific but should generally include testing for EIA, EVA, piroplasmiasis, strangles and possibly CEM – and that a key message for such imports is ‘buyer beware’.
12. Date of next meeting – Thu 14 Nov – BHA, High Holborn, London.