

**Notes of the ‘UK Equine Disease Coalition’ meeting**

**Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

**Via Zoom online platform**

**Attendance:**

Mark Bowen MB (Nottingham Uni)	Ben Mayes BM (private practitioner)
Nadine Arber (NA) (Scottish Gov)	Annabel Henderson (AH) (Scottish Gov)
Shane Collins SC (DAERA)	Keith Meldrum KM (Observer)
Linda Evans LE (The Donkey Sanctuary)	Richard Newton RN (ex-AHT)
Alastair George AG (APHA)	Roly Owers RO (World Horse Welfare) – Chair
Liz Kelly LK (World Horse Welfare)	Helen Roberts HR (Defra)
Roxane Kirton RK (RSPCA)	Gosia Siwonia GS (Welsh Gov)
Joe Latimer JL (Defra)	Amanda Piggot (AP) (BHA)
David Mountford DM (BEVA)	Gordon Hickman (GH) (Defra)

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1. RO welcomed everyone to the meeting noting that there were no apologies.
  2. Notes on the previous meeting – Wed 4 November 2020 – were agreed as an accurate record.
  3. Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda
    - a. Equine Movements Template. AG confirmed that this continues to be delayed by other operational issues and is still work in progress. Andy Paterson is progressing and anticipates an update in 2-3 weeks.
    - b. Animal Health Trust. RN explained that tendering for AHT diagnostic and surveillance functions had been completed and Rossdales had been contracted for the laboratory services. Further discussions involving Cambridge University and RN’s group were still taking place. RO mentioned a letter due to appear in the Vet Rec and an article in the Veterinary Journal on the AHT and KM confirmed that both had now been published. The AHT library had been purchased by Lord Kirkham and moved to the Harper-Keele Veterinary School where it is now available to all students. DM commented that other industry sectors are keen to invest in disease surveillance and support RN’s team.
  4. Terms of Reference (ToR). Last amended in November 2019, the Coalition’s Terms of Reference were approved unchanged.
  5. Disease update
    - a. Equine Influenza. RN reported that EI is still being seen globally and gave details on incident numbers seen in North America and Europe – Canada 2, USA 14, France 12, UK 10. In the UK disease had been seen in new arrivals, some from overseas (3 in Dec, 2 in Feb, 3 in Mar, 2 in Apr) both in vaccinated and non-vaccinated animals. Neil Bryant at Cambridge University is now typing the strains, with Florida Clade 1 predominant. It will be interesting to see what effect coming out of lockdown and resumption of events will have on disease.

RN discussed vaccination protocols, with France and German racing regulators having taken on revisions with 6-month boosters required. AP said that British Racing had delayed a consultation on any changes due to Covid but would shortly be progressing this work. It was noted that the BEF disciplines were waiting for any updated approach from racing before proposing changes. AP will contact BEF to update them on racing’s position.

- b. Equine Viral Arteritis. HR said that the review of the 1995 EVA Order continues to be delayed but good progress is now being made on a strategy. JL stated that they were looking at the most effective measures for owners and sectors. Some controls are currently lacking. It will be linked to equine ID and registration and the objective is to provide effective control while reducing the negative impact on the sector. It is expected that a draft strategy will be available for the group to see later this year. GH said that it is hoped that this would be a GB strategy (if not UK). However Wales and Scotland were unclear if they would be in a position to meet this timeline due to other priorities.

AG reported 18 non-negative reports, with the options for owners, for example, as test matings (observed and monitored by APHA) or semen testing. RN asked about any changes anticipated post-Brexit – HR confirmed that the disease is not part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> country trade certificate – however this does not prevent the sector applying voluntary controls. Defra will consider further opportunities as a 3<sup>rd</sup> country and more industry involvement, as for CEM which is working well, may be an option for consideration. HR spoke of a new equine stakeholder group being set up. This would include a number of members from EDC, it will be Government led and be aligned with similar stakeholder groups in other sectors who provide information on how disease control strategies impact on their sectors. HR agreed to review the Coalition's Terms of Reference to check if they needed updating. **HR to action**

- c. Equine Herpes. DM stated that guidance for vets on vaccination was published on the BEVA website. It was reported that some insurance companies were refusing to cover disease costs where horses had not been vaccinated – even in cases where disease was neurological and vaccine not appropriate. HR is part of the EFSA group tasked to look at EHV and opine as to whether it should be notifiable, with the opinion due in November. DM and RN reported that the group set up by Jane Nixon and Celia Marr had worked well during the recent outbreak in Spain.

RN gave a brief overview of the disease in the UK – 12 incidents of abortion and 2 neurological – with neither linked to the outbreak in the Iberian Peninsula. This outbreak was dramatic with multiple cases and deaths and proved a challenge for national federations. Many animals returning to the UK were subjected to quarantine and dual testing, which appeared to work well. FEI is currently discussing whether mandatory vaccination will be recommended in future. French and German racing have already adopted this, including for GB horses travelling to France.

- d. African Horse Sickness. RN discussed the situation in the Western Cape. HR reassured the group that any trade deals post Brexit would not pre-empt a FVO inspection and that her team were well aware of the potential risks of importing equines from South Africa. Any decisions will be science and risk based in the knowledge that trade could adversely affect our own exports to the EU. HR is currently working with EFSA on an opinion on control measures for Category A diseases: [Scientific Opinion on the assessment of the control measures of the category A diseases of Animal Health Law: African Horse Sickness \(wiley.com\)](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ahl.13111). The current Terms of reference were to look at 1) movements out of zones 2) the monitoring period and 3) size of zones. **All to feedback comments to HR**
- e. West Nile Virus. HR confirmed that following concerns raised on the clarity of the guidance on the exclusion testing regime for WNV, Defra will look at this again. **HR to action**

RN reminded the group that HBLB CoP now had guidelines on WNV, and that the breeding industry were asking about vaccinations in view of the emergence of positive cases in

humans, birds and horses in Germany and humans and birds in the Netherlands. If there is a rush to vaccinate here, there may be an issue with vaccine access. It was queried whether further advice on WNV should be provided to BEVA members. **DM to discuss with BEVA Health & Medicines Committee**

6. Regulatory update
  - a. Equine ID and CED. DM reported that the action plan for animal welfare from Defra and the Queen's Speech confirmed that there will be changes in the equine ID regulations. Review and discussions are happening now with a view to a change by spring 2022. The British Horse Council has been inputting to the discussions and the consultation will be launched before the year end. Options being discussed include – digitalisation, with studbooks to continue as separate function, registration of premises and horses being signed back into the food chain following certain conditions. This will be a 'horse' SI, not just a 'horse ID' SI. SC confirmed that NI is currently amending their legislation in line with the EU AHL and working with Defra. Wales and Scotland had no additional comments as no ID policy team members were present. GS confirmed that retrospective microchipping was now compulsory in Wales (from 12 Feb 2021). It was noted by DM that while the intention was to move to a digital only solution in England, a paper ID would still be required for international travel.
  - b. Animal Health Law (AHL). HR reported that Defra was looking at the requirements under the AHL as a third country. SC reported that NI will implement the AHL in full. GH updated the group on the revised disease listings with 15 additional diseases now reportable or notifiable across the various species, from 21 Apr. There is little change for equines – Surra is now reportable and the glanders listing now covers camelids and goats in addition to equines, with powers to slaughter now incorporated. Defra and the Devolved Administrations will look at control strategies. The new Export Health Certificates will be available in due course with exporters currently having a derogation to use the existing EXCs until August. AH and GS reported that Scotland and Wales have also made the legislative changes. Wales have not included culling powers as yet but will be consulting on this.
  - c. Animal Welfare (Licensing of activities involving animals) (England) Regulations 2018. BM reported that guidance for riding establishments is now online and this item can be removed from future EDC agendas.
  - d. Traceability Design User Group (TDUG). Nothing additional to report.
  - e. Proposed Licensing of Sanctuaries and Rehoming Centres in England, Scotland & Wales. RO confirmed that World Horse Welfare had received a draft of the Local Authority guidance for the new Scottish legislation and will be providing feedback along with BHS Scotland. AH said that the new legislation comes into force on 1 Sep. In England, the intention is to progress with legislation. GS referred to the Code of Practice published for Wales but will check with policy comments for any other update. **Action GS**
  - f. Welfare in Transport. RO noted that the Queen's Speech confirmed Defra's intention to ban live exports for fattening and slaughter. LK said that there had been several responses from the sector for both the England/Wales and Scotland consultations on welfare in transport. The Commission were also reviewing the EU legislation. This is a great opportunity to push for evidence-based change in welfare transport legislation. RO said that good agreement had been reached across the equine sector in the responses.

7. EU-GB/NI trade. DM reported initial severe difficulties with trade had improved somewhat as OVs and transporters were apprised of the systems. However, numbers were low and recently improvements have stalled. There was concern about delays in paperwork processing, particularly in France leading to equines waiting at borders. This will be a real concern as summer temperatures rise, with BIPs only open during working hours so preventing travel at night to offset hot conditions. Andrew Soldan (APHA) holds fortnightly bird-table meetings which were proving helpful in resolving some of the issues. SC said that NI was going through major change and that volumes of equine movements were increasing entering and exiting NI ports. There had also been some issues with poor certification as highlighted by a recent court case.
8. Biosecurity Behaviour Change Project. LK reported that the project remains on hold.
9. Equine Medicines. No issues were raised.
10. Update from related groups/initiatives.
  - a. Animal Health and Welfare Board for England. DM said that memberships of the Board were up for renewal. Michael Seals will continue with work on health and Welfare Pathways into 2022 but will retire as chair. Recruitment for a replacement chair and new members will take place. Tim Morris is also standing down.
  - b. British Horse Council. DM reported that the main focus has been on Equine ID (see 6a above) and the Equine Health and Welfare Pathway (see 10c below).
  - c. Equine Health and Welfare Pathway. DM reported that the content is being developed to include a wider context than health and welfare. Bullet points on work to date will be circulated to industry next month and input will be sought from Defra. This is an England initiative although the BHC is encouraging the involvement of Devolved Administrations.
  - d. Equine Stakeholder Group for Scotland. The Group is next due to meet on 21 Jun. Please submit any agenda items.
  - e. DAERA strategy development. SC reported that the Interim Equine Forum is now well established and proved very helpful for communications during the EHV outbreak. Current work includes consideration of a farrier registration, rural microbusiness growth schemes (with access to funds) and access to forest trails. SC will share the minutes of the Equine Forum with EDC.
  - f. Equine Industry Committee. RN confirmed that the biannual meetings of the Committee (focusing on equine infectious diseases) continue with Sidney Ricketts as chair and the international element of the meetings remains.
11. AOB. LK raised the release of the draft annual review of the contingency plan for exotic notifiable diseases. This is for all species, including poultry and has been updated to reflect the new trading relationship with the EU. **LK to review the draft plan and share any comments with DM**
12. Date of next meeting – 9.30am on Wednesday 17 Nov 2021– either via Zoom or at the BHA boardroom.