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Notes of the UK Equine Disease Coalition meeting Wednesday 14th May 2025 Online via Teams

Michael Anderson (MA) Scottish Government
Chris Bain (CB) Scottish Government
Kelly Harty (KH) APHA
Sara Higgins (SH) APHA
Liz Kelly (LK) World Horse Welfare
Roxane Kirton (RK) RSPCA
Ben Mayes (BM) Clinical Practitioner
Keith Meldrum (KM) Observer

David Mountford (DM) BEVA
Richard Newton (RN) Cambridge University
Jane Nixon (JN) British Horse Foundation
Roly Owers (RO) World Horse Welfare – Chair
Richard Pizzey (RP) Welsh Government
Helen Roberts (HR) Defra
Charlotte Smith (CS) DAERA
Sally Taylor (ST) British Horseracing Authority

1. RO welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Estevao Simoes (Scottish Government) and Jon Rouse (Defra).
2. Notes of the previous meeting on 20 November 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.
3. Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda
 - a. Equine Movements Template – Livestock Demographic Group (minute 3a). SH confirmed that this is now progressing through the LDG and will report back when relevant.
 - b. SRUC research on ferry journeys to Shetland and Orkney (minute 6d). CB will liaise with Andrew Voas re circulation of the presentation. **Action CB**
 - c. NAOI review of the UK's resilience to animal diseases. DM confirmed that the review had taken place (RN, LK and RO also present) but has heard nothing since.
4. Terms of Reference (ToR) – May 2023 version. Approved with no changes.
5. Disease update
 - a. Equine influenza. Results from the International Collating Centre (EQUIFLUNET/ICC) since the last meeting were presented by RN. North America dominated in number of outbreaks with 14 recorded in the US and 6 in Canada. There were cases in Europe, Germany (2), Ireland (1), Netherlands (1) and the UK (1). RN presented the timeline of outbreaks with North American outbreaks dominating the early period and European countries more recently. Unusually an outbreak was recorded in Japan via WOA reports (the disease was last recorded there in 2009). Cases were seen in the north and south of the country and in both regions, viruses belonged to the H3N8 subtype, clade 1, genetically closely related to strains previously detected in North America suggesting a potential import source.

RN highlighted the publication of the latest Equine Disease Surveillance report where a case of EI was confirmed by swab. However, no epidemiological data had been obtained from the submitting veterinary practice. RN confirmed that the vaccines were holding up well, with no issues on availability. ST and RN briefly discussed the recent desktop exercise on EI in January with the scenario created by Celia Marr. It demonstrated that the overall handling of the scenario situation was good, but some of the processes could be improved.

BM mentioned that a number of EI cases were seen in SE England following the Appleby event last year and animals returning. He felt that while awareness of the disease is good in the travelling community, any increase in vaccination rates was seen only in its periphery. RK

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agreed that the number of unvaccinated animals at Appleby, along with associated practices (e.g. sharing troughs etc.), ensured that the situation was far from being under control. BM said that the community was interested in the science and swabs can often be taken but animals are not isolated even if clinically affected.

- b. Equine Herpes Virus. RN reported 60 cases of reproductive EHV-1 since the last meeting, 54 of which were in Europe (5 from Sweden, 11 from France, 18 from Germany, 16 from the Netherlands and 2 from UK). The UK reports were from Hampshire and Wiltshire. RN is aware of 4 additional outbreaks in the UK but again no further information is public as permission is needed to enable him to do this. RO questioned potential reasons for this, with BM confirming that client pressure to maintain confidentiality is strong, despite no individual identification of premises. It is simple to report information, but RN said that some practices do not engage despite the lab being helpful. DM queried whether any other countries had an obligation on practices to report further information, but RN felt it was preferable for practices to volunteer the information themselves and the French system, while possibly not needing the vet's permission to report, was lacking in detail of outbreaks. While it would be possible to quote numbers with no additional information RN was concerned that this could have unintended consequences.

There had been 45 outbreaks of neurological EHV-1 since the last meeting, 24 in North America and 20 in Europe, with one of those in the UK. RN said that if this disease was reportable with enforcement, then this would help bring it under control as generally collaboration was good, but difficulties were encountered in multi-horse facilities. HR explained that to take this forward, a risk assessment would first be needed, including the impact of the disease, to assess whether it met the legal bar for a reportable or notifiable disease. This could be looked at (e.g. Brucella Canis is now a reportable animal pathogen). HR confirmed that there is currently a UK Government emphasis on biosecurity, with the discussion on the SPS agreement and discussions with the EU, so it could be added to the list and agreed to explore this further. **Action HR**

- c. African Horse Sickness. HR said that questions had been sent back to South Africa following the assurance visit with no response yet and the draft report on the UK to South Africa visit is not yet available. However, if an SPS agreement is confirmed then this is a moot point. She confirmed there were no plans for any direct imports of horses from SA.
- d. West Nile Virus (WNV. SH reported that the proposed changes to the TTE protocols, streamlining the process for practitioners, have now gone through the legal department and any questions resolved. The instructions for practitioners and the new laboratory forms should be approved in a week or so then the new system will launch. BEVA will help with communications to equine practitioners.

HR reported that following the 2022 floods in Nottinghamshire a large number of biting mosquitoes had been collected and tested for Usutu virus and WNV. The mosquitoes were Aedes vexans, best known for appearing in flood conditions but not ubiquitous in the UK, and WNV RNA was detected in two pools. This finding in a vector was notified to WOA and WHO. 500 wild birds have subsequently been tested, all negative. The Local Authorities, following concerns of the nuisance biting of the mosquitoes, have since established an environment suitable for water voles, but not for mosquitoes. Public health authorities have tested all cases of human encephalitis for WNV, all negative. Potential sources of the RNA could be either wild birds or mosquito larvae. There are no plans to test horses in the area

but the government is keen to raise awareness, and the risk level has been raised to 2. The WNV control strategy will be ready by end June.

- e. CEM. KM asked about the number of cases appearing in Germany. RN said there was an issue with Icelandic horses, a breed not traditionally tested for CEM. The authorities were now getting things under control. He said there had been outbreaks in Florida in geldings, not breeding animals and cases in non-breeding animals had also been seen in Sweden.

DM raised the rule changes on semen importation, where stringent tests are carried out (with the risks of delays causing non-viability) at high costs to industry and no positives to date, whereas imported stallions are policed by the industry and live horse movements potentially lead to disease outbreaks. The danger with the new semen system is that there may be the temptation for semen to be imported illegally.

- f. Other. There were 53 reports of Equine Infectious Anaemia issued, with 40 in North America (30 in Texas), 3 in Chile and 10 in Europe. RN discussed the report from France of EIA where 4 horses had been euthanised following outbreaks in the south in April (3 horses) and May (one horse). The cases were linked epidemiologically. These cases led to RESPE (Equine Pathology Epidemiological Surveillance Network) recommending the cancellation of equestrian events within 3 km radius of the two affected premises in Var and Alpes de Haute Provence and strict limitation of equine movements. SH questioned the rationale for the 3 km radius. RN was unsure, as though there were concerns re biting flies although an iatrogenic source was more likely.

6. Regulatory update

- a. Review of equine disease control legislation. HR reported that due to discussions on the SPS agreement with the EU this work had been pushed back. There is a summit meeting with the EU next week.
- b. Target Operating Model. DM confirmed this work had been delayed. The SPS protocol may help when agreed.
- c. Equine ID and CED. RO confirmed that Defra had decided not to progress with the SI making digital equine ID mandatory, although a co-design appraisal was in progress. DM was not hopeful, but did say that discussions were taking place with AHWBE and Baroness Hayman, and that there was cross party support for progression noted at a recent parliamentary reception. Cost was an issue and £2-4m to upgrade the current database had been suggested. A further issue is the difference in policies on equine ID in the different administrations. The industry is open to discussing options, including on costs, in the co-design group and will continue to push for progress.
- d. Welfare in Transport. RO stated that there had been no further progress on a national basis. In the EU, there have been thousands of amendments submitted to the AGRI and TRAN committees on the revised EU Regulation and there should be an outcome on progress on this by the end of the year.
- e. Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Act. DM reported on the work of the co-design group with the industry. It had been a very positive process. The biggest threat identified was the GB land-bridge from Ireland to Europe. The proposal was to have approved shippers with a light touch and all non-approved shippers would be required to have an export licence. The next stage is to work on the details of how this would work, with no timeline as yet.

f. Other. Nothing raised.

7. Equine medicines

- Artervac. RN said that Artervac vaccine supply issues continue, and that the industry is keen on exploring alternative options in advance of the next breeding season, including the possible import of a live attenuated vaccine. However, as stallions will potentially shed live vaccine virus for 30 days and need to be isolated when first vaccinated, a biosecurity protocol is required. HR has discussed this with VMD but more information on numbers and timings is needed, and any costs would need to be borne by the industry and not Government. RN and SH agreed that this needed to be discussed further with industry.

Action RN/SH

- Northern Ireland. CS updated in more detail on the NI situation and grace period following the meeting, as below:
 - Veterinary medicine matters relate to the UK Government's own commitments on implementation of the Windsor Framework, and questions about Government decision-making on these issues should be directed to the Defra Secretary of State.
 - Minister Muir is committed to continuing to do all within his powers to ensure the continued supply of veterinary medicines to Northern Ireland.
 - The Minister is hopeful that the UK Government will act in good faith to improve EU/UK relations and work towards the possibility of an SPS/Veterinary Agreement, that may resolve some of the issues for the future supply of and access to veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland.
 - The UK Government has advised they are progressing work on this issue as quickly as possible.
 - The Veterinary Medicines Working Group continues to advise the UK Government on solutions that agricultural and pharmaceutical industries, as well as private animal owners and keepers, need to ensure the continued future availability and supply of veterinary medicines into Northern Ireland.
 - Gentamicin. DM raised the issue of gentamicin supply for horses as there have been problems with Genta-Equine (histamine causing reactions) and an alternate formulation, GentaDug, has been used instead, imported from NI. There is a large price discrepancy, with Genta-Equine being up to 10x more expensive, and with this product now being reintroduced it is raising some significant questions. Discussion are ongoing between BEVA and the VMD on this matter.
8. AOB. BM raised the question of the APHA subsidy to NI under the Movement Assistance Scheme. DM has spoken about this to the Centre for International Trade in Carlisle and received the response below forwarded from the relevant team: *'We can confirm that MAS will close to new claims from 30 June 2025. Details of planned scheme closure were made public in October 2023 and several reminders have been issued to scheme users. Claims relating to the movement of goods or horses that take place after 30 June will not be accepted and all invoices must be submitted within 90 days. The new flat rate for equine reimbursement is £162.50, effective from 1 May'*.
9. Date of next virtual meeting – 9.30am on Wed 12 Nov on Teams.