

**Notes of the UK Equine Disease Coalition meeting**  
**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2024**  
**Online via Teams**

Michael Anderson (MA) Scottish Government  
Chris Bain (CB) Scottish Government  
Mark Bowen (MB) HBLB  
Harriet Freeman (HF) Welsh Government  
Sara Higgins (SH) APHA  
Liz Kelly (LK) World Horse Welfare  
Roxane Kirton (RK) RSPCA  
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  
Jon Rouse (JR) Defra  
Charlotte Smith (CS) DAERA  
Sally Taylor (ST) British Horseracing Authority

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1. RO welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Anastasia Georgaki (DAERA). Anastasia is moving to the Food Safety Authority so will not attend future meetings.
2. Notes of the previous meeting on 22 May – were agreed as an accurate record.
3. Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda
  - a. Equine Movements Template (carried forward since 2019). SH reported that work was now taking place on this project through the Livestock Demographic Group, and she will update the Coalition as needed.
4. Terms of Reference (ToR). 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. Equine influenza was recorded in North America and northern Europe, with 27 reports in the UK, probably reflecting effective surveillance, although RN is aware that some cases may not be reported. Diagnoses were made in England, Scotland and Wales. Results of swab testing at various diagnostic laboratories are reported to the submitting practitioners with subsequent text alerts being disseminated by Richard's team at Cambridge. The reports of positive results are anonymised before dissemination.

Following submission to the virus isolate library based at Rossdale Laboratories, further genomic typing and viral culture is conducted by the equine virology group based at Cambridge Vet School. The latest Equine Quarterly Disease Surveillance report (Q3) includes results of the Cambridge group's sequencing, showing a distinct cluster of viruses in 2023 and another distinct cluster in 2024. Monitoring on the haemagglutinin (HA) protein and changes over the year gives valuable information on variants that may possibly be evading the current vaccines.

RN confirmed that so far there had not been evidence of virus significantly affecting vaccinated horses and outbreaks continue to be associated with the usual risks – including sales, lairage and transport, with the presence of non-vaccinated animals at these gatherings contributing to the speed of disease dissemination, particularly when arriving at premises with non-vaccinated horses onsite.

ST updated the group that following the 2019 EI outbreak in racehorses, the BHA had appointed a horse crisis management specialist, and a desk top exercise would be taking place in Jan 25 and the disease control strategy refined. She will give an update on the exercise at the next meeting.

- b. Equine Herpes Virus. RN reported 11 cases of reproductive EHV-1 since the last meeting, 6 of which were in Europe (3 from Sweden, 2 from France and 1 from Ireland). There were 22 outbreaks of neurological EHV-1 outbreaks since May 24, 9 from North America and 12 from Europe. The 3 reports from the UK (Leicestershire, Ceredigion and Gloucestershire) were not major and successfully managed. This week reports of disease from France have been linked to pony events, of concern was that dressage events had also been held on the same site the week after. A press release from British Equestrian with guidance for those planning to go to France or who have recently visited with their horses has been released. It is of concern that the outbreak occurred early in November with information only now being available from France. This is still an evolving situation.

DM commented that the lack of timely information from France highlighted the value of RN and his team. RN said that the lack of information may not be due to the French surveillance system response to reports from practitioners but may have been exacerbated by both the use of point of care testing, without escalation of results, and the fear of breaking confidences in disease information communications. This also occurs in the UK, although reports of outbreaks are only given at a county level. RO questioned whether enough was done to encourage practitioners reporting positive results from point of care testing in the UK. DM thought that more could be done in terms of liaison and communications. It is important to encourage vets to work with owners and assure them that the information is anonymised if that is required.

- c. African Horse Sickness. JR reported that the draft report on the UK to South Africa assurance visit is not yet available. DM said that there was some anxiety in the industry since the EU trading situation had changed leading to more horses from South Africa in the UK and it would be useful to see the report.
- d. West Nile Virus. SH reported that she has presented a plan on changes to the TTE protocols, streamlining the process for practitioners, who would be able to submit samples without prior APHA approval if West Nile was low on their list of differential diagnoses. It is currently waiting for go ahead from the legal team and if approved will be on trial for a year. This would hopefully lead to an increase in surveillance numbers. RN thanked SH for taking this forward. The disease will remain notifiable, and SH asked for help from the group to disseminate the new information once the new system had been approved.
- e. CEM. SH reported that the Nottingham case had been successfully resolved, with freedom from infection now confirmed.
- f. Other. Nothing reported.

#### 6. Regulatory update

- a. Review of equine disease control legislation. JR reported no further progress on this since the last meeting, but work was now beginning again and the consultation should be out early next year. It is expected that the new legislation would not be in place until 2026.

- b. Target Operating Model. DM gave an update on this work. In England work had slowed with the new Government team looking to improve the system with possibly significant changes as TOM is developed and implemented. At Sevington activity has decreased and the situation remains unclear. RP confirmed that it was a similar situation in Wales where the build at Holyhead is continuing but is delayed. They should have a better idea by the next meeting in May.
- c. Equine ID and CED. DM reported that plans to bring forward the SI on equine ID in England had been paused post the spending review. Industry is deeply frustrated as an enhanced ID system is such an important foundation for the sector. However, discussions are ongoing between the sector, Defra and Equine Register to try to find a way forward. MB said that the current CED was unreliable in terms of current data, making it almost meaningless without further investment. Others shared his concern, but the idea was to streamline the current system (to try to remove much of the current friction to improve owner compliance) before any kind of sector-wide promotion is carried out. RO noted that the CED approach was being used in other countries so there is a good degree of confidence that the platform is technologically sound. KM asked if the CVOs were content with the current situation as there is a problem in the event of an equine disease outbreak. DM said there was support for the concept but not the cost.

MA agreed with others and added that in Scotland there was no time to progress this until 2028 earliest as cattle, sheep and pigs will all come first. Legal resource is very tight. There will be a cross Governments (England, Wales and Scotland) meeting on 9 Dec to discuss the current traceability regulations. There are differences between the systems (e.g. in Scotland the keeper is recorded as a more reliable way of knowing the whereabouts of the horse, in England it is the owner).

DM confirmed that the two elected vets in Westminster had been contacted to help. On compliance, the industry could help – for example the Pony Club currently ensures all ponies in the club are correctly registered. MB raised the difficulty of registering imported horses and the cost.

- d. Welfare in Transport. RO stated that there had been no further progress on a national basis. In the EU, the Commission had put forward a revised regulation for discussion but there were concerns on the extent of the derogations and other content. It will now go to Council and Parliament, and the overall process is likely to take several months to complete before the proposed regulation returns to the Commission. There are differences of opinions within the sector on the proposed derogations, but RO hoped that there could be a collective effort across the industry to ensure that the regulation contains meaningful measures that will protect equine health and welfare.

CB gave an update on research being done in Scotland by SRUC on ferry journeys to Shetland and Orkney. The presentation on the work by Andrew Voas will be forwarded to RO for distribution to the group. **Action CB**

- e. Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Act. RO highlighted that an effective digital equine ID system is needed for this legislation to work. However, Defra have a co-design group with the industry, chaired by DM looking at the secondary legislation required. They are 3 months into the 6-month process, which will report with recommendations. So far, the group has looked at the size and means of trade and at the next meeting in December will explore potential

loopholes. DM confirmed that there is good engagement with all administrations and the process is a genuine co-design project.

DM raised the challenge with the Act as GB is used as a land bridge for movements from NI/Ireland. RO confirmed that the Act did not ban movements into GB for slaughter.

- f. Other. DM updated on the fresh semen importation pilot project mentioned at the last meeting. The checks on the semen were being done by the inseminating vet, not at the control post and this was more practical. A simpler method of reporting was needed and there was some variation in the support of the two airports involved. RP confirmed that the pilot will roll out in Wales next year with improvements on reporting.
7. EU-GB/NI trade. Nothing to report. This will no longer be a standing item, with any updates as required.
8. Equine Medicines. Artervac vaccine supply issues continue and will do so into 2025. There is currently no appetite for import of a live attenuated vaccine from the US as animals will potentially shed live vaccine virus for some time and need to be isolated for several weeks when first vaccinated, although this will be kept under review. RN has issued guidance and a decision tree on managing the forthcoming breeding season again in the absence of EVA vaccine, including reporting of suspect positives, but the situation remains unsatisfactory for the next breeding season. He reminded the group that the UK is not strictly EVA free.  
  
The grace period in NI on veterinary medicines is due to end in December 2025 and around one third of current medicines might cease to be available. The NI Veterinary Association is releasing a report this month with recommendations on traceability, registration of farriers and the issue with medicines. CS reported that all is still in discussion and could continue until the last minute.
9. AOB. DM raised the current National Audit Office (NAO) work on reviewing the UK's resilience to animal diseases. NAO is meeting with senior stakeholders to discuss questions on current structures, effective action by Defra and APHA on prevention and their appropriate action on recovery from animal disease outbreaks. DM asked for any comments on the proposed questions previously distributed by RO by 29 Nov. KM expressed some concern that the questions were somewhat leading, and he had doubts that currently we were in a good position on resilience. It was agreed that it is essential that the NAO speak to the appropriate people, especially those on the front line. DM confirmed that he would highlight this key issue.
10. Date of next virtual meeting – 9.30am on Wed 14 May 25 on Teams.