

Notes of the UK Equine Disease Coalition meeting
Wednesday 22nd May 2024
Virtual meeting on Teams

Michael Anderson (MA) Scottish Government
Chris Bain (CB) Scottish Government
Mark Bowen (MB) HBLB
Anastasia Georgaki (AG) DAERA
Sara Higgins (SH) APHA
Liz Kelly (LK) World Horse Welfare
Roxane Kirton (RK) RSPCA
Ben Mayes (BM) clinical practitioner
Keith Meldrum (KM) observer
Carmen Marco (CM) APHA

Rebecca Miller (RM) Scottish Government
David Mountford (DM) BEVA
Richard Newton (RN) Cambridge University
Jane Nixon (JN) British Horse Foundation
Roly Owers (RO) World Horse Welfare – Chair
Charlotte Pursey (CP) Welsh Government
Jon Rouse (JR) Defra
Gosia Siwonja (GS) Welsh Government
Charlotte Smith (CS) DAERA
Sally Taylor (ST) British Horseracing Authority

1. RO welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Annabel Henderson and Alastair Douglas (Scottish Government).
2. Notes of the previous meeting –16 November 2023 – were agreed as an accurate record.
3. Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda
 - a. Equine Movements Template (carried forward since 2019). This template is intended to help event organisers by providing information to help trace horses moving on and off showgrounds and to help clarify and minimise equine control measures. SH said that this not yet completed but colleagues in APHA are working on it and to retain it as an agenda item.
 - b. Animal and Environment AMR Delivery Group Survey. Already actioned, see update supplied by GS on 5 Dec 23.
4. Terms of Reference (ToR). Approved with no changes.
5. Disease update (see attached presentation from RN)
 - a. Equine influenza. There has not been much to report globally since the last meeting. The spike in May (3 outbreaks) involved unvaccinated horses in Washington State. Three outbreaks seen in the UK involved non-vaccinated animals in November, a group of imported animals of unknown vaccination status in Norfolk in December and a group of unvaccinated animals imported from Denmark. All were non-TB. The last outbreak demonstrated the system in place following the arrival of the horses from Denmark to Yorkshire. The initial swab taken at source was sent to Rosssdales for virus isolation and from there, further typing in Cambridge showed a difference in 2 amino acids from isolates seen in the previous 2 years.

RO gave further information on the Norfolk case. This involved a consignment of 26 animals abandoned at Dover, 7 with no paperwork, of which one tested positive for EI when tested on arrival at World Horse Welfare in Norfolk, with others showing clinical signs. This consignment of horses had been stated to be travelling from Ireland to the Netherlands but it seemed that others had been picked up from markets in England.

GS raised the point that there may be underreporting of outbreaks as the disease was not notifiable in most countries and whether all countries shared sequencing data. RN agreed

that we may just be seeing the tip of the iceberg and while the disease is notifiable in Australia and New Zealand, elsewhere it is endemic. There was some sharing of data, but it is variable. There is a WOA meeting annually to share sequencing data and the reference laboratories and twinning of laboratories helps.

RN described the methods used to raise awareness of EI, including social media and an article in the latest equine disease surveillance quarterly report. He agreed with AG on the importance of raising awareness and their additional staff member was helping with the social media aspects, plus close working with BEVA. He encourages practitioners to sign up to all alerts and reports supplied by his team. For international reporting, RN explained that some countries were very good (e.g. France had a good system) but others were not so good. He mentioned an EU funding initiative to address this and the use of broader networks, for example FEEVA to help.

- b. Equine Herpes Virus. RN reported 57 neurological EHV-1 outbreaks since November 2023, 44 in North America. There were 12 reports from Europe. No outbreaks were linked to FEI events. On reproductive EHV-1 (not on the reporting system in the US), 37 outbreaks were reported in Europe.
 - c. African Horse Sickness. SH reported that a draft report has been completed on the UK to South Africa assurance visit with an outcome expected within the next 3 months. The EU had approved the recommencement of direct horse movements from South Africa to the EU. RN highlighted the article on this in the latest equine disease quarterly report.
 - d. West Nile Virus. SH reported that new instructions on the Test to Exclude protocols were in place to smooth the process for vets phoning and an article in BEVA Quarterly highlighted the TTE process. Internal discussions within APHA were taking place on what else might be done to improve the process and, in response to a question by RN, confirmed that industry would be involved once internal discussions had concluded.
 - e. CEM. Three UK outbreaks have been resolved using the industry protocol since 2020, with one case in Nottingham still unresolved. SH said that this case was currently still in discussion and not yet able to be closed.
 - f. Other. EVA. A case of EVA was confirmed in Scotland in April. The stallion was detected positive on a pre-breeding test. It had been imported from Spain in 2021 and SH confirmed that the owner was fully cooperating with the Code of Practice and that the horse is not known to have been used for breeding in the UK prior to the test. RN said it was a concern as the relevant vaccine, Equip Artervac, was still not available from Zoetis. He recommended that all breeding stallions are tested. RN's team had placed the notification of this outbreak on Tell-Tail.
6. Regulatory update
- a. Review of equine disease control legislation. JR updated the meeting as work was still ongoing. He explained that the policy had not changed but as the AHS regulations had originally been made under the European Communities Act and never been used (as no incursions had occurred), the policy team were challenged on why they needed to be amended. This had been clarified and work was continuing. The consultation paper was in preparation and would be published after clearance.

- b. Target Operating Model. DM gave an update on this work and described the current and proposed systems for both live animals and germplasm. For live animals, Sevington in Kent is still being developed. There are questions around other points of entry, which are still unresolved. Full implementation of the process at Sevington is not expected until October earliest but may be later. On high health horses, it has been confirmed that high health horses would be exempt from physical checks at borders (with High Health Horse checks being intelligence led only), leaving the focus for inspections on the movements of horses outside the control of industry regulators.

On germplasm, DM said that there were concerns on practicalities, in that the germplasm must remain viable during checks. A pilot period was in place for this season until August, with 20% physical checks. These checks were not of the actual contents being imported but verification that the number on the box matched the accompanying health certificate. During the pilot the vet at the destination (at the point of insemination) would report the correct match to the BCP of entry. Documentary checks would have already been carried by the OV prior to importation. In future, a small number of identity checks (involving opening the box containing the germplasm in a temperature-controlled facility) are prescribed in the TOM – although how this will be implemented practically is unknown.

From the other administrations, GS confirmed that her colleagues had been involved in signing off the processes on a GB basis at meetings of the Animal Disease Policy Group. RO was aware that the CVO Scotland had stated that there would not be a BCP at Cairnryan. DM listed the potential risks that imported animals could travel further for checking or checks could be carried out at destination or animals being imported under other arrangements.

- c. Equine ID and CED. DM reported that this was slowly moving forward in England and Defra were on the 3rd draft of the proposed statutory instrument and industry is expected to have an opportunity to comment on this draft. There is a concern over the availability of funding for the implementation of the programme.
- d. Welfare in Transport. RO stated that there had been no further progress on a national basis but significant developments were taking place in the EU with the Commission releasing draft proposals for an update to the legislation. Some of the content was of concern, in particular around the number of exemptions/derogations within the proposed legislation. The equine sector response did support the view that much of the proposed legislation could be damaging to the industry without providing any welfare benefit. The EU have stalled work for now and this gives the opportunity for more research to be done on specific issues, supported by the European Horse Network.

DM said that there was to be an update on transport at a meeting between the BHC and Defra in June. CB explained the research being done in Scotland on ferry journeys between the islands and the mainland, with a balance needed between welfare standards and the pattern of transport to and from the remote islands.

- e. Live exports ban. RO reported that the live export ban had just received Royal Assent. Implementation will begin in the livestock sector, and Defra are already reaching out to discuss how the legislation can be implemented within the equine sector. KM queried if the Minimal Values legislation was still in place and RO confirmed that it was not. KM praised the work done by World Horse Welfare and others over many years on this topic.
- f. Other. Nothing to report.

7. EU-GB/Nl trade. Nothing to report.
8. Equine Medicines. Artervac vaccine supply issues have already been mentioned. The grace period in NI on veterinary medicines is due to end in December 2025. CS reported that negotiations on the future continue.
9. AOB. KM asked when the EDC meetings began – RO said that the first meeting was in September 2010. KM praised the good attendance and the fact that the coalition had continued for so long.
10. Date of next virtual meeting – 9.30am on Wed 20th November 2024 on Teams.