

**BVA response to UK-New Zealand FTA: Trade and Agriculture Commission call for evidence**

## Introduction

The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom. With over 19,000 members, our primary aim is to represent, support and champion the interests of the United Kingdom's veterinary profession. We therefore take a keen interest in all issues affecting the profession, including animal health and welfare, public health, regulatory issues, and employment matters.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to call for evidence on the UK-New Zealand FTA. As the UK takes control of its trade policy, it should be assertive in spreading animal welfare norms via trade agreements. Therefore, existing animal health, animal welfare, public health, veterinary medicines, workforce, and environmental protection standards must at least be maintained and opportunities to improve and enhance standards and outcomes should also be taken.

## Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures

The agreement in principle stated that imports "will still have to meet the same food safety and biosecurity standards in New Zealand and the UK." This has now been agreed in the final text of the FTA. As such, the UK retains the ability to ban goods based on animal or public health grounds. This would not apply to barriers that are based on animal welfare grounds or environmental concerns.

We welcome that the SPS chapter contains provisions to support cooperation on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR). Both parties recognise that AMR is a serious threat to human and animal health. The UK was one of the first countries to establish a National Action Plan (NAP) on AMR. New Zealand has had a NAP in place since 2017.

## Animal Welfare

Animal welfare is a global concern and ensuring the health and welfare of sentient animals is important as a marker of social progress, as well as for the role it plays in achieving other sustainability objectives. UK citizens see value in protecting the welfare of farmed animals. The UK Government should look to maximise opportunities to promote high-quality, high-welfare UK produce to export markets. As the UK takes control of its trade policy, it should be assertive in spreading high animal welfare norms via trade agreements.

The UK and New Zealand are largely aligned on many aspects of animal health and welfare policy. Animals used in farming in New Zealand are protected by the Animal Welfare Act 1999, including

the general anti-cruelty and duty of care provisions. Codes created under the Act provide detailed standards for transport, painful husbandry procedures, commercial slaughter, and specific requirements for farm animals. The Code of Welfare for the Commercial Slaughter of Animals requires that all large mammals must be stunned, so that they are immediately rendered insensible and must be maintained in this state until death.

In 2015, New Zealand officially recognised the sentience of animals in law. This is an international marker of the significance of animal welfare, which will soon be replicated in the UK once the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill receives royal assent.

#### **Trade and Agriculture Commission (TAC) Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference note that the TAC will advise on whether the measures provided for in FTA relating to agricultural products could mean a change in UK domestic statutory protections, or government's ability to set those protections, concerning animal or plant life or health, animal welfare, and environmental protections. It is specified that the TAC's advice will not cover the potential impact of tariff measures.

Whilst responding to this call for evidence, we are mindful of the TAC report on the UK-Australia FTA. We welcome that assessment of the implications of that FTA. However, that report underlines the limited nature of the TAC terms of reference. In particular, we are concerned that the TAC is not able to fully consider the impact of liberalising tariffs on the welfare of animals, in both the UK and the other party to the FTA.

The UK must safeguard its high reputation for animal health, animal welfare, and food safety. In all trade agreements it negotiates, the government must only grant tariff free access to agricultural goods where there is equivalence with core standards of animal health, animal welfare, public health, food safety and responsible antibiotic use.

#### **Conclusion**

Ongoing consultation with the veterinary profession on all relevant aspects of trade is essential. This is an FTA with two chapters with direct and extensive bearing for the veterinary profession (Sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS) and Animal welfare). It is therefore concerning that there has been no engagement by the Department for International Trade with the veterinary profession or the BVA, as the representative body for the profession, at any point during negotiations.

We look forward to engaging with the Trade and Agriculture Commission as this FTA and others progress.