

**Response by Neil Parish MP on behalf of the guests at the BVA London Dinner on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2014**

Introduction

Thank you and members of the British Veterinary Association for your hospitality and for inviting me to speak tonight. Let me start by highlighting the crucial role of the veterinary profession in safeguarding animal health and welfare. Through the trusted position that veterinary practitioners hold with farmers and pet-owners, the invaluable role played by vets in pathogen surveillance, and the crucial work undertaken by the profession in the event of a disease outbreak, it is clear that Great Britain owes a debt to its vets, both inside and outside of Government.

There is much to celebrate this year, ranging from fantastic progress on the quality and efficiency of TB testing to implementing measures to increase microchipping in dogs. Veterinary practitioners will be aware of the detrimental impact of fly-grazing on both farmers and animal welfare, and I am delighted that Julian Sturdy's Private Member's Bill on Control of Horses now has a good chance of success with our support.

However, there are always opportunities to improve: there is still a long way to go before TB is eradicated in Britain, there are signs of an alarming increase in illegal puppy trading, and we must constantly improve our surveillance to keep Britain free of animal disease. This must all be done in the context of financial austerity.

This speech will go over these successes and many more, whilst highlighting opportunities to further build on our achievements.

## Bovine TB

Bovine TB continues to be our greatest animal health challenge, and I am proud that this Government is taking robust action to combat this terrible disease. I am also grateful to the BVA for its support of our comprehensive strategy, which includes increased cattle movement controls, badger vaccination in the high risk edge areas and culling where the disease is rife. We know from international experience that there is no single solution or quick fix so this Government is determined to continue implementing this proven approach.

While there remains much more to be done, we should not overlook our success in controlling the disease in the half of England where TB in badgers is not a problem, and which remains on course to achieve TB freedom by 2019. There is also emerging evidence that our tough cattle measures and other interventions are starting to have an impact in the areas worst affected, so it's important we protect and build on that progress.

## Surveillance

Our ability to detect new and re-emerging threats to the health of our livestock population remains a key priority, and veterinary surgeons are fundamental to the success of the scanning surveillance system in Great Britain. Over the last year, APHA has been broadening its surveillance network to collaborate with a number of veterinary businesses, schools and other academic institutes, whilst also substantially improving the carcass transportation service. This work will increase the proportion of your clients in England and Wales within one hour of a Veterinary Investigation centre from about 50% a year ago to over 90%.

Of course access to expertise is only one element of the system, and I am grateful to the BVA for their support of a programme to improve the CPD opportunities for veterinarians to develop their pathology and investigative skills.

The outcome of all the hard work done by veterinary surgeons on the front line is the accumulation of information that allows us to identify potential threats, meaning we are better prepared than ever to rapidly identify and robustly tackle any threats to GB-wide animal health.

#### Veterinary Delivery Partnership Project (VDPP)

We know that TB testing is essential to achieving eradication. Through the VDPP, we are modernising our partnership with the veterinary profession to improve our ability to detect animal disease through on-farm testing. From April, APHA will manage TB testing and other veterinary services through Delivery Partners who have successfully tendered for this work in one or more regions of England and Wales.

I cannot comment on the procurement process because it is commercially confidential, but the new arrangements will better assure the quality of the service being delivered and ensure that on-farm testing is as effective as possible. In response to concerns expressed by the farming and veterinary communities, we are committed to securing local delivery through this tendering process. APHA will ensure that livestock keepers retain the option to pay for testers privately and that the veterinary profession and livestock industry are given information and support in preparation for the introduction of new processes.

Protecting our country from animal and plant disease continues to be an important concern for this Government, and we recognise the key role that frontline vets play in achieving this. Since 2010, we have maintained the number of vets in our organisation and expanded investigatory capacity. We have also appointed a Chief Plant Health officer for the first time and promoted the position of Chief Veterinary Officer to Director General.

Prioritising frontline vets allowed us to efficiently and effectively contain the recent outbreak of avian influenza, limiting the outbreak to just one case and controlling its impact on both British farming and trade.

#### Antimicrobial Resistance

The incidence of untreatable clinical disease in animals due to antibiotic resistance is low in the UK, and it is imperative that we continue our efforts to keep it this way. I want to recognise how valuable the collaborations have been by a number of veterinary sector organisations in developing this work, including the Pig Veterinary Society, the British Veterinary Poultry Association, and the British Cattle Veterinary Association on the farm animal side and the British Small Animals Veterinary Society and the British Equine Veterinary Association on the companion animal side.

Veterinary surgeons are key players in promoting best practice and instigating changes to continue ensuring antibiotics are used responsibly. It is vital that you continue to show leadership and actively promote the benefits of good husbandry, biosecurity and antibiotic stewardship.

## Illegal Puppy Trade

I am saddened by the news that some unscrupulous traders appear to be importing puppies into the UK for sale under the cover of the EU pet travel scheme. Whilst I am pleased that the EU has recently tightened up the pet travel rules, and proud to report that the UK carries out more checks on pets at the border than most other EU member states, I feel that there is more that each of us can do.

Crucially, we need co-operation across the EU to clamp down on illegal activity in countries where the puppies are born. The recent Dogs Trust's report resulted in Hungarian and Lithuanian authorities taking prompt action against people found to have been acting illegally, and highlights why we must continue to raise instances of abuse.

This illegal trade is driven by a demand for cheap pedigree puppies, and the British public can play an essential role in stopping the trade through the choices they make when purchasing a puppy. This is an area where the government, veterinary community and welfare charities should continue to work together.

I continue to be a strong supporter of the Pet Advertising Advisory Group, whose volunteer moderation has led to the removal of over 130,000 irresponsible adverts from websites, many of which facilitated illegal puppy trading.

## Religious Slaughter

On religious slaughter, the Government would prefer to see all animals stunned before slaughter but we respect the rights of Jewish and Muslim communities to eat meat prepared in accordance with their religious beliefs.

Our existing national rules provide greater protection than those in the EU Regulation in terms of restraints on adult bovines; the use and maintenance of restraining pens for bovines; the method of killing; and the handling of animals during killing.

The Government is aware of calls for meat from animals that have not been stunned to be labelled and supports the need for accurate information for consumers. We will look into labelling options in light of the results of an EU study due this year.

### Paraprofessionals

We have been looking at the issue of the activities of the veterinary paraprofessional, or technician, through an industry-wide project known as the Review of Minor Procedures Regime. This project builds on the recommendations made by the Veterinary Development Council, to consider appropriate mechanisms that would allow suitably trained lay persons to carry out minor acts of veterinary surgery.

For the past two years we have been gathering views and evidence about where the flaws may lie in the current system and what is important to retain in any new framework. This has been a long, but necessary, first step and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the BVA and the profession for providing views and evidence throughout this process.

We now have a substantial amount of input upon which we can start developing options on how we would like the future to look. I hope that the BVA continues to work closely with Defra as the project progresses.

## EU Animal Health Regulation (EUAHR)

As many of you will know, the EU Animal Health Regulation is currently being negotiated and this will consolidate provisions on animal health into a single piece of legislation that is easier to understand and less costly to use for everyone involved in animal health.

We have very much valued personal input from the BVA President and his predecessors, as well as your Policy Committee and wider divisional members, in helping us to shape and secure the UK's negotiating goals. We must continue working together closely in the next stage of the process: trilogue discussions between the European Council of Member States, Commission and Parliament.

## Conclusion

Safeguarding animal health and welfare remains of paramount importance to the Government, and I once again applaud the leadership and commitment that is consistently exhibited by the BVA and the entire veterinary profession. I have had the privilege of speaking to you about just a few of our many successes, and of some of the challenges that still lie ahead. In the face of continued financial pressures throughout the United Kingdom it is now more imperative than ever to develop new and efficient ways of working. I have the utmost confidence that the people in this room and the organisations they represent have the ability and drive to meet these challenges. I look forward to continuing to work together to improve animal health and welfare in the future.