

BVA response to AHDB proposal for a co-ordinated approach to tackling ruminant health and welfare across the UK

October 2019

Who we are

The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom. With over 18,000 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 and the wellbeing of the profession.

Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this industry proposal for the formation of an industry Ruminant Health & Welfare Group (RHWG) to deliver a simpler, more co-ordinated approach to tackling ruminant health and welfare across the UK. There is considerable scope to coordinate activity between the sheep and cattle (beef and dairy) sectors. This includes both the coordination of shared disease programmes (eg Johnes) and the delivery of shared communications to livestock keepers. There is also considerable overlap with goats with shared diseases (Johnes Disease, Parasitic Gastro Enteritis) that could benefit from coordinated approaches and messaging.

We are supportive of efforts to co-ordinate and focus industry efforts on endemic disease. In particular, we see the argument in favour of consolidation and streamlining of animal health and welfare industry bodies in order to utilise limited resource more effectively and efficiently. These efforts should be cognisant of other proposals to develop industry led bodies to tackle endemic disease to ensure no duplication.

Objectives

We broadly support the stated objectives for the group, which brings together animal health and welfare outcomes with appropriate environmental and economic objectives. This is in line with our [position on Sustainable animal agriculture](#), where we present our vision for agriculture that should be undertaken in a way that is environmentally, ethically and economically acceptable for consumers, producers and wider society.

We would support the inclusion of a wider one health approach within the scope of the group. We would welcome consideration of public health within the objectives. Diseases of public health (food borne) importance have an effect upon the health and welfare of UK farmed animals. In particular we would encourage the inclusion of responsible antimicrobial use within the objectives of the group.

Once the RHWG is formed, it should agree indicators which will help determine what 'success' looks like and help measure progress in achieving the high-level objectives.

Devolution

We welcome the ambition of the RHWG to incorporate collaboration across the UK into its structures, including through its membership. Diseases do not respect political borders meaning that shared structures between the four jurisdictions of the UK need to be put in place to ensure ongoing cooperation and collaboration.

Sharing of health and welfare knowledge, industry intelligence and surveillance data across the UK's domestic borders is imperative, as recommended in the BVA Position on veterinary scanning surveillance (animal health and disease monitoring).¹ We therefore support the ambition that "disease surveillance and responses will be further improved and more easily facilitated through the sharing of health and welfare knowledge and industry intelligence across the UK's domestic borders." Post-Brexit cooperation and collaboration with neighbouring jurisdictions will also be vital. This will be particularly important with respect to Northern Ireland which will continue to share a land border with the EU. North-South cooperation has "enabled the island of Ireland to be treated in policy and operational terms as a single epidemiological unit for the purposes of animal health and welfare."²

Membership

Veterinary membership

We support the inclusion of veterinary representation within the group. Veterinary surgeons provide preventive healthcare and treatment for livestock, as well as carry out health monitoring and disease surveillance, promote good biosecurity, promote high animal health and welfare, undertake research and development and optimise food productivity and sustainability. Vets are also the trusted advisors to farmers and uniquely positioned to offer advice and provide essential surveillance services which play a key role in the package of measures necessary to address endemic disease.

We strongly support the inclusion of BCVA (British Cattle Veterinary Association) and SVS (Sheep Veterinary Society). Both BVA specialist divisions will provide expertise, experience and insight to the work of the RHWG, as they have done on their respective health and welfare groups to date. As noted above, there is opportunity to coordinate with the goat sector also, and the Goat Veterinary Society are well placed to provide expertise as the relevant BVA specialist division. BVA has not traditionally sat on health and welfare groups, but we are keen to engage where we can complement our species specialist divisions. Particularly we can provide capacity to the remit of the group which seeks to influence public policy by advocating high health and welfare standards in domestic policy and in international trade.

We understand from the proposals that the four Chief Veterinary Officers of the UK should have an open invitation to attend all meetings, whilst not being members of the group. We welcome this intention to ensure the input of this vital veterinary insight within government is captured.

Other members

We welcome the breadth of the proposed membership of the group. We note that there are cases where organisations are listed, such as the RSPCA and Livestock Auctioneers Association, that only operate in England and Wales. This may be intentional given the fact the group will be required to focus on England to an extent as there is no devolved framework in place at present. However, there

¹ BVA Position on veterinary scanning surveillance (animal health and disease monitoring)

https://www.bva.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/News_campaigns_and_policy/Policy/Animal_disease_surveillance/BVA%20Position%20on%20veterinary%20scanning%20surveillance%20-%20Executive%20Summary.pdf

² Department for Exiting the European Union, Northern Ireland and Ireland, 2017

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/638135/6.3703_DEXEU_Northern_Ireland_and_Ireland_INTERACTIVE.pdf

should be consideration of how to gain expertise from Scotland and Northern Ireland that may not be possible from these groups.

We support the proposal to include the chairs of each of the devolved animal health and welfare policy groups. However, the four groups listed from the constituent parts of the UK, are not direct parallels with one another. We note that the Animal Health and Welfare Northern Ireland's remit is limited to cattle. Recently DAERA consulted on an [Animal Health & Welfare Strategic Framework](#) for Northern Ireland. This would be overseen by a NI Animal Health & Welfare Strategic Framework Partnership. When this partnership is established, this may be a more precise equivalent to other representative bodies with the bonus of covering sheep and cattle within its remit.