

## **BVA position on the facilitation of trade in live animals and animal products between Great Britain and the EU Single Market**

### **Introduction**

Live animals and products of animal origin (POAOs) may carry pathogens that can represent a threat to public health and the health and welfare of animal populations. Sanitary (relating to human and animal health) and phytosanitary (relating to plant health) (SPS) measures protect humans, animals, and plants from diseases, pests, or contaminants that can enter a territory through trade, tourism or other movements. They form a vital part of the UK's framework of biosecurity protections. SPS measures apply to domestic production as well as products from overseas, and can take many forms, including:

- geographical restrictions such as mandating products originate from a disease-free area
- requirements for specific treatment or processing of products
- licensing of establishments and inspection of products by authorised personnel

SPS measures serve the vital purpose of protecting national freedom from animal diseases (eg Foot and Mouth Disease and African Swine Fever). The consequences of failing to maintain freedom from disease can be costly. This was vividly illustrated by the Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2001, which is estimated to have cost £5 billion to the private sector and £3 billion to the public sector, damaged the lives of farmers and rural communities, harmed the reputation of UK agriculture, and caused a general election to be postponed.<sup>1</sup> Having robust systems in place to ensure continued freedom from disease provides assurance to our trading partners, allowing exports to continue.

Recently the advance of African Swine Fever (ASF), a fatal and highly infectious disease of pigs, has been concerning. ASF has moved west across Asia and has been detected as near to the UK as Belgium.<sup>2</sup> An assessment<sup>3</sup> of the economic losses caused by ASF outbreaks in China between August 2018 and July 2019 showed a total economic loss that accounted for 0.78% of China's gross domestic product in 2019, with impacts experienced in almost all economic sectors through links to the pork industry, and a substantial decrease in consumer surplus.

SPS measures do not include measures that are explicitly based on animal welfare or environmental grounds (e.g. production systems) and countries are unable to bar goods that fail to meet animal welfare standards by using biosecurity as the sole justification. SPS alone can also not be used to justify a barrier linked to animal or public health which is not for the protection of the UK's biosecurity, such as barring POAOs where antimicrobials have been used as growth promoters. This is despite concerns that this irresponsible use leads to antimicrobial resistance (AMR) which poses a real and urgent risk to our ability to treat animals and protect human health in the future.

The great majority of new free trade agreements (FTAs) now contain provisions seeking to reduce friction caused by SPS trade barriers. However, SPS measures should not be seen solely as a barrier to trade that needs to be overcome. SPS measures support animal welfare because good border biosecurity serves to reduce the risk of animal disease and resulting negative animal welfare and public health consequences.

There are ample opportunities to minimise the burden that can come with providing the vital assurance expected by our trading partners and by the UK for imports, whilst upholding high standards of animal health, welfare, and public health. UK trade policy should endeavour to cooperate with trade partners on SPS

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<sup>1</sup> National Audit Office, The 2001 Outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease, 2002

<sup>2</sup> Updated Outbreak Assessment #10 African swine fever in Europe (Eastern Europe & Belgium) 23 March 2020 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/874897/asf-east-europe-update10.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874897/asf-east-europe-update10.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Shibing et al (2021) African swine fever outbreaks in China led to gross domestic product and economic losses Nature Food volume 2, pages802–808 (2021) <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-021-00362-1>

processes to simplify procedures and remove unnecessary access barriers for UK producers. This could be through veterinary equivalence agreements which can be part of a comprehensive FTA or be standalone. Cooperation should be underpinned by the principle of reciprocity where both sides experience mutual benefits, which are balanced by mutual commitments.

**Recommendation 1: Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures form a vital part of the UK's framework of biosecurity protections. Government should engage the veterinary profession on all relevant aspects of SPS policy and implementation.**

**Recommendation 2: Whilst maintaining current high standards of animal health, welfare and public health, UK trade policy should endeavour to cooperate with trade partners on SPS processes to simplify procedures and remove unnecessary access barriers for UK producers.**

## **Trade between Great Britain and the EU Single Market**

The Withdrawal Agreement, concluded between the EU and UK on 17 October 2019, formalised the position that Great Britain would be leaving the EU Single Market.

Within the single market, the UK was able to trade live animals and POAOs easily across borders with EU Member States, as well as four non-EU countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the European Economic Area and Switzerland through bilateral agreements). Consistent standards of biosecurity, production, and certification through the food chain has minimised animal, plant, and public health risk. Traded goods meet a recognised single standard that provides assurances for consumers on food safety and authenticity. As a result, trade within this zone does not require any additional veterinary certification.

It should be recognised that within the Single Market freedom to trade was underpinned by the work of vets within the borders of member states. Examples include:

- Farm vets working with farmers on national disease control programmes that meet agreed EU-wide standards as well as undertaking surveillance activities by detecting and reporting notifiable disease.
- All live animals must travel with a health certificate validated by an Official Veterinarian (OV) specifying that the animals fulfil the basic animal health requirements as set out in the relevant Regulations.
- Public health OVs stationed at abattoirs identifying disease in livestock at slaughter,
- Government vets sharing data via EU disease surveillance systems such as Animal Disease Notification System (ADNS) and undertaking risk assessment and risk management through EFSA.

Great Britain leaving the Single Market has meant leaving this system of assurance. Unlike a normal free trade agreement, any deal reached between the UK and EU would have sought to manage additional trade friction, rather than reduce it. There was hope that the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) would in some way make that additional trade friction less burdensome, reduce bureaucracy, and limit the level of controls that would be required. However, the TCA SPS chapter provided no replacement assurances and exporters now require an Export Health Certificate (EHC) to transport animals and POAO from Great Britain to the EU Single Market.

The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland is the part of the Withdrawal Agreement that sets out the arrangements to maintain an open border on the island of Ireland. According to the Protocol, Northern Ireland will remain aligned to a range of EU single market rules, including sanitary rules for veterinary controls. As the rest of the UK has the freedom to diverge, there will be a need for SPS measures on goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland.

## Meeting the requirements of SPS arrangements

Veterinary surgeons both certify and supervise the import and export of animals and animal products. The vital role of veterinary surgeons in trade, protecting public health, food safety, animal health and animal welfare is recognised around the world.

Since January 2021 there has been increased demand for veterinary certification and supervision with exporters requiring an EHC signed by an OV to transport animals, POAOs, and germplasm from Great Britain to the EU Single Market. The OV signature attests that relevant public health and animal health requirements have been met and it is essential that there are sufficient vets in place to meet these additional demands.

This has created a huge workload for the profession although, to date, we are not aware of any consignment failing to leave Great Britain for lack of an available OV. This is, in part, thanks to the fact that the number of vets in GB who have become qualified as OVs to sign EHCs for animal products has increased from 643 in January 2019 to 1894 in October 2021.<sup>4</sup> The Certification Support Officer (CSO) role has also been introduced, creating an allied profession working under the direction of an OV, collecting the evidence required for the OV to complete an EHC. The number of CSOs has increased from around 100 in November 2020 to over 500 in March 2021 and continues to grow.<sup>5</sup> However, we are aware that capacity is now stretched with little potential for significant expansion.

Whilst movements between Great Britain and Northern Ireland fall outside the scope of this document, there are associated impacts on veterinary capacity to consider, with 40,000 EHCs issued between January and March 2021 for Great Britain-Northern Ireland movements of animals and POAOs<sup>6</sup>

Despite this significant increase in product export OV capacity, further additional demands are expected, and we are not confident that the UK will have sufficient veterinary capacity. As the provisions of the Scheme for Temporary Agri-food Movements to Northern Ireland (STAMNI) begin to be phased out, further EHCs will be required for goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. The latest Defra estimate is that demand for EHCs may increase by 70,000-150,000 per year as a result. This is estimated to require up to 70 full-time equivalent (FTE) OVs. Based on a survey conducted before the end of the transition period, Defra found that on average an OV spent approximately 15% of their working week on certification. Defra expected this percentage to increase with the greatly increased demand and increasing specialisation and used a range of 10% to 30% within their preparatory work. Using this same range, 70 FTE OVs would be the equivalent of between 233 and 700 actual vets.

There will also be the need for OVs to perform import checks once sanitary controls are phased in for imports to GB from the EU. OVs on the border act as the “first line of defence for biosecurity in the UK.”<sup>7</sup> The work of border OVs is vital to prevent outbreaks of disease such as African Swine Fever. Import checks also provide assurances for our trading partners, which in turn supports exports. Defra funded £14 million in England to support recruitment and training of over 500 new staff, including OVs.<sup>8</sup> These OVs will be employed by public health authorities (PHAs), either directly or indirectly, or by APHA, and Defra will be responsible for delivering training.

Border control posts (BCPs) are currently being constructed in Great Britain. Before becoming operational these BCPs will need to be inspected and approved by APHA, as the relevant competent authority. These BCPs will need to be designated for specific types of consignment and have appropriate facilities and staff to meet the standards expected for the specific designation, for example facilities to inspect live animals.

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<sup>4</sup> House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee Moving animals across borders: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2021–22 Fifth Special Report of Session 2021–22

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> House of Lords European Affairs Committee 2nd Report of Session 2021-22 HL Paper 55 Report from the Sub-Committee on the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5802/ldselect/ldeuaff/55/55.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/9795/pdf/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-for-new-checks-on-animal-products-creates-500-jobs>

On 14 September 2021, a Parliamentary Statement was released announcing a postponement of border checks that were due to begin to be phased in from 1 October. There has been no consultation with the veterinary profession and no assurances have been provided by Government that relevant biosecurity risks associated with this delay had been assessed and managed.

The Border Operating Model<sup>9</sup> was updated on 18 October 2021. This provided new detail on the phasing in of certification and controls for imports into Great Britain from the Single Market. These requirements will now be introduced in the following timetable:

- 01 July 2022: All remaining regulated animal by-products (ABP) and all meat and meat products.
- 01 September 2022: All dairy products.
- 01 November 2022: All remaining regulated products of animal origin, including composite products and fish products.

Live animal physical checks will take place at designated BCPs where a facility is operational at the point of entry. Where there is no designated BCP, checks will remain at destination for other ports of entry until sufficient BCPs are operational. Checks at the inland BCP at Sevington in Kent and designated airport BCPs will commence from 01 July 2022.

## Veterinary capacity

The UK needs a veterinary workforce with the capability and capacity necessary to facilitate international trade both with the EU and other trade partners. To continue to trade, the UK must have enough appropriately trained OVs to meet the demands for export and import certification. If that requirement is not fulfilled, it will present a significant barrier to trade and limit any opportunities for the farming and food sectors that may be found in new free trade agreements.

The UK has been highly reliant on the contribution of EU vets to our workforce. Yet, as the demands on veterinary capacity have increased, there has been a reduction in new veterinary surgeons entering the UK from the EU. According to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), on 19 January 2021, there were 27,324 UK practising vets. Of these, 7,936 graduated in the EU (29% of the total). In recent years, more veterinary surgeons who registered in the UK qualified in the EU than in the UK. However, between 2019 and 2021, EU registrations dropped by 68%.<sup>10</sup>

### Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons annual new registrations by nationality

	2019	2020	2021
<b>UK nationality</b>	930	992	900
<b>EU nationality</b>	1118	730	353
<b>Rest of world nationality</b>	296	223	290
<b>Not disclosed</b>	6	3	5
<b>Total</b>	2350	1948	1548

It is evident that the end of free movement of people has had an enormous impact on the veterinary workforce, with potentially significant consequences for all aspects of veterinary practice, including animal health and welfare, public health, and trade. The need to meet the requirements associated with trade

<sup>9</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1034308/20211117\\_November\\_BordersOPModel\\_Final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1034308/20211117_November_BordersOPModel_Final.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Source: RCVS

facilitation, without a corresponding increase in vets in the UK, means pulling vets away from other essential activities.

## **Better use of allied professionals**

The operation of veterinary functions must become more efficient, and the use of allied professionals is vital to achieving that aim. Consideration is being given to greater utilisation of allied professionals under a vet-led team.

In certain specific situations, OV's may rely on third-party attestations by Officially Authorised Persons (OAPs). There has been a piecemeal expansion of the list of OAPs recognised by the RCVS, including the introduction of a Certification Support Officer (CSO) role. These allied professionals work under the direction of an OV, providing support by collecting the evidence required for the OV to complete an EHC.

There has been further expansion to include existing roles within the scope of OAPS. In 2020, Food Competent Certifying Officers (FCCO) were added to the list of OAPS. Fish Health Inspectors (FHI) were added in 2021, to help meet new requirements for fish exports under the Animal Health Law. Further exploration of appropriate OAPs, working within a vet-led team, would be supported.

To date, these additional categories have been pragmatic and supported by BVA. Further exploration of categories of OAP should be done in a coordinated way with a stronger process between government and RCVS with appropriate engagement with the profession and wider stakeholders. Reforms need to be undertaken in a measured way that prioritises animal health, animal welfare and public health and does not undermine the integrity of the veterinary surgeon's signature.

**Recommendation 3: Government, veterinary organisations and other stakeholders should develop a strategy to ensure the UK has a veterinary workforce with the capability and capacity necessary to facilitate international trade and carry out other essential veterinary work.**

**Recommendation 4: Government, veterinary organisations and other stakeholders should explore opportunities to make better use of allied professionals to support trade. This must not undermine the integrity of the veterinary surgeon's signature.**

**Recommendation 5: Further exploration of categories of OAP should be explored in a coordinated and open manner following appropriate consultation with the profession. This should not undermine the integrity of the veterinary surgeon's signature.**

## **Improving compliance**

There has been a steep learning curve on both sides of the channel and Irish Sea as SPS measures have been applied to exports from Great Britain to the EU Single Market. Many of the OV's completing EHCs in Great Britain, since the end of the transition period, will have been doing so for the first time. Furthermore, the established cohort of OV's who had the required export qualifications will have had no prior experience of signing these specific EU EHCs. Moreover, the EU and NI portal OV's performing checks will also be undertaking much of this work for the first time. In fact, many of the BCPs in question have been built to accept goods from Great Britain since the end of the transition period.

Based on data shared by the French Embassy, we understand that in the first week of the new trade relationship non-compliances accounted for 90% of exports. That number improved over the weeks and months, and we are now seeing levels of non-compliance akin to other third-country trade. This welcome improvement is testament to the hard work of vets across the UK.

Senior Defra and APHA staff have attended regular meetings with OV's to determine capacity issues and identify any concerns regarding the completion of EHCs as well as the acceptance of these EHCs by EU BCPs. These concerns are then raised by government with individual BCPs and the EU Commission to ensure consistency. As appropriate, the guidance to Great Britain OV's and Member State BCPs is updated to ensure the advice to exporters is correct. This process has improved, however, there remain periodic issues with the completion of EHCs, both in interpreting the requirements and with inconsistencies in interpretation and implementation at BCPs.

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Ahead of the full application of the full range of import controls on movements into Great Britain it is vital that appropriate structures and communication channels are put in place to ensure high compliance and consistency of interpretation as goods move in the opposite direction, learning from the lessons of more than a year of UK exports to the EU Single Market.

**Recommendation 6: The UK, EU and Member States should enhance and enable appropriate structures and communication channels to ensure high compliance and consistency of interpretation at BCPs, learning from the experience of vets in the UK and EU.**

## Simplifying SPS requirements

BVA is a member of the SPS Certification Working Group. This group is comprised of food and feed trade associations, hauliers, farmers and veterinary and environmental health professional organisations, working together to minimise trade friction in SPS requirements between Great Britain and the EU by identifying issues and proposing solutions to Government and its agencies.

This group comprises industry and certifiers and thus has access to the interconnected concerns of the veterinary profession and wider industry. In a report<sup>11</sup> issued by the group there was a call for urgent efforts to streamline processes to overcome restrictions to exports to the EU and identified three areas where there is the potential to facilitate the completion of SPS requirements:

- Explore what can be done by the UK government, certifiers, and industry to streamline the process of certification and official controls.
- Work jointly with the EU under the auspices of the TCA to find solutions for both imports and exports.
- Greater collaboration beyond that found within the TCA, to provide assurance for trade moving between Great Britain and the EU.

A reliable rule when considering SPS measures is that the importer is free to set the standard and how they wish for that standard to be assessed. Each EU EHC sets the standards expected by the EU for each type of commodity and it is for an OV in Great Britain to certify if those standards have been met.

The government should consider what is within the gift of the UK to simplify the process behind the EHC whilst providing the level of assurance expected of the EU. This must be done in a way that does not in any way weaken the authority of the OV signature, which underpins trade, not just with the EU, but globally.

There has already been some progress on this issue by the UK Government and its agencies, which fall under four headings:

- more effective use of allied professionals (discussed above),
- use of attestations,
- remote certification
- digitisation.

There is also now an opportunity to explore how Great Britain will apply its own import regime.

## Use of attestations

Under the principles of certification<sup>12</sup> an OV should certify only those matters which:

- a) are within his or her own knowledge;
- b) can be ascertained by him or her personally;

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.chilledfood.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/SPS-Certification-Report-FINAL-10-06-21-for-web.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/supporting-guidance/certification/>

c) are the subject of supporting evidence from an authorised veterinarian who has personal knowledge of the matters in question; or

d) are the subject of checks carried out by an Officially Authorised Person (OAP)

Efficiencies are realised when a certifying OV can rely on the assurances provided by another professional who has provided an attestation which complies with point c) or d).

Under the groupage export facilitation scheme (GEFS), where certain types of products are produced from a stable supply chain, exporters who are GEFS members may use 30-day support attestations to provide information to OVs to facilitate completion of an EHC. The attestation must be completed and signed by a veterinary surgeon or CSO working under an OV.

Further use of attestations could be explored in a measured way that does not undermine the integrity of the veterinary surgeon's signature.

**Recommendation 7: Government should engage the veterinary profession and industry to explore the further use of attestations. Therefore, involvement of RCVS in this process will be vital. This should not undermine the integrity of the veterinary surgeon's signature.**

## Remote certification

Within current RCVS guidance there is an allowance "in some limited or exceptional circumstances" for an OV to certify low-risk products remotely based on knowledge of the production establishment and working processes, or where they are supported by an OAP acting under their direction.<sup>13</sup> A consignment can be certified remotely in limited cases where:

- the product is the result of an industrial process,
- the OV inspects the production establishment periodically and checks the quality control systems that are in place
- the certificate does not require the OV to be present at the time of loading,

This allowance for remote certification is welcome as it supports more effective use of an OV's time. Specifically, remote certification can reduce travel time for an OV. This can often be overlooked within the wider discussion of making the certification process more efficient. However, considerable working time is spent simply travelling to and from establishments and this is particularly true in more remote parts of the UK.

It is essential that remote certification is undertaken in a way that supports the integrity of the wider certification system. The RCVS guidance is proportionate as it balances the benefits of remote certification with any risks. Remote certification is underpinned by the professionalism of OVs. These OVs should be supported by clear guidance to support their decision making and to aid their communications with clients.

**Recommendation 8: Competent authorities and RCVS should ensure clear up-to-date guidance is provided to OVs in order to encourage the proportionate and effective use of remote certification.**

## Digitalisation

Government is undertaking considerable efforts to digitise the process of completing EHCs. It is hoped digitalisation<sup>14</sup> will make the process of certification quicker, simpler, and reduce the potential for human error.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/supporting-guidance/certification/>

<sup>14</sup> Digitisation means to convert something into a digital format, and usually refers to encoding of data and documents. Digitalisation is a wider process to convert processes over to use digital technologies.

The Digital Assistance Scheme (DAS) is designed to support the continued movement of agri-food goods and live animals from Great Britain to Northern Ireland in line with the Northern Ireland Protocol. However, there is scope for using this system for all exports to the Single Market.

The Defra scheme aims to provide a simplified end-to-end digital system which streamlines the certification and verification processes required for moving goods. Engagement from the team developing the system has been welcome and we have stressed the need for the system to reflect the variety of goods that are certified, where there will be significant variation in the level of complexity. For example, a composite product such as a meat and cheese pizza, will have many more elements that will require certification when compared to a simpler consignment such as a shipment of frozen meat.

Clear communication to the profession and industry on DAS ahead of its formal launch is essential to smooth the transition to the new system.

**Recommendation 9: Government should assess and clearly communicate the benefits of digitisation to certifiers and businesses ahead of any launch.**

**Recommendation 10: Defra should continue to engage with industry and the veterinary profession as it develops the Digital Assistance Scheme, with field trials being representative of the most challenging exports such as composite goods or consignments which include a mix of products.**

**Recommendation 11: Digitisation should not undermine the integrity of the veterinary surgeon's signature and engagement with RCVS is essential.**

## Imports regime

Now that the UK is no longer an EU Member State, Great Britain has the competence to set its own imports regime, creating an opportunity to establish an imports regime that is bespoke to the priorities and needs of Great Britain.

There is an opportunity available to Great Britain to design a new regime that can take into account:

- the specific biosecurity needs of Great Britain
- opportunities presented by new technology,
- effective use of available veterinary expertise and utilisation of allied professionals

Specifically, a new official controls regime could be designed that suits the form of trade that will move through BCPs in Great Britain. Prior to leaving the EU, controls were applied only to third-country trade, which is different from the variety of imports received from the EU. EU imports will be more likely to be roll-on roll-off consignments with just-in-time supply chains of perishable commodities and composite goods. Therefore, these imports will be more complex and will be under greater time pressure to make it to their final destination.

**Recommendation 12: Government must prioritise engagement with the veterinary profession to ensure the opportunities of a new import regime are realised. It is essential that the veterinary profession is involved in this process to ensure animal health and welfare and public health are upheld whilst using our workforce efficiently and effectively.**

## Working jointly under the TCA

Within the structures created by the TCA, there will be a "Trade Specialised Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures" where the UK and EU can meet and discuss the operation of SPS arrangements and potentially seek further reciprocal facilitations without compromising biosecurity.

It is imperative that the UK government engages with industry and the veterinary profession to understand their practical experience of meeting the demands of exporting SPS goods and to work together to identify potential solutions to bring to the specialised committee.

Through Specialised Committee meetings, the UK and EU should prioritise finding a reciprocal solution on the movement of laboratory samples between Great Britain and the Single Market. At present consignments

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of research and diagnostic samples, trade samples or display items as defined in the Animal By-product (ABP) legislation and not intended for human consumption imported into Great Britain from the EU Single Market do not need individual authorisations.<sup>15</sup> However, the products must be produced, processed, transported, handled, labelled, stored, used, and disposed of in accordance with the relevant requirements. However, there was no equivalent reciprocal arrangement in place, which adds delay, bureaucracy, and cost to the movement of samples to the EU which has implications for animal health and welfare as well as client costs.

The movement of diagnostic samples from CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) listed species between Great Britain and EU is more complex. Species and their products that were freely moved and traded between Great Britain and the EU, now require a CITES permit or import/export notification.

Clinical samples taken for the purpose of diagnosis fall under the convention. Veterinary surgeons in the UK send these clinical specimens to reference laboratories for investigation to aid diagnosis and determine best treatment. Applying for a permit can take many days before being granted. For those samples that survive, the severe delays will make diagnoses in clinical cases impossible. This will have devastating consequences for the health and welfare of the animals affected. Samples from CITES listed species that are utilised for research will be equally impacted. This will see longer-term impacts on conservation and welfare of reduced research materials would be significant.

At present, there are no BCPs designated for the purposes of live livestock at EU mainland ports with direct routes from Great Britain. The construction of a designated BCP would facilitate the movement of high health breeding animals from Great Britain to continental Europe. Joint Committee meetings offer a means for the EU and UK institutions to collaborate to ensure live animal BCPs are positioned to reduce journey times.

**Recommendation 13: To support cooperation on SPS barriers under a new Trade and Cooperation Agreement, the UK Government should develop a process whereby vets, farmers and processors are engaged to identify unnecessary SPS barriers. This could form a key component of the UK's ongoing cooperation with the EU through the Trade Specialised Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures.**

**Recommendation 14: Using the framework of the Trade Specialised Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, the UK and EU should agree a reciprocal solution on the movement of samples between Great Britain to laboratories in the Single Market. This should include samples from CITES listed species.**

**Recommendation 15: Using the framework of the Trade Specialised Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, the UK and EU should cooperate on the positioning of border control posts including agreeing to the construction of a designated BCP in EU mainland ports with direct routes from Great Britain.**

## **Greater collaboration beyond that found within the TCA**

Finally, the UK and EU should consider steps that build upon the current TCA and would provide greater reciprocal assurance for movements of live animals and POAO. It is important for both sides to fully consider the benefits and conditions of different types of agreements.

Different forms of agreement will provide different benefits and conditions, which would need to be considered holistically, and it will be essential for government to engage with exporters and importers as well as the veterinary profession.

An equivalence agreement, such as that reached between New Zealand and the EU, would see the systems of standards and regulation recognised by both parties as being equivalent. Essentially the EU and GB would not be bound by the same rule book but would determine that the outcome of each other's rule book and

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<sup>15</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/867835/facilitation-letter-samples-from-eu-countries.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/867835/facilitation-letter-samples-from-eu-countries.pdf)

assurance those rules are being followed leads to an equivalent standard. This would remove some of the border inspection requirements and reduce the demands on OV's.

However, servicing a trade relationship with the EU based on a New Zealand style model would likely create new demands on government, business, and vets, which should be investigated. An equivalence deal would also allow Great Britain greater flexibility in how it sets rules for domestic production. It is also important to recognise that the New Zealand example covers a limited scope of goods, which is very different from the variety of trade that exists between Great Britain and the EU.

An alignment agreement would see the UK and EU continue to mirror regulations indefinitely. This is currently the case for Switzerland and in effect the relationship Northern Ireland has within the Free Market. This option would remove the need for regulatory border checks on goods moving between Great Britain and Northern Ireland and between Great Britain and the EU. There would be no need for OV's to sign EHCs. This approach would go further in removing unnecessary trade barriers for SPS goods. However, there would be less scope for bespoke regulatory approaches in Great Britain.

It is imperative that all stakeholders recognise the unique circumstances that exist where both parties are starting from a position of near alignment. The situation relating to Northern Ireland, remaining effectively in the Single Market, is also unique. As such it is likely that any negotiation will require a bespoke solution that meets the specific requirements of trade between the UK and EU. Therefore, simply discussing a binary choice between New Zealand and Switzerland, equivalence versus alignment is merely a starting point for more complex discussions.

**Recommendation 16: The UK and EU should consider steps building upon the current TCA which would provide greater assurance for movements of live animals and POAO. Engagement with vets who are at the forefront of facilitating trade will be vital.**