Northern Ireland Branch Council meeting 27 August 2014

Participants
Pat Hart (President)
Simon Doherty (President Elect)
Jean Wales (Branch Honorary Secretary and VPHA)
David Torrens (DARDNI)
Cathal Carr (SPVS)
Greg Koulianos (BVPA) – part
John Blackwell (BVA President Elect)

In attendance
Amelia Findon - BVA

Apologies were received from: Sandra Dunbar (AWF), Alex Shirlow (AVS), Lisa Mawhinney (MSG)

1) The President of Branch welcomed members to the meeting, in particular BVA President Elect, John Blackwell, the BVA Officer with a special interest in Northern Ireland.

Minutes of the last meeting
2) The minutes of the last meeting were accepted as an accurate record.

3) Regarding Branch Council membership (paras 3-4) it was noted that reminders had been sent to both BEVA and BCVA, who had previously confirmed their intention to nominate. It was agreed that a further reminder would be sent. The Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute (AFBI) Veterinary Sciences Division would also be reminded of their vacancy following the departure of S Doherty, who would remain on Branch Council as President Elect. **Action: Secretariat**

Welfare at slaughter
4) It was reported that BVA’s campaign on non-stun slaughter had been gathering momentum. With the backing of the RSPCA, BVA launched a government e-petition on 30 April which had attracted over 73,000 signatures to date. BVA had also written to the party leaders in the devolved regions, receiving a response, from David Ford MLA, indicating support for the campaign. Branch Council were encouraged to disseminate the link to the e-petition as widely as possible. **Action: All**

5) It was noted that next steps included a meeting with Steve Wotton from Bristol University to explore further research into the recoverability of stunning techniques.

Welfare of Animals Act 2011
6) The President of Branch reported on three recent DARD led workshops exploring the implementation of the Welfare of Animals Act 2011. The workshops had been attended by Branch members and Sean Wensley, BVA’s incoming President Elect. Branch Council commented that key issues appeared to be the lack of a central number for reporting, and inadequate sentencing. For equines a key welfare issue was the lack of access to slaughterhouses willing to take equines, and for companion animals poor public understanding of duty of care was a concern. The outcomes of the workshops would be circulated on the Branch email loop once
Veterinary school in NI
7) Branch were reminded of BVA’s response to member concerns regarding the announcement of a new veterinary school at the University of Surrey:
   - Discussion forum in October 2013, including the devolved perspective
   - Draft statement and strategy developed by the MSG Education Subgroup and approved by MSG
   - Draft broadly supported by BVA Council on 23 July subject to the incorporation of a clear statement about concerns surrounding the increase in veterinary undergraduate places, and in particular an explicit statement that a rapid rise in numbers could have serious consequences for the quality of veterinary teaching and the future of the profession.

8) It was noted that plans to establish a veterinary school at the University of Ulster, Coleraine, were underway. In the NI Assembly the Minister for Employment and Learning had been asked to outline his plans reporting that the university had the discretion to offer veterinary courses from within its existing maximum student number (MaSN) allocation. However, as the university wished to secure funding it was preparing an economic appraisal to support its proposal.

9) Branch Council commented that the future of the vet school proposal was entirely subject to appropriate funding being secured. It was anticipated that further information regarding progress would be available at the NIVA/AVSPNI evening event on 17 September, which BVA’s President Elect and incoming President Elect would both be attending. Branch Council would be kept updated.

Tendering for OV services
10) Branch Council were reminded that the AHVLA Veterinary Delivery Partnership Project had been separated into two separate requirements: Requirement 1 (England and Wales) which included TB testing, other government paid OV services and emergency disease outbreak response; and Requirement 2 (UK wide) covering the framework provision of services of a veterinary nature. The ITT for Requirement 2 had been published on 28 May and had run until 28 July 2014.

11) It was reported that AVSPNI had tendered on behalf of all its members who wished to be involved, and had formed a limited company for the purpose, although some larger practices had chosen to submit their own tenders.

Test and vaccinate, or remove (TVR)
12) Branch Council were reminded of the recently developed BVA position on the “test and vaccinate or remove” (TVR) approach to bovine TB in badgers in Northern Ireland. The position indicated BVA support for any approach that sought to reduce the number of infected badgers in the environment. However, doubts remained regarding the TVR due to the lack of sensitivity of the diagnostic tests currently available and the risk of perturbation of the badger population.

13) Branch supported the position, agreeing that the research in Northern Ireland was welcomed and could contribute to improved understanding of the epidemiology of the disease. It was agreed that, whatever the outcomes of the pilot, TVR was unlikely to be cost effective for wider roll-out.

BVD control and eradication
14) In September 2013 Branch had responded to the DARDNI consultation on compulsory testing for bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD). The response had supported the introduction of legislation to make testing for BVD compulsory as, without a
compulsory phase, it was likely that the eradication programme would fail. The response had also stated that legislation should be backed up with a comprehensive programme of education and awareness-raising as legislation alone was not enough to prevent breeding from a known PI.

15) It was reported that the compulsory phase was expected to begin on 1 January 2015. Branch agreed that the move was welcomed, following frustration during the voluntary phase.

Any other business

16) Meet the members
It was agreed that a Branch ‘meet the members’ event should be organised around the BVA visit for the Northern Ireland political dinner on 23 October. A date and programme would be fixed in due course, with Branch Council members encouraged to submit discussion ideas. **Action: All**

17) Going for Growth
It was noted that the ambitious Going for Growth strategy in NI was strongly supported by rural stakeholders, however, to date there had been little focus on the role of the veterinary surgeon. It was suggested that this could be included as part of the BVA President’s speech at the NI political dinner. **Action: Secretariat**

18) The President of Branch thanked members for their attendance and contributions.