Ladies and gentlemen; a very warm welcome to Cardiff City Hall this evening, and the British Veterinary Association’s annual Welsh dinner. Thank you for joining us and showing your support for BVA.

Introduction
It’s a little over a month since the results of the Welsh Assembly elections were announced, and this evening we’re delighted our new Cabinet Secretary Lesley Griffiths has been able to take time out of her busy schedule to be with us. We look forward to hearing from the Cabinet Secretary in a short while - and [addressing the minister] we look forward to working with you to continue championing animal health and welfare in Wales, recommendations for which we’ve laid out in our Manifesto for Wales and copies of which can be found on your tables.

I’d also like to take this opportunity to express BVA’s thanks to Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, Professor Christianne Glossop; who not only continues to ensure a trusted ‘voice for vets’ is heard in government, but for facilitating effective working relationships and offering valuable support.

Another veterinary colleague whose dedication to the profession and his community has been officially recognised is BVA past president, Dr Peter Harlech Jones; who was appointed High Sheriff of Gwynedd earlier this year. One of only 50 or so Royal High Sheriff appointments made in counties across England and Wales each year: so, on behalf of us all, congratulations Peter!

President’s theme
As this might highlight – and as we all know - vets’ varied roles, responsibilities and impact, extend well beyond animal health and welfare.

My Presidential theme is “Vets in the human-animal age”, which thinks about vets in the so-called Anthropocene – the period when human activities are having such impact on our climate and environment that they characterise our geological era.

It recognises that we are one animal among many, and our commonality with animals, both in terms of shared disease susceptibility and shared capacity to feel. And it does so within the concept of One Health, which promotes and fosters interdisciplinary working on the health and wellbeing of humans, animals and the environment.

Antimicrobial resistance
One of the greatest challenges to both animal and human health is, of course, the threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). I’m sure you all saw the latest headlines, covering the final report of Lord O’Neill’s global AMR review, which warned of antibiotic resistant 'superbugs' that could cause millions more deaths each year.
AMR is a top priority for BVA and we welcomed the report’s recommendations; which recognised the importance of using a range of measures in both human and animal health.

To tackle AMR it is imperative that human and animal health organisations work together at strategic and individual levels - and BVA is committed to strengthening that collaboration through our inter-professional One Health working group, while proactive work is also taking place throughout the veterinary profession to promote the responsible use of antimicrobials. We all recognise that tackling AMR will require us to continue “thinking globally and acting locally”.

As such, vets at the heart of communities across Wales are well-placed to help achieve a globally responsible Wales – and support many of the other ambitions laid out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

Aberystwyth / RVC veterinary hub
The role of the veterinary surgeon in all walks of life cannot be understated - and this relies on vets receiving the right training, skills and knowledge from the outset of their career.

The Cabinet Secretary’s announcement last week about a new hub of veterinary expertise and excellence is an exciting initiative that brings together the right resources to deliver a range of potential training opportunities to Wales’s vets of tomorrow.

There are of course both risks and opportunities in increasing the number of veterinary undergraduate courses - particularly in ensuring that there are good clinical career prospects for graduates - but this hub will help safeguard animal health; promote animal welfare; and better support the farmers and other animal owners we work with across Wales.

bTB and endemic disease
The Cymorth TB pilot is just one example of where vets’ valued role in knowledge transfer was able to offer support to farmers suffering a TB breakdown. Cymorth TB was rolled out across Wales last November and we strongly encourage veterinary surgeons to access the government subsidised training places.

Bovine TB is one of the most serious animal health problems we face and to eradicate the disease we must utilise all available tools in the toolbox.

It is encouraging that the veterinary network of on-the-ground insight and expertise is being maintained in Wales through the delivery of vital official veterinarian services, thanks in part to effective working with TB delivery partners Ieychyd DA and Menter a Busnes.

Testament to this – and the work being done by Christianne and her team, in partnership with industry and the veterinary profession – is the quarterly TB data, which showed the number of herds in Wales under restrictions at its lowest level in 10 years. This is welcome news and we very much hope that the downward trend continues, but we do know that TB statistics can fluctuate, which is why we’re continuing to urge the Welsh government to re-consider its eradication programme to include the targeted and humane culling of badgers, by means of cage trapping and shooting only, particularly in light of the suspension of the badger vaccination project.
The tripartite relationship between vet, farmer and government is paramount to controlling, and protecting against, disease - and those close links must continue to progress the excellent work that has been done so far into, for example, plans for a Bovine Viral Diarrhoea eradication scheme and research on sheep scab.

Surveillance

The streamlined surveillance structure that was established in 2014, set up in the wake of nationwide laboratory closures - encompassing OVIs, the Wales Veterinary Science Centre at Aberystwyth, existing diagnostic facilities and labs, and the carcase collection system – has been well received. Yet given the dramatic increase in carcase collection throughout Spring, we now need demonstrable evidence of the effectiveness of this system in joining the dots of disease; so we can assess whether it can be seen as a solution – or considered as a stepping stone towards developing the robust, coordinated system of data capture that is needed to reduce and eliminate disease.

Animal welfare

The first responsibility of the veterinary profession is to improve the lives of animals and to ensure as many animals as possible enjoy a good life and, where it is in our gift, a humane death. Earlier this year we launched our own animal welfare strategy for the profession, 'vets speaking up for animal welfare', which identified priority areas for the veterinary profession to contribute solutions for real-world animal welfare problems. Vets have a unique opportunity and responsibility to advocate animals' best interests at individual, community and national levels – and we are proud to be involved in pivotal partnership working like the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group.

Dog health and welfare

Wales has already led the way with many animal welfare successes, from banning the use of electric shock collars on dogs and cats, to the production of a code of practice on the use of snares for fox control, and the Animal Welfare (Breeding of Dogs) (Wales) Regulations.

Indiscriminate dog breeding and sale, and irresponsible ownership, are issues that are rarely out of the headlines. With puppy farming a growing problem and reports of lorry-loads of puppies entering the UK through Holyhead, the government must ensure border controls and local authorities are equipped with the necessary resources to effectively enforce existing legislation. And new regulations and legislation must keep pace with societal change, like the growth and use of the internet to advertise and sell pets – which is why we’re calling for an urgent review of the outmoded 1951 Pet Animals Act.

Equine issues

And to support the best practice that is being achieved under the Control of Horses (Wales) Act, BVA is also calling for compulsory microchipping of all horses - given the ongoing welfare concern of fly-grazing and abandoned ponies. Latest figures from RSPCA Cymru show over 10,000 equine incidents per year, with Cardiff one of Wales' worst affected areas.

Since the Control of Horses Act is now also in effect in England, both governments must work together in the establishment of a central equine database and single passport issuing authority to promote and sustain responsible horse ownership.
Promoting animal welfare – wild animals in travelling circuses

Alongside partnership, we need pragmatism. Where there are opportunities to improve animal welfare we must take them. For example, BVA is clear that wild animals should not be used in travelling circuses because it is emblematic of the way we treat animals in the human-animal age. We eagerly await the final report of findings on the welfare of animals in circuses from Professor Stephen Harris’ independent review, which was commissioned last year. This specific issue may not affect many individual animals, but while we have the political will to change the law then we should.

Welfare at slaughter

From a small number of animals to many millions, BVA continues to campaign on welfare at slaughter. There is currently very little non-stun slaughter carried out in Wales but, while it is permitted under EU derogation, the government should reduce the welfare harm of non-stun slaughter by introducing better labelling to ensure non-stun products are not sold unlabelled on supermarket shelves in any part of the UK, including Wales.

Recent national-news headlines about welfare breaches in a Norfolk abattoir also highlighted the pressing importance of another of our welfare at slaughter campaign calls; for mandatory CCTV in all slaughterhouses, and for accompanying legislation to ensure vets have unrestricted access to slaughterhouse CCTV footage. CCTV can only aid animal welfare at slaughter if official veterinarians have full and unrestricted access to footage as independent monitors.

Vet Futures

As we look ahead in the Anthropocene, BVA will continue to develop its ambitions and support for humane, sustainable animal agriculture and good lives for animals under the stewardship of, and impacted by, human activity. And we will continue to do so alongside our veterinary nurse colleagues, who play an invaluable and integral role providing outstanding care for animals and education for owners. They, like the veterinary profession, will be launching their 2030 vision for their profession at the Vet Futures summit in London next month.

Thank yous

In terms of team work, BVA couldn’t achieve a fraction of the presence, influence and engagement in Wales that it does without our Welsh Branch colleagues. I have already mentioned some of their proactivity and productivity in my speech, and I’d like to congratulate them on having had such a successful year under President Neil Paton. Thank you also for hosting us here this evening.

If all of my BVA colleagues would join me in being upstanding and raising your glasses in a toast “to our guests.”

*TOAST*

It now gives me great pleasure to introduce Lesley Griffiths, Cabinet Secretary for the Environment and Rural Affairs.

Diolch yn Fawr / thank you.