

Rural Development Sub-Committee

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Date: Thursday 29 November 2007

Venue: Senedd, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay. Committee Room 3

Title: Rural Development Sub-committee update on developments with the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak

Purpose

1. This paper provides a briefing to update members of the Committee on developments with the Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak.

Summary / Recommendations

2. That the Committee considers the contents of the briefing paper at Annex 1.

Background

3. FMD is an infectious disease affecting cloven-hoofed animals, in particular cattle, sheep, pigs and goats.

4. On confirmation of FMD in Surrey on 3 August and 12 September the Welsh Exotic Animal Diseases Contingency Plan was activated and the Emergency Co-ordination Centre Wales was established to facilitate engagement with Defra for meetings of Animal Disease Policy Group, National Experts' Group and COBR. It also enabled the management and administration of the various issues arising from the outbreak, licensing, communications, briefing and legislation. There have been 8 confirmed cases of FMD in Surrey and Berkshire.

5. A Restricted Zone (RZ) was declared in Wales as part of a GB wide ban on the movement of susceptible animals. In light of animal welfare and husbandry issues affecting the livestock industry licensing arrangements were put in place to enable specific categories of movement, following veterinary risk assessment.

6. The RZ in Wales was lifted on 17 October. Following extensive surveillance work there have been no further cases of FMD. Defra lifted the FMD RZ in Surrey on 19 November.

Action for Subject Committee

7. The Committee is invited to note the contents of this paper.

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Annex 1

Update on Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak.

Restrictions - August outbreak

The first case of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in Surrey was notified on 3 August 2007. A protection and surveillance zone was set up around the infected premises and Wales declared a Restricted Zone (RZ) as part of a GB movement ban of all susceptible animals. It was essential that a ban was instigated to limit disease spreading.

During the outbreak a series of General Licences and individual licensing arrangements were put in place to deal with specific difficulties experienced by the livestock industry, particularly in respect of animal welfare and animal husbandry issues (e.g. dairy issues, veterinary treatment, fallen stock and allowing animals to go direct to slaughter). Such movements were only allowed following veterinary risk assessments and were accompanied by strict conditions to minimise the risk.

On 8 August, following a Decision by the European Commission, legislation was put in place banning the export of live animals, meat and meat products. On 24 August the RZs and the export ban were lifted by GB administrations. A 20 day livestock standstill was put in place pending the removal of restrictions in Surrey. All restrictions were lifted on 8 September and the usual "peacetime" 6 day standstill period was re-imposed.

Restrictions - September outbreak

On 12 September a further outbreak of FMD was confirmed on a farm in Surrey. Further cases of the disease were later confirmed in Surrey and Berkshire. The RZ and movement ban was re-imposed. A further series of veterinary risk assessments were undertaken and both licensing arrangements put in place in respect of animal welfare and animal husbandry. Some 35 different licences were issued between 12 September and 17 October when the restrictions were lifted.

On 13 September, the European Commission issued a Decision banning the export of live animals, meat and meat products from GB. Some restrictions were lifted on 12 October to allow the export of certain animal products from specific areas in GB.

Following extensive surveillance and veterinary risk assessments the Protection Zone around the infected premises and all movements' restrictions outside the Risk Area in Surrey were lifted on the 17 October. The RZ in Wales was lifted and peacetime rules (6 day standstill) were reinstated.

The Risk Area in Surrey was reduced on the 21 October to a 10Km and on the 5 November the Surveillance Zone was lifted. Whilst the Risk Area remained in place movements within it resumed. Extensive surveillance carried out around the Pirbright Institute and the infected premises which led to the conclusion that there were no further cases of FMD present.

Trade implications

Since 17 October the Commission have issued a series of easements to the export restrictions. This has demonstrated the confidence the Commission have had in the measures taken to eradicate FMD. On the 6 November the Commission agreed a further Decision, which came into force in Wales on 20 November. This easement split GB into three areas; South East England where no exports are allowed, an area around the South East where exports are restricted and the rest of Great Britain where pre-FMD conditions were restored. The ban on live animal movements out of the area where exports are banned or restricted still apply, this protects the export status in the rest of Great Britain.

The Commission on the basis of the disease control measures in the UK, particularly the results of the surveillance and testing, are expected to further reduce the export restrictions. However, the ban on the export of live animals is likely to remain in place until late December or early January.

Pirbright

Reports by the Health and Safety Executive, Professor Spratt and Defra's own Epidemiological Report acknowledge that the source of the outbreak is likely to have been contamination from the Pirbright site. Since 7 September HSE and Defra have carried out further joint inspections, and work on the Improvement Plan is underway. All essential work will need to be completed at the Pirbright site before full operations can recommence at all its facilities. Remedial work has been carried out at the site and extensively tested, including work on the effluent pipes identified by the HSE. HSE and Defra inspectors have reviewed the improvements at the site (including operating procedures) and have concluded that it is safe for vaccine production to recommence.

On the 6 November Defra restored the Specified Animal Pathogens Order licence to Merial Animal Health to permit the use of live FMD and Bluetongue viruses for vaccine production, following further extensive inspections, tests and documentary evidence.

Impact on Wales

The outbreak of FMD has had a significant impact on the farming industry in Wales. Well aware of the hardship the restrictions caused to farming families, however, these movement controls were essential to protect Wales from disease.

Support for the Industry has included:

Recognising the needs of the industry and allowing specific animal movements, subject to strict conditions, as soon as it was safe to do so. Movements for welfare were allowed from 19 September, movements to collection centres and red markets from 17 September, reopening of green markets on 4 October and on farm sales on 8 October.

Regular meetings and communication with industry stakeholders

A Light Lamb Welfare Disposal Scheme at a cost of £6.5 million

A £1 million given to Hybu Cig Cymru to increase the marketing and promotion of light lambs

Discussions with major retailers to find a way to promote Welsh meat products.

Point made to Secretary of State Hilary Benn that the UK Government should fund support packages on a GB basis for the consequence of FMD outbreak in England.