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Chair of the Audit Committee
The National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE: COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL REPORT

I am pleased to enclose a number of copies of the Comptroller and Auditor General's report, *The 2001 Outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease*, which was published on 21 June 2002. In view of the disease's impact on Wales, the Audit Committee may wish to note this report at its next meeting, on 18 July 2002. (I am arranging for the report to be translated into Welsh, so that a bilingual version could be laid in the Assembly. In view of the report's length, however, the translation will not be ready in time for the meeting.)

It might be helpful to set out the accountability arrangements for dealing with the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. As set out at paragraph 1.19 of the report, disease control operations of this sort were not functions that were devolved to the Assembly. Full responsibility for managing the outbreak therefore remained with the Westminster government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), later the Department of Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Against this background, the Comptroller and Auditor General reported on a Great Britain-wide basis, covering England, Wales and Scotland. This examination did not cover Northern Ireland which has its own animal health legislation and veterinary service.

As you know, I was concerned to ensure that the report set out relevant information on the outbreak of the disease in Wales. This is separately set out in Appendix 6 of the report which provides some interesting and useful comparative data.

Although the Welsh Assembly Government was not accountable for managing the crisis, the report makes clear that it made an important contribution. For example:

- it contributed to policy decisions ultimately taken in Westminster (referred to in Figure 16 on pages 22-23 of the report);
- the Assembly provided staff and other resources on an agency basis to MAFF/DEFRA (using Section 41 of the Government of Wales Act 1998). All relevant costs incurred by the Assembly related to the outbreak are to be reimbursed in full by DEFRA; and
- Assembly Government staff and Ministers played an important role in communications in Wales – as set out in paragraph 30 of Appendix 6.

As you know, on 3 July the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts took extensive evidence from senior DEFRA officials on the findings of this report, and will publish its own report later in the year. Wales did not feature separately in the Committee's questioning, illustrating the point that issues arising in Wales were the same, to a greater or lesser degree, as those in the affected English regions and Scotland.

In light of the Comptroller and Auditor General's report and the fact that the Assembly was not accountable for the expenditure associated with this report, I do not propose to undertake any work in the immediate future in connection with the foot and mouth outbreak in Wales. I shall, of course, continue to keep this matter under review.

If I can provide any further information on this subject, I would be happy to do so.

JOHN BOURN

(approved and signed on behalf of Sir John in his absence)