

Reports and Comments

Responsibility and cost sharing in England regarding animal health and welfare

Following its 15-month deliberations, the Advisory Group on Responsibility and Cost Sharing launched its findings at a meeting at Defra in London on Monday 13th December 2010. The Chair, Rosemary Radcliffe, outlined the proposals and there were additional comments from other members of the Committee: Jonathan Barber, Bill Reilly, James Fanshawe, Mike Sheldon and Diane McCrea. The Report was welcomed by Caroline Spelman MP, the Secretary of State.

The question addressed by the Group was how industry and government might form a new relationship to work together for animal health and welfare. How should responsibilities and costs be shared, between animal keepers and government, in protecting against and dealing with diseases of economic or human health importance (such as foot and mouth disease or bovine tuberculosis)? This question came into focus as the huge costs to the public purse of dealing with the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak became clear in its aftermath and has been receiving some attention ever since. The Advisory Group role was to find a way forward with this issue. Its aims were: (i) to reduce the risk and cost of animal disease and improve the welfare of kept animals and also (ii) to rebuild and maintain trust between animal keepers and the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and to improve the effectiveness and value for money of measures for disease control.

The Advisory Group concluded that responsibility-sharing arrangements must precede any further discussion of cost sharing and it has developed a new model for a system to take this forward: an England Partnership Board. It is proposed that this should have about 12 members, an external Chair, and comprise external members and Defra officials, with the former in clear majority. It will be an integral part of the Defra decision-making process. The proposal is for a new and unique arrangement that may not have precedents or parallels in government. No legislative changes are required for this body to be established so there are no reasons why it could not be set up quite rapidly.

The Partnership Board will be responsible for strategy, policy development, prioritisation of expenditure and strategic oversight of delivery on all kept animal health and welfare issues. It is recognised that its success will depend on picking the right people, that these will communicate and engage with stakeholders effectively, that Ministers will need to be comfortable with the arrangements and willing to accept the Board's advice, that Defra officials will need to adapt to new ways of working, and that there will need to be leadership from industry organisations in demonstrating commitment to making the new model work.

The current spending review means there is an even stronger focus on value for money and it is proposed that there is a staged approach to sharing costs. This will include

undertaking full review of the value for money of all government-funded activities; looking for efficiencies; considering scope for enhanced fee and charges regimes; review of compensation arrangements (and working with insurers to explore the possibility of new arrangements in this area); and to encourage stakeholders to develop projects with public pump-priming funding. The Advisory Group has not recommended a general animal disease levy.

The benefits to be gained are improvements in efficacy in policy-making and implementation, through increased challenge and scrutiny of policies and priorities; a single strategic overview of animal health and welfare policies within Defra, and greater understanding and acceptance of policy among stakeholders. The England Partnership Board will need to liaise with authorities in the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

It is understood that Ministers will respond to these proposals in the Spring of 2011.

Report of the Responsibility and Cost Sharing Advisory Group (December 2010). The Responsibility and Cost Sharing Advisory Group. A4, 120 pages. Published by Defra and available at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/policy/animalhealth/sharing/advisory-grp/index.htm>

JK Kirkwood

UFAW

Compliance with regulations on use of lead shot over wetlands in the UK

It is thought that lead poisoning can severely affect the welfare of wildfowl. To protect wildfowl from disease and mortality associated with lead poisoning arising through the ingestion of lead shot, the UK is committed to phasing out the use of lead shot over wetlands. To this end, the Environmental Protection (Restriction on Use of Lead Shot) (England) Regulations came into force in 1999 requiring that lead shot must not be used for shooting over specified wetlands. In order to assess compliance with these regulations, Defra commissioned an 18-month study which: (a) identified shot types from ducks purchased from game suppliers across England, and (b) conducted questionnaire surveys of those involved in hunting wildfowl.

The conclusions were: "That non-compliance with the regulations was high across English... regions, with 70% of ducks (344/492) having been shot with lead". The results of the questionnaire survey indicated that understanding of the regulations was poor and 45% of those legally obliged to use non-lead shot indicated that they sometimes or never complied with the regulations. It was found that over a third of those who should be using non-lead shot disagreed with the reasons behind the regulations and factors in this were views that non-lead shot is expensive, not widely available and not as effective as lead. Some approaches to improving compliance are discussed in the report.

Compliance with the Environmental Protection (Restriction on Use of Lead Shot) (England) Regulations 1999 (July 2010). Report to Defra from the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust with contribution from the British Association of Shooting and Conservation. A4, 100 pages. Available at: <http://www.wwt.org.uk/files/HQ-PR/Lead/LeadShotRegulationsComplianceReport.pdf>

JK Kirkwood

UFAW

The Farm Animal Welfare Forum consults on a means of labelling food from farm animals within the European Union

The Farm Animal Welfare Forum (FAWF) is a collaboration of seven organisations concerned with improving the welfare of farmed animals. Supported by the Tubney Charitable Trust, the FAWF hopes to encourage all parties within the foodchain, including farmers, policy-makers, retailers, manufacturers and consumers, to work together in delivering higher welfare standards for animals reared for food.

Three areas have been prioritised by the FAWF for action within Europe: confidence for consumers about animal welfare and food quality; a positive future for farmers based on high welfare, high quality and sustainability; and a substantial overall improvement in animal welfare standards.

In June 2010, FAWF published a paper for consultation in which they laid out their proposals on how a mandatory labelling system for food from farmed animals within the European Union may be implemented. Labelling has increasingly been an area of focus as various surveys have indicated that consumers would like more information about on-farm animal welfare at the point of purchase to enable them to make informed decisions.

The FAWF paper concentrates on fresh and frozen meat from pigs and chickens since FAWF believe that chicken and pig farming systems are the most readily categorised and that these farm animals are most likely to be kept in barren, highly stocked indoor conditions. Additionally, pig meat is consumed in the greatest quantity in the EU.

The FAWF would like the European Union to work strategically towards:

- All fresh and frozen chicken and pig meat sold through retail outlets across the EU labelled by method of production by 2015;
- The establishment of 3–5 categories of livestock production system;
- Minimum criteria for each category of production system for each livestock species being defined by EU law;
- Labelling terms or descriptors being agreed for each production system and species based on consumer and market testing;
- The introduction of welfare outcome assessment to provide further information and evidence about the welfare credentials of each category of production system, within 5 years.

Labelling Food from Farm Animals: Method of Production Labels for the European Union (June 2010). A paper for consultation with Stakeholders produced by the Farm Animal Welfare Forum. A4, 20 pages. For further information, please visit the FAWF website, available at: www.fawf.org.uk, or contact: Farm Animal Welfare Forum, PO Box 762, Godalming, GU7 9EQ, UK

E Carter

UFAW

Defra puts forward new regulation to allow beak trimming of laying hens

Under The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007, laying hens within England may be beak trimmed if the procedure is carried out by a qualified member of staff and on birds that are less than 10-days old. The aim of beak trimming is to reduce feather pecking and cannibalism and involves cutting off up to one-third of a hen's beak using either a hot blade or infra-red technology. Beak trimming is considered by many to be an insult to a bird's welfare since it involves the loss of a sensory organ and trimming may result in acute and chronic pain.

A ban on routine beak trimming of laying hens was due to come into force from 31st December 2010. However, following a Defra consultation, carried out in January 2010, the ban on beak trimming has been removed and a new regulation, 'The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (Amendment) Regulations 2010', laid before Parliament. The new Regulation would allow beak trimming of day-old chicks intended for laying using infra-red treatment only. Infra-red beak-trimming techniques are relatively new but have become the routine means of trimming the beaks of day-old chicks at hatcheries and are considered to be less of an insult to welfare than hot-blade trimming. Excluding parent stock, in 2008, approximately 90% of the 19.6 million laying hens in England were beak trimmed using infra-red.

Although the government's long-term aim is to ban all beak trimming, a viable alternative to prevent feather pecking and cannibalism is yet to be found. The Beak Trimming Action Group (a body set up by the government in 2002 and consisting of scientists, welfare groups, and industry) has been tasked with creating an action plan to work towards a beak-trimming ban in 2016, although progress will be reviewed in 2015.

The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) (Amendment) Regulations (2010). Draft regulation laid before Parliament under section 61(2) of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, for approval by resolution of each House of Parliament. Available at: http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2010/draft/pdf/ukdsi_9780111503553_en.pdf

E Carter

UFAW