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Your ref:
Our ref:

8 January 2003

Dear Stakeholder

**ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE STRATEGY FOR GREAT BRITAIN -
CONSULTATION**

In presenting the Executive's response to the main Foot and Mouth Disease Inquiries the Minister for Environment and Rural Development, Ross Finnie MSP, outlined that in conjunction with DEFRA and the Welsh Assembly Government the Scottish Executive would be working to produce an Animal Health and Welfare Strategy for Great Britain. This will take a strategic approach to promoting the country's animal health and welfare status as well as to minimising the risk of future disease outbreaks. The need for the strategy reflects a number of animal health issues over recent years and the conclusions from the post FMD Inquiries.

Whilst the strategy has yet to be written it is expected that it will focus on strategic principles at the GB level but will reflect important distinctive Scottish features in delivery and priorities.

In developing the strategy we want to hear the views of stakeholders and would welcome your comments on what the strategy should look like. They should be sent by 3 April to Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Development, Animal Health and Welfare Division - Strategy and Planning Branch, Room 345a Pentland House, 47 Robb's Loan, Edinburgh EH14 1TY, e-mail joanna.mcdonald@scotland.gsi.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely

NEIL RITCHIE

Preparing an Animal Health and Welfare Strategy for Great Britain

**A consultation document by UK Government,
the Scottish Executive and the National
Assembly for Wales**

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This document invites your views on what a strategy for animal health and welfare in Great Britain should contain. Throughout the paper, Government refers to UK Government and to the Devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government have committed themselves to working together with a wide range of stakeholders to develop an **Animal Health and Welfare Strategy for Great Britain**, intended to reduce the economic, social and environmental impact of animal diseases, and improve the welfare of animals kept by man. This work will be closely linked to the development of the Northern Ireland “All Island” animal health programme.

2. WHY ARE WE CONCERNED?

2.1 Animal health and the way in which animals are treated is of increasing concern to the owners of animals, veterinarians, consumers, members of the public and the Government alike. In recent years we have seen only too clearly how animal diseases can be a threat to people’s health, and the serious impact that they can have on the rural economy and people’s everyday lives.

2.2 There are a number of drivers for change in the way in which we manage animal health and welfare related issues in this country. Some of these flow from the recent independent inquiry reports into the Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak last year, and from the earlier Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) inquiry. Some are already reflected in English, Welsh or Scottish strategies for sustainable farming or Departmental Aims. All these drivers press towards a more strategic approach to this area in particular, and to long term goals which Government, the industry, and the public are signed up to.

2.3 Traditionally our animal health status has been highly regarded but this has been called into question in recent years, both domestically and abroad. Industry and Government are keen to learn lessons from the experiences of BSE and the FMD outbreak; but concerns about disease and welfare go much wider – we need to reduce the vulnerability of livestock by reforms in industry practice and so to ensure the sustainability of the livestock industry. There may be best practices in other countries we can learn from. It is clear that we need to put in place measures to restore the confidence of the wider public and consumers; to actively protect them; and to restore our animal health status within the international community.

2.4 Our record on animal welfare continues to be something of which we can be proud. We must build upon this strength as well as target bad practice. However, we can not be complacent. Many other member states have given high priority to this. Government and stakeholders agree that we should combine our vision for animal welfare and animal diseases into a single strategy positively addressing all aspects of animal health.

3. THE EU AND INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

3.1 As a major international trading nation and member of the European Union, many of our rules and practices governing animal health and welfare are set or influenced at EU or international level – in the latter case mostly the Office International des Epizooties (OIE) but for welfare also the Council of Europe and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Our strategy needs to recognise this, and be directed to setting the scene for our discussions with EU and international partners as well as to domestic policies.

4. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY AN ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE STRATEGY?

4.1 Our starting point is that an animal health and welfare strategy should establish:

A vision for the future of animal health and welfare.

What do we want the animal health and welfare situation to be in Britain – in say 10 years time? What would a truly “sustainable” animal health and welfare world look like? Are our visions the same? Probably not in all respects, but are they compatible? Can we all work towards the same goals?

A discussion of what a draft vision might encompass is included in Section 10.

A framework which will:

- ensure that solutions to animal health and welfare problems are:
 - addressed in partnership between all stakeholders
 - based on a consistent set of principles
 - assessed and prioritised in an open and transparent way
 - evidence based (including sound science, economic, social and legal aspects)
 - implemented in the most appropriate and effective way (by Government, delivery partners and stakeholders working in partnership)
 - clearly defined through the setting of deliverable outcomes
- provide the basis for keeping strategic direction, priorities and policies under regular review
- have sufficient flexibility to deal with local or regional issues
- respect the principles of sustainable development
- address who, amongst livestock stakeholders, veterinary and other interests, and the various parts of Government, should be responsible for what parts of the picture
- help to establish the right balance between partners as to how costs should be met
- enable resources to be committed transparently and in line with priorities
- have sufficient flexibility to deal with potentially major changes to the world in which we operate, from global warming to major reform of the CAP regime.

A draft possible framework of what the Strategy could look like is at Annex A.

A delivery plan for bringing about change.

- This will set out in more detail what we are going to do and who will do what. It is important that responsibilities are clear and defined. The delivery plan will follow on from the development of the Strategy.

4.2 The Strategy and its delivery plan will be reviewed on a regular basis and will evolve over time. Regular reports on progress will be issued and stakeholders will be involved.

5. SCOPE

5.1 We expect that the strategy will focus primarily on the health and welfare of animals kept for food production. We believe it should also embrace in some degree farmed fish and shellfish and the interaction (in terms of disease control) between farmed animals, whether aquatic or land-based, and wildlife. It will need to set out how companion animals (pets) fit in, and to deal with human or animal disease issues which may come via wildlife. How far the strategy will need to deal directly with these issues will depend on how far they are already being addressed elsewhere. The strategy should contain a map of where these and other related issues (plant health, biodiversity, the protection of wildlife) are to be found.

6. WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM THE STRATEGY?

6.1 By improving the health and welfare of animals in Britain – a valid aim in itself - society as a whole will benefit. Depending on its scope, the Strategy could affect a wide range of people, including those who:

- farm animals
- have pets
- keep animals for sport
- keep working animals
- come into contact with wild animals
- keep animals in zoos
- use animals in performance
- live or work in rural and agricultural areas
- visit the countryside
- buy, sell and consume British food
- manufacture, import or export food
- work in other parts of the food chain
- deliver Government policy
- deliver animal health and welfare advice
- provide services to rural and agricultural sectors
- work in the veterinary field

7. WHAT HAVE WE DONE SO FAR?

7.1 A series of initial informal meetings have been held with stakeholders who represent a wide range of the interested parties in animal health and welfare. In these meetings people were asked for their ideas on what a strategy might look and feel like and to identify areas where Government or stakeholders could do things differently.

7.2 From the themes that emerged from these meetings, we have included in this paper some initial ideas on what a **10-year vision for animal health and welfare** (Section 10) might look like, together with an account of the **reasons for Government involvement**, (Section 8) and some expectations about the **roles and responsibilities of animal owners and keepers and others** (Section 9). A summary of the main themes raised in the **initial stakeholder meetings** (Section 11) is also set out, together with some **questions that we would like you to consider** (Section 12.2). We have annexed a short **framework** of what the strategy might contain (Annex A).

8. WHY DOES ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE MATTER?

8.1 The strategy will need to set out clearly the reasons for public intervention in animal health and welfare. This will help to establish the respective roles and responsibilities of key players, and enable all partners to work from a clearly defined and agreed agenda. The main reasons for Government intervention appear to be:-

8.1.1 *The impact animals can have on human health.* There are diseases which we can contract directly from animals (zoonoses), and also pathogens we can pick up from eating animal products or handling animals.

8.1.2 *Economic effects.* Animal diseases affect production which in turn affects the viability and sustainability of livestock farming. There can also be serious effects on the export trade, on rural communities, on the

environment, and an increased burden on the taxpayer. As we have recently seen, these economic effects can be extreme. Most animal diseases will be for the livestock keeper to manage but some, either fast moving highly contagious disease or those which cause major economic problems far beyond the individual holding, have led to Government intervention in the past.

8.1.3 The responsibilities which we assume when we become a keeper of animals either commercially, as companions or for sport. The economic and other rewards which come from animal ownership bring with them obligations not merely to avoid cruelty but also actively to ensure the well-being of every animal in their care.

8.1.4 International obligations placed on Government – usually themselves linked to one or other of the above effects.

9. WHO DOES WHAT?

9.1 We hope that the strategy will set out an understanding of where we want the livestock production/animal keeping relationship to go and provide a framework within which the above relationships can be understood and developed. The process will require all those involved in the keeping, handling and trading of animals to reach an understanding of where they want to be and how they want to get there. The main players in the proposed strategy are animal keepers, veterinarians, others in the livestock production chain, consumers, rural and environmental interests, and the Government:

9.1.1 Animal keepers: all farmers, traders, dealers and pet owners, should have a good understanding of the physical and welfare needs of the animals in their care. They should be able to recognise the signs of disease, although they are not to be expected to be able to diagnose. An understanding of which diseases are notifiable i.e. legally have to be reported to Government is also important. The underpinning assumption is that in order to meet their responsibilities and legal obligations every

animal keeper should employ private veterinarians as necessary to ensure an appropriate standard of animal health and welfare.

9.1.2 Veterinarians: veterinarians employed by the Government provide advice to Ministers and implement policy, undertake disease surveillance and enforcement through the State Veterinary Service and the VLA, on the farm, and the Meat Hygiene Service, at the slaughterhouse. Private veterinary practitioners help animal keepers to deal with disease and welfare problems, and may also undertake a range of duties for the Government as official veterinarians.

9.1.3 Others in the livestock chain, such as auction markets, hauliers, abattoirs, processors and retailers have a range of interests in animal health and welfare. Some temporarily keep or handle animals as part of their business, and have relevant obligations for example for welfare during markets or transport, disease reporting and disease control and prevention (biosecurity). Others have contractual relations with those further up the chain, and are in direct touch with consumer attitudes and the market.

9.1.4 Consumers: In their capacity as consumers, people have fundamental expectations about the safety of the food they eat. This is a shared responsibility of the whole food chain, in the context of regulatory standards for which the Food Standards Agency take the lead. Beyond that, consumers are also closely interested in quality, variety, availability, price and a range of other aspects of food production. These may all be affected by the way in which animal health and welfare policies are pursued; and by measures taken to control disease when it appears. Some consumers also take an active interest in the conditions under which food animals are reared, for example as regards the welfare or other standards of various production systems, and reflect this in their purchasing behaviour.

9.1.5 Rural and environmental interests: Recent experience demonstrated that animal diseases do not only affect the farming community: they can impact on the wider rural economy. For example, during the Foot and Mouth disease outbreak in 2001, the rural tourism industry was hit very badly. Animal health and welfare policies need to strike the right balance between eradicating disease as quickly as possible, and minimising the costs to the wider rural economy wherever possible.

Farming practices and disease control measures can have an impact, positive or negative on the environment. As part of the commitment to sustainable development, rural and environmental interests must be encouraged to play their part in proofing policies in this area.

9.1.6 Government: The Government works with other groups to draw up the regulatory framework within which animal keepers operate. The most important of these regulations are those which seek to safeguard public health, including trade issues and points of entry. Government, both centrally and through local authorities ensure delivery and enforcement of the regulatory framework. The Government also has a role in working with industry to set standards, and in encouraging best practice or facilitating advice and training etc. It is a major funder of livestock farming through CAP subsidies and of research into animal diseases.

The Government also negotiates international agreements which affect animals and their keepers and also has to find the right balance between the partners in animal health and welfare on how the costs should be met. The Strategy should, for example provide a framework for review of diseases and their controls to ensure that Government only intervenes in clear cases where there is a real public interest. In the case of major diseases such as BSE, the Government also needs to keep under review long-term strategies for control and eradication.

10. A DRAFT VISION

10.1 The following draft vision reflects many of the themes which have been raised during initial meetings with stakeholders. It is not our developed vision – we want to have your views, and to reach a shared picture of the desired future. Any such vision is not for delivery by Government alone.



A Draft Vision of Animal Health and Welfare in Britain

... in 10 years time we want to have achieved:

Consistently High Standards of Animal Health and Welfare

- Healthy and protected animals – on the farm, in the wild and in the home
- Animal welfare practices enhanced and promoted
- “Disease free” status against highly infectious diseases and the restoration of the UK’s international animal health position
- Adaptability and understanding of the changing environment and the threats this can impose on animal health and welfare
- Animal owners and Government to each take an appropriate level of responsibility for animal health
- The right balance between the partners in animal health and welfare as to how the costs are met
- An active role in shaping and leading EU and International agendas on animal health and welfare
- Responsible use of veterinary medicines

Improved Public Health

- Reduced carriage of food borne pathogens by food producing animals
- No major food scares from animal products or any other animal related public health surprises
- Public confidence in the way their food is produced

A better informed and more effective livestock industry which is

- Highly skilled
- Efficient, sustainable and profitable
- Applying best practice in disease prevention (biosecurity), whether through assurance and health schemes or in other ways
- Aware of its role in producing safe food
- Working closely with private veterinary practices
- Set in the context of a thriving countryside and rural economy
- Aware and appreciative of the widest impacts of animal health and welfare on society and our natural resources, biodiversity, environment etc

The capacity to deal swiftly and effectively with any disease emergency

- Improved and transparent handling of animal disease outbreaks
- A reduced level of international threat to animal health and more effective and a greater awareness of import controls

A Policy Framework which allows

- Government intervention that is clear and justified
- Regulation kept to the minimum necessary and appropriately enforced
- Clear strategies to be agreed with Stakeholders for major diseases

Professional Veterinary Services which are

- Skilled to support animal health and welfare best practice
- Used by livestock keepers to promote health as well as respond to disease or welfare problems
- Joined-up working between the State Veterinary Service, the VLA, the Meat Hygiene Service and Private Veterinary practices

Use of science to ensure

- Policy which is evidence based and scientifically informed
- Research is targeted on priority areas
- Veterinary surveillance is targeted on priority areas
- An Active horizon scanning programme

10.2 We need to know whether you share this vision, and if so whether you are prepared to help develop the mechanisms and behaviours we need to deliver it.

11. THEMES FROM STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

11.1 These are thoughts that stakeholders have raised during a number of initial stakeholder meetings this autumn which included representatives of many key parties. They do not represent the views of Government, and are in no way exhaustive or exclusive.

Relevant Issues

- Disease and Welfare trends, both domestically and world-wide
- Current and evolving farming and husbandry methods, including organic
- Potential conflict between animal health and welfare issues and other policies (such as public access to the countryside, identification and traceability requirements)
- Changes in the structure of the livestock industry (increasingly part time, seasonal, ageing, diversified)
- Best use of available research and surveillance (greater risk analysis)
- The links between animal welfare and animal health
- Potential conflicts between animal husbandry and animal welfare
- Potential conflicts between best biosecurity advice and established industry practice
- The way the media portrays animal health and public health issues
- The threat of bioterrorism and illegal imports
- The relationship between agriculture and the wider rural economy
- Regular reviews of, and progress reports on, our state of preparedness

Ideas that might help us to improve animal health and welfare

- Understanding of the cost of animal disease and welfare problems and communicating the benefits to business of improving animal husbandry.
- Improved levels of skill and knowledge (within livestock industry, the Veterinary profession and Government)
- Review of education and training for both farmers and veterinary surgeons
- Changing the role of veterinary surgeons from fire fighting to prevention (building partnerships with farmers)
- Better communication between all involved in the partnership approach – sharing of best practice and new advice
- The contribution of research, science and surveillance
- The interface between agriculture and health
- The role of farm assurance schemes
- The uptake and role of Herd and Flock health plans which are fully integrated into overall farm business planning
- A “state of alert” system for Great Britain
- Reaching farming business outside of assurance schemes
- Best use of available information (e.g. post slaughter data)

Clarity in the roles of:

- Government (Defra and devolved administrations, other Government Departments e.g. Department of Health, Department of Trade and Industry and Department for International Development)
- Food Standards Agency/Meat Hygiene Service
- Local authorities
- Industry (from farm to fork)
- Other stakeholders (e.g. veterinary profession)
- International Agencies

Delivery mechanisms

- Everyday activities and best practice
- The need for tried and tested contingency plans
- Better crisis management
- Addressing public concern over food safety

The impact that animal health and welfare problems have on the wider rural economy and on the environment

- Lessons to be learned from Foot and Mouth disease
- The need to ensure Sustainable Development
- Access to the countryside and disposal issues

12. SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

12.1 Government and stakeholders maintain a continuous debate on a wide range of animal health and welfare related problems. In seeking your views on the future scope and shape of an animal health and welfare strategy it is important to think beyond current issues and consider more long-term interests. This exercise is primarily concerned with developing a vision for animal health and welfare in Britain, and to create a process by which our objectives can be realised.

12.2 Defra, the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly Government would like to hear your thoughts on the general questions below. More general comments on the development of the Strategy are also welcome.

- *Do you agree that we need a more strategic approach to animal health and welfare in Great Britain? If so what do you think a strategy should cover? Do you have any other views on the reasons for a strategy?*

- *Is the draft vision set out above section 10 a desirable future for animal health and welfare in Britain? What is your vision?*
- *What economic, social, environmental and welfare benefits are you looking for from the Strategy? What costs need to be taken into account? And how should these be balanced?*
- *Can you identify any potential conflicts or risks that might challenge the draft vision?*
- *How can we build the new contract and make partnerships with stakeholders work?*
- *What is your most important long-term animal health and welfare priority? Do you agree with the issues and themes from stakeholder meetings? Section 11 Do you have any to add?*
- *Your views are sought on the value of animal health plans: do you think this is something that should be expected from all animal keepers?*
- *Have we set out accurately the roles of Government, the livestock industry, and other stakeholders? Is the current balance of Government intervention right? What are your views as a taxpayer?*
- *Do you have views on the scope of the strategy and how far beyond farmed livestock and companion animals it should extend?*
- *For England and Wales, a commitment was made in the FMD Inquiry response to seek views on the regular reviewing and issuing of progress reports on the state of emergency preparedness : what do you think would be the most appropriate format for these? How often do you think Government should issue them?*

13. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

13.1 This consultation exercise is a scoping study about what the Strategy could cover. As well as this written consultation Defra, the Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales are keen to get more people involved. This will mean taking the draft vision and the ideas for a Strategy around Britain. Following consultation, ideas will be reviewed and the potential costs and benefits assessed to form an interim strategy to be published in Spring 2003. This is an ambitious target but it is important to get the basis of a strategy in place as soon as possible. The Strategy will need time to evolve and the structures will need to be put into place to manage and develop this programme of work.

13.2 Following the launch of the interim strategy, draft delivery plans will be drawn up and will be issued for consultation. Your help will be looked for in developing these delivery plans which will set outcomes, objectives, milestones and how we measure success.

14. CONCLUSION

14.1 We hope that you have found this paper helpful in thinking about what a sustainable animal health and welfare strategy for Great Britain might be about. We want to hear from you about what kind of future you want to see, and how you think we can all – Government and the wide range of interested parties – contribute to achieving it.

15. HOW TO CONTRIBUTE

15.1 Deadline for Comments

In order to give interested parties sufficient time to consider these papers, there is a twelve-week period for responses. If you wish to make comments on the issues covered by the enclosed paper, please send them to the following address by **3 April 2003**.

England

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Welsh Assembly Government
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15.2 Consultation Process

At the end of this period copies of any comments received will be made publicly available. It will be assumed that your reply may be made available unless you indicate clearly that you wish all, or part, of it excluded from this arrangement.

England

The main Defra Library in Room 320, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR (Tel: 020 7904 6003) will supply copies of replies submitted to the Department on request to personal or telephone callers. An administrative charge will be made to cover copying and postage. To enable requests to be dealt with efficiently, and to avoid undue delay, could personal callers please give the library at least 24 hours notice of their requirements.

The document will also be published on the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy website at www.defra.gov.uk as will an overall summary of responses at the end of the consultation exercise.

Scotland

The Scottish Executive Library can supply copies of responses received. Write to The Scottish Executive Library, K-Spur, Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, EH11 3XD, or email Alan.Gold@scotland.gsi.gov.uk, alternatively ring 0131 244 4552. If you wish to personally view the responses held in the library, it is necessary to telephone and make an appointment at least 24 hours in advance. Small administrative charges may be made to cover photocopying and / or postage.

The consultation document will also be made available in the Scottish Parliament Information Centre. Requests can be made via the Public Information Office (PIO) on 0131 348 5000.

The consultation document will also be published on the Scottish Executive website (www.scotland.gov.uk) as will an overall summary of the responses at the end of the consultation exercise.

Wales

The Assembly Publication centre will supply copies on request, either write to the above Cardiff address, or email: assemblypublications@wales.gsi.gov.uk or ring 02920 898 688. If you have no objection to your response being made publicly available it would be helpful if you could supply an extra copy of your response.

The consultation document will also be published on the Welsh Assembly website (www.wales.gov.uk) as will an overall summary of the responses at the end of the consultation exercise.

15.3 Other information

If you are aware of any organisations or individuals that might be interested in seeing and commenting on the enclosed paper but who have not received it, please let us know and a copy will be sent to them.

ANNEX A

Animal Health and Welfare Strategy for Great Britain: a possible framework

This “framework” provides a possible outline of what the Strategy could look like. The first three chapters would set out the draft vision for the Strategy, the drivers for change and some of the challenges we will face. The last part of the framework deals with the action plan and outlines what needs to change and what relationships or mechanisms need to be in place to make the Strategy work.

This format is not finalised and is provided only as a guide to how the different aspects of the strategy might knit together. The framework does not go into detail about delivery.

Animal Health and Welfare: A Framework of a Strategy for Great Britain

- **Executive Summary**
- **Introduction including**
 - Vision
 - Principles
 - Aims
 - Scope
- **Factors driving change**
 - Current health status, global threat and ever changing risks
 - Rationale for government involvement in animal health and welfare
 - Role for agencies responsible for delivering the strategy including:
 - Stakeholders
 - Economic factors
 - Social factors
 - Environmental factors
- **Action Plan**
 - Examples of issues and initiatives to be developed under the strategy.
 - Partnership between industry and Government, farmer and SVS, and local authorities
 - Strengthening services
 - Routes of communication
 - Developing Best Practise
 - Research and development
 - Science and professional practice
 - Costs and benefits

- **Governance** (aims, membership etc)
Strategy Board -
Stakeholder forum
Scientific/expert committee
Annual animal health and welfare conference
Annual Review and Report arrangements
- **Next steps**
Development of a delivery plan
Arrangements for feedback and monitoring
Arrangements for review and updating
Arrangements for benchmarking our strategy against arrangements in other countries

