

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>

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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.