

**Title: Blue Tongue Virus Strain 8 Vaccine for Scottish livestock.**

Dear Sir

The article by Dan Buglass (The Scotsman May 02) “Scottish bluetongue row as England starts vaccinating” makes a number of statements that are not correct.

Bluetongue has not “until recently been confined to southern Europe”. Bluetongue virus takes the form of a number of serotypes which have been, and continue to be, common in many parts of the world. The EU 27 was largely free of bluetongue disease until 2006 when serotype 8 arrived. The second year of infection within the EU was much more devastating to both cattle and sheep.

Although Defra said England would be at low risk in 2007, the arrival of BTV8 in England was confirmed on September 22nd 2007. England is now due for its second year of infection.

The Scottish Government has not yet ordered BTV8 vaccine for Scotland, although England ordered 20 million doses in December 2007 with an additional 2.5 million doses for Wales. It is the first part of that order that is now being delivered and made available for use on a voluntary basis by English livestock farmers in the English Protection Zone.

Scotland’s tendering process for its order for 12 million doses is not due to be completed until late June. The exact delivery date for Scotland’s eventual firm order is not yet known. Essentially, the Scottish Government is hoping to delay vaccination until the next Vector Free Period (VFP), which is likely to be around late December 2008 when midge activity is low. They claim, with little convincing evidence, that the risk of bluetongue reaching Scotland before then is low.

The root of the problem as to why Scotland did not order BTV8 vaccine when England did lies in the rules laid down by the EC. They state that, for reasons of trade, a country that is bluetongue disease free is forbidden to vaccinate prior to the disease arriving, unless it declares itself to be a Protection Zone (as though it had already been infected) and accepts the rules that are consequent upon such a declaration. These include permitting free trade of livestock into the country from any Protection Zone throughout

the EU where disease is rife. But with a gap of some 60 days following the start of vaccination (even if we had the vaccine) before protective immunity is fully established in cattle, Scotland would be hugely vulnerable to bluetongue spreading rapidly throughout the land.

Current EC rules leave Scotland in a dilemma, for example, take the risk of not vaccinating until the next VFP, or vaccinate as soon as possible and invite the disease to flood into the country before it can be effective.

The National Beef Association Scotland has repeatedly highlighted this problem. In an effort to remedy the EC rules that are so damaging to the proper use of vaccination in the prevention of disease spread, it is raising a petition to the EC, whereby a disease free country, such as Scotland, which is at obvious risk of getting the disease, would be able to vaccinate before the disease arrives.

This is the same problem that was largely responsible for vaccination not being used in the Foot and Mouth outbreak in the UK in 2001 that resulted in an epidemic and an unacceptable programme of mass slaughter. It was also responsible for the delay in placing any order by an EU Member State for a vaccine to be developed and supplied against BTV8 until December 2007.

To be quite clear - a derogation for Scotland to vaccinate 'free of disease' does not allow animals from other restricted zones to enter Scotland, because - Scotland would not have a Protection Zone. Free or unrestricted movement of animals only applies to countries that declare a Protection Zone.

NBA Scotland is acting in the best interests of the industry and believes livestock keepers should be permitted to vaccinate their livestock to protect them from the virus before the disease reaches Scotland - not after.

Dan Buglass quotes John Cameron as saying that the NBA is seeking derogation for Scotland on vaccination that is voluntary - It is not. John Cameron is also quoted as saying that the quest for such a voluntary derogation is 'clearly driven from forces south of the border'. The petition that is being raised to the EC to change its outdated rules is the action of the Scottish Council of the NBA, which was not influenced by its southern

regions. It was originated by the Scottish Council and is being conducted by the Scottish Council, with administrative facilities provided by NBA UK.

NBA Scotland, as a stakeholder with the Scottish Government, has agreed to compulsory vaccination against BTV8, with the vaccine being administered by farmers, as recently affirmed by the Scottish Government.

Yet another quote from John Cameron made in the Dan Buglass article is incorrect. It states “There is sufficient flexibility in the timing of the Scottish proposals to allow for changing developments in the south, should they arise”. But with the Scottish tendering process for its supply of vaccine not due to be completed until the end of June, this would hardly seem to reflect reality.

The threat of bluetongue to Scotland’s livestock industry is very serious. The least than can be expected from the media is accurate reporting. It is also important that the subject is not used by certain members of the farming community to score points against others within that community who are trying their best to remedy the basic flaw in how viral diseases of livestock are controlled through inappropriate EC regulation.

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