

LAND REFORM - RESPONSE TO SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE PROPOSALS FOR LEGISLATION

Veterinary Hazards to Open Access to Enclosed Agricultural Land

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As a Veterinary Surgeon who has spent the last 26 years in Agricultural Practice, there are several aspects of the proposals on Access (section 7) which I find deeply disturbing.

The proposals as they stand pay no attention to the necessary control of infectious disease among live-stock. It is stated that "responsible behaviour by the public will be crucial in ensuring that the countryside remains a safe and viable working environment, and that the welfare of animals is safeguarded".

There is no mention of the health of animals, which in itself is a major component of welfare, and no mention of how animal health is to be safeguarded.

One of the guiding principles of good stock management is the maintenance wherever possible of a closed

flock or herd, in order to minimise the risk of disease being introduced from outside the farm.

Many common diseases are easily spread by mechanical transmission, e.g. salmonellosis and E. coli (including the lethal 0157 strain) from field to field and farm to farm on the soles of boots and on clothing. As a Veterinary Surgeon moving from farm to farm it is considered obligatory to properly disinfect ones boots and protective clothing before leaving the farm and moving onto the next one. It should also be noted that both the examples quoted above are zoonotic diseases: i.e. they infect man as well as animals.

How do the Executive propose to ensure proper disease control given that they are proposing a right of responsible access to all land in Scotland, including enclosed agricultural land?

ACCESS ON HORSEBACK

I understand that the current proposals include access on horseback. If this is indeed the case the implications for disease spread are further multiplied. No race-track or horse show will admit a horse that has not been properly vaccinated against a range of infectious diseases,

including the highly infectious respiratory viruses. Yet the proposals as they stand allow the passage of people and horses through fields which may contain vulnerable animals. e.g. young foals which may be too young to have been vaccinated and therefore protected.

How do the Executive propose to safeguard the interest of owners of valuable livestock and horses, which the current proposals put at serious risk, in terms of disease transmission?

RISK ASSESSMENT

There would also appear to be serious implications for the farmer or owner of the land in terms of risk assessment.

By their nature animals are often unpredictable, especially where they may be exposed to large groups of unfamiliar people. How is the livestock keeper expected to conduct any kind of rational risk assessment when he has no idea when, where, or in what numbers members of the public may decide to visit his holding (section 7.2 proposes to grant statutory right to enter upon land - and for people to exercise this right in a group of family or friends, **or as part of a club outing!**).

The countryside can be a dangerous place. The risks include both physical injury and contact with zoonotic diseases, which unfortunately are still all too common in livestock. The accident statistics for the agricultural industry are amongst the worst for any indus-

try. I believe that the current proposals on access will make these figures even worse and will expose the farmer or land manager or owner (where exactly will liability rest?) to potentially damaging and expensive litigation from members of the public.

The issue of liability does not appear to have been properly addressed in the current proposals.

I wish to make it clear that I am not against the principles behind the proposals. I merely wish to point out some of the many practical problems which they will cause people who live and work in the countryside.

Unfortunately I believe some of the problems (e.g. disease control) are insurmountable if the Executive insists on maintaining its current position that the proposals on access should apply to all land in Scotland, including enclosed agricultural land. A lifetime's work could easily be destroyed by the inadvertent introduction of disease to a livestock unit.

I trust the Executive will give due consideration to the serious implications of these proposals as they currently stand.

Yours sincerely

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