

Independent Body for Animal Health Responsibility and cost sharing consultation

8 June – Market Drayton

DEFRA official outlined the reasoning behind the proposed Independent Body for Animal Health.

She stated that cost sharing with industry will come – either directed by Government or from the EU – and that cost sharing has broad cross party support.

Consultation ends 30 June.

The proposed benefits of cost sharing will be to reduce the cost of disease and give value for money for investment in disease prevention.

Share costs through compulsory registration of livestock keepers (plus compulsory insurance) for unbudgeted exotic disease outbreaks.

Current budget is £44m for surveillance and preparedness of exotic disease – propose a 50:50 split with industry. £22m to come from industry.

The aim is to establish a new ‘arms length’ body for Animal Health. The scope of new body will be:

- Research and development
- Preparedness, surveillance, vaccinations and movement control
- Import control
- International trade
- Compensation arrangements

Animal welfare to remain with DEFRA.

Independent board to have understanding of industry and be based on Nolan principles. Access to scientific and expert advice. Body can change funded activities and contribution rates.

Principles of operation:

- Informed by best evidence
- Open, transparent, independent
- Decisions and actions clear
- Best practice
- Full account of UK obligations
- Accountable to Parliament

The body will be staffed by core DEFRA staff (240 staff). The running costs of the new body will not come from the levy scheme but will be funded by Treasury.

Registration of animals:

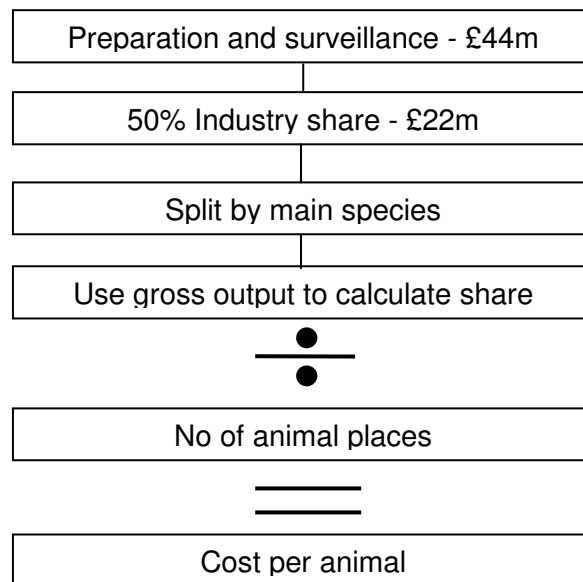
Keepers of farm livestock (including horses?) provide annual self declaration of maximum livestock numbers

Annual fee calculated on maximum stocking numbers

Seeks to strike a balance between simplicity/low cost and fairness

Payment threshold? Discounts for lower risk status?

Calculation of Levy:



Compulsory insurance – DEFRA discussing with insurers – if viable further consultation, if not viable look to extend levy to cover outbreak costs

Questions raised by the participants:

What is the definition of an exotic disease? DEFRA rep defined as not present in the country at the moment. Not endemic diseases – Government funds this already (ie another FMD outbreak or the current problems with TB will be covered by Government funds not this new levy).

Horses seem to have been added on as an afterthought? DEFRA rep stated that the horse industry had asked to be included?

Shouldn't we have better border control rather than levy?

It was stated that £22m is a relatively small sum of money for an entire livestock industry to raise and this proposed levy and insurance scheme seems a unduly complicated way to raise this sum.

The proposed levy currently applies to England only, but questions were raised about how the devolved Governments in Wales and Scotland will respond. It needs to be applied UK wide in order to be effective.

What insurance company will take this on?

What about importation of semen for AI? Will that be screened/tested?

There was a general fear that more and more disease control costs will be passed on to industry (ie TB), DEFRA stated that this was not their intention.

If the body is set up will it be listened to? Or have any influence?

Trading standards will be expected to enforce but they don't know about it and do not have the resources.

Questions were also raised about how the proposed levy per animal species has been calculated and that based on these figures much more than the required £22m will be raised. What will these extra funds be used for?

Participants felt that both livestock used for commercial purposes and 'pets' should be included. However, if pets were to be included how far were DEFRA going to take it (ie to dogs and cats?). DEFRA rep stated that they had no intention of including dogs and cats, but if someone had a pet pig, chicken, sheep these should be included.

A further question was then raised about how to ensure full compliance? How do you reach those people who only have a couple of chickens in their back garden?

Will the funds raised for each species be ring-fenced for that species or will it all go into one big pot? DEFRA rep stated that it would be ring-fenced per species.