

DEFRA CONSULTATION ON EXOTIC ANIMAL DISEASES

EVIDENCE SUBMITTED BY THE SOCIETY FOR GENERAL MICROBIOLOGY (SGM)

Introduction

The Society for General Microbiology, founded in 1945, is an independent professional scientific body dedicated to promoting the 'art and science' of microbiology. It has now established itself as one of the two major societies in the world in its field, with some 5,500 members in the UK and abroad.

General Comments

My general opinion is that this is a very sensible contingency plan for exotic animal diseases. The microbiology requirements seem to be well thought out and the procedures for detection, isolation and characterisation are convincing.

The range of diseases is always a hostage to fortune but the plan has attempted to be up to date and with bluetongue now in the country it will soon not be exotic.

The changes in the document resulting from the first consultation all appear to have been incorporated in this version and are sensible.

The contingency plan outlined in this consultation document appears to be both comprehensive and well considered.

Specific Comments

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| 1 | Avian influenza. Whilst most of the other disease information summaries have a comment on 'advice to humans', this is missing here and is clearly required. |
| 10 | Advice to humans required. |
| 11 | Bluetongue. Paragraph 1.63 should be changed as there have been at least 3 recent cases of bluetongue in cattle in the UK (September 2007). Advice to humans should be added. |
| 12 | Equine viral encephalomyelitis (EVE). Advice to humans should be added. |
| 14 | Hendravirus. Nipah virus should be mentioned, and advice to humans should be added. |

- 16 Paragraph 2.5. It should be noted that the consequences for humans of outbreaks of animal disease should be assessed early and communicated to the general public.
- 25 Paragraph 3.7 ‘...no minimum contingency stocks are held at VLA...’ This statement is surprising and should be reconsidered. In paragraph 3.28 some of such stocks are actually identified.
- 28 Paragraph 3.19 is good.
- 29 Paragraph 3.23. There are avian influenza vaccines under development. The paragraph should be updated accordingly.
- 41 Paragraph 5.2. Some of the key lessons learned from the exercise should be summarized here. The Executive Summary of the specific document is not very clear.
- 42 Paragraph 5.7. This should be expanded by a few sentences of the experience and successful management of the FMD outbreak near Pirbright in August/September 2007.
- 45 I realise the area increases with the square of the radius, but should the 10km zone be increased in light of what happened in Surrey this year?

Additional comments:

The Bluetongue Expert Group, as described in point 6.1 of the “Bluetongue Disease Contingency Plans for Great Britain”, would consist of a closed group of government affiliated organisations and lack any external expertise from recognised national and international experts in the field who are not linked to highly government funded research organisations e.g. IAH. Similarly, I would recommend that the Expert Advisory Group, as described in point 1.2.3. of the “UK Bluetongue Control Strategy” document, should predominantly consist of scientists and veterinarians who are recognised as established experts in the field but who are not current or *ex-officio* employees of IAH and other government agencies. In its present form true objectivity appears limited.

Regarding the provision outlined in point 2.7. of the “UK Bluetongue Control Strategy” document, that the CVO may permit the use of an unauthorised vaccine in an emergency, it is essential that the CVO be adequately informed of all vaccines being developed, not only those being considered for manufacture by industry. In particular, consideration should be given to other vaccines that have already proved to be protective and safe (e.g. protein based subunit vaccine or virus like particle vaccine) and whose manufacture ought to be encouraged, should a vaccination strategy be considered necessary.

Vaccination: since vaccinated animals are tagged, I think it would be wise to sample vaccinated animals (in a longitudinal study) to determine sero-conversion rates and the times taken to mount a protective response.

Sources

This evidence has been prepared on behalf of SGM by Dr Ulrich Desselberger, Professor William Donachie (Moredun Research Institute), Professor Polly Roy (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine), and Dr Martin Ryan (University of St Andrews).

About the SGM

Society membership is largely from universities, research institutions, health and veterinary services, government bodies and industry. The Society has a strong international following, with 25% of membership coming from outside the UK from some 60 countries.

The Society is a 'broad church'; its members are active in a wide range of aspects of microbiology, including medical and veterinary fields, environmental, agricultural and plant microbiology, food, water and industrial microbiology. Many members have specialized expertise in fields allied to microbiology, including biochemistry, molecular biology and genetics. The Society's membership includes distinguished, internationally-recognised experts in almost all fields of microbiology.

Among its activities the Society publishes four high quality, widely-read research journals (*Microbiology*, *Journal of Medical Microbiology*, *Journal of General Virology* and *International Journal of Systematic and Evolutionary Microbiology*). It also publishes a highly respected quarterly magazine, *Microbiology Today*, of considerable general educational value. Each year the Society holds two major scientific meetings attended by up to 1500 microbiologists and covering a wide range of aspects of microbiology and virology research.

The governing Council of the SGM has a strong commitment to improving awareness of the critically important role of microbiology in many aspects of human health, wealth and welfare. It has in this connection recently initiated a 'Microbiology Awareness Campaign' aimed at providing information to the government, decision makers, education authorities, media and the public of the major contribution of microbiology to society.

An issue of major concern to the Society is the national shortage of experienced microbiologists, particularly in the field of clinical microbiology and in industry. To attempt to improve this situation long-term, the Society runs an active educational programme focused on encouraging the teaching of microbiology in university and college courses and in the school curriculum, including primary schools. Some 400 schools are corporate members of SGM.

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