



RURAL AFFAIRS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

AGENDA

25th Meeting, 2015 (Session 4)

Wednesday 2 September 2015

The Committee will meet at 9.45 am in the Mary Fairfax Somerville Room (CR2).

1. **Decision on taking business in private:** The Committee will decide whether to take item 4 in private.
2. **Land Reform (Scotland) Bill:** The Committee will take evidence on the Bill at Stage 1 from—

Trudi Sharp, Deputy Director for Agriculture, Rural Development and Land Reform, Kate Thomson-McDermott, Head of Land Reform Policy Team, Fiona Taylor, Land Reform Bill Manager, Matt Smith, Land Reform Policy Officer, and Rachel Rayner, Solicitor, Scottish Government;

and then from—

Trudi Sharp, Deputy Director for Agriculture, Rural Development and Land Reform, Dougie McLaren, Business Rates Policy Manager, Brian Peddie, Local Government Relationship Manager, Hugh Dignon, Head of Wildlife Management, and Helen Jones, Head of Landscape and Involvement with the Natural Environment, Scottish Government;

and then from—

Trudi Sharp, Deputy Director for Agriculture, Rural Development and Land Reform, Billy McKenzie, Team Leader EU Rural Development Programme and Agricultural Holdings, Fiona Buchanan, Agricultural Holdings Policy Officer, Angela Morgan, Land Reform and Agricultural Holdings Policy Officer, and Andrew Campbell, Solicitor, Scottish Government.

3. **Review of Veterinary Disease Surveillance Centres:** The Committee will take evidence from—

Mike Wijnberg, Managing Director, SAC Consulting, and Brian Hosie, Head of SAC Consulting: Veterinary Services, SRUC.

4. **Work programme:** The Committee will consider its work programme.

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The papers for this meeting are as follows—

Agenda item 2

Land Reform (Scotland) Bill cover note

RACCE/S4/15/25/1

PRIVATE PAPER

RACCE/S4/15/25/2
(P)

PRIVATE PAPER

RACCE/S4/15/25/3
(P)

Agenda item 3

Review of Veterinary Disease Surveillance Centres cover
note

RACCE/S4/15/25/4

PRIVATE PAPER

RACCE/S4/15/25/5
(P)

Agenda item 4

PRIVATE PAPER

RACCE/S4/15/25/6
(P)

Land Reform (Scotland) Bill

Introduction

1. The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill¹ was introduced in the Scottish Parliament on 22 June 2015. The Bill was accompanied by Explanatory Notes², which include a Financial Memorandum; a Policy Memorandum³; and a Delegated Powers Memorandum⁴.
2. Subsequently, the Scottish Government published an Equality Impact Assessment⁵ and a Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment⁶ of the Bill.
3. Under Rule 9.6 of *Standing Orders*, the Parliamentary Bureau referred the Bill to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment (RACCE) Committee to consider and report on the general principles.
4. No secondary committee was appointed to scrutinise the Bill. However, the Finance Committee will consider the Financial Memorandum to the Bill, and the Delegated Powers and Law Reform (DPLR) Committee will consider the Delegated Powers Memorandum, and both committees will subsequently report their views to the RACCE Committee.

Background to the Bill

5. On 2 December 2014 the Scottish Government published its document - *A Consultation on the Future of Land Reform in Scotland*⁷ and the consultation closed on 10 February 2015.
6. The consultation was predominantly a result of the work of the Land Reform Review Group, which was established by the Scottish Government in 2012 and chaired by Dr Alison Elliot, with a remit to review the need for land reform in Scotland to report to the Scottish Government. The final report of the Group was published on 23 May 2014 and contained 62 recommendations. These recommendations were included as an annexe to the land reform consultation, and were updated to state what action the Scottish Government was taking on each of them.
7. However, the consultation also sought views on the recommendations made by the Scottish Government's Agricultural Holdings Legislation Review, a process which had been running concurrently with the review of land reform issues throughout this session of Parliament. The Agricultural Holdings

¹ [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Bill](#), as introduced (SP Bill 76, Session 4 (2015)).

² [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Bill. Explanatory Notes](#) (and other accompanying documents) (SP Bill 76-EN, Session 4 (2015)).

³ [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Bill. Policy Memorandum](#) (SP Bill 76-PM, Session 4 (2015)).

⁴ [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Bill. Delegated Powers Memorandum](#) (SP Bill 76-DPM, Session 4 (2015)).

⁵ [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Bill. Equality Impact Assessment](#).

⁶ [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Bill. Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment](#).

⁷ Scottish Government (2014). *A Consultation on the Future of Land Reform in Scotland* Available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/12/9659>.

Legislation Review, which was chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment, published its final report⁸ on 27 January 2015.

8. The Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee has taken extensive evidence throughout this session on both the land reform and agricultural holdings reviews respectively, and has reported to the Scottish Government with its views on the final reports of both reviews.

9. The consultation made 11 main proposals for issues to include in a land reform bill, which were—

- establishing a Scottish Land Reform Commission;
- limiting the legal entities that can own land in Scotland;
- improving information on land, its value and ownership;
- introducing a sustainable development test for land governance;
- establishing a more proactive role for public sector land management;
- introducing a duty of community engagement on charitable trustees when taking decisions on land management;
- removing the exemption of from business rates for shooting and deerstalking;
- providing a new legal definition of common good land and addressing other common good issues;
- implementing some of the recommendations of the Scottish Government's Agricultural Holdings Legislation Review;
- introducing further deer management measures; and
- clarifying the core paths planning process in relation to public access.

10. The Scottish Government received 1269 responses in total, of which permission was given to publish 1076⁹. On 15 May 2015 the Scottish Government published an analysis¹⁰ of the consultation responses.

Contents of the Bill

11. The Bill takes forward many (but not all) of the proposals in the consultation, together with several recommendations made by the Agricultural Holdings Legislation Review group. The issues outlined in the consultation but not being taken forward as suggested are—

- establishing a more proactive role for public sector land management;
- introducing a duty of community engagement on charitable trustees when taking decisions on land management;
- providing a new legal definition of common good land; and

⁸ Agricultural Holdings Legislation Review Group. Final Report (2015). Available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/01/5605>.

⁹ Published responses to the Scottish Government's Consultation on the Future of Land Reform in Scotland. Available at: https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/land-reform-and-tenancy-unit/land-reform-scotland/consultation/published_select_respondent.

¹⁰ Scottish Government (2015). A Consultation on the Future of Land Reform in Scotland: Analysis of consultation responses. Available at: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00477022.pdf>.

- limiting the legal entities that can own land in Scotland.

12. The Policy Memorandum which accompanies the Bill states that the policy objective of the Bill is to—

- “Ensure the development of an effective system of land governance and on-going commitment to land reform in Scotland;
- Address barriers to furthering sustainable development in relation to land and improve the transparency and accountability of land ownership; and
- Demonstrate commitment to effectively manage land and rights in land for the common good, through modernising and improving specific aspects of land ownership and rights over land.”

13. The Bill is presented in 11 parts (104 sections in total) and a schedule as follows—

- **Part 1** requires the Scottish Ministers to publish a **statement of their objectives for land reform**;
- **Part 2** establishes the **Scottish Land Commission**, and the Land Commissioners are intended to have a role in helping Ministers to shape those objectives by gathering evidence, by reviewing the effectiveness of law and policies on land and by making recommendations. One of the members of the Land Commission, the Tenant Farming Commissioner, is to have a particular role in relation to agricultural holdings, which includes collaborating with the Land Commissioners in the exercise of their functions;
- **Part 3** contains two regulation-making powers aimed at **obtaining information about proprietors of land** and about persons who, while not technically proprietors, have effective control over land;
- **Part 4** would place a duty on the Scottish Ministers to **publish guidance to landowners and others** (whilst having regard to the desire to further sustainable development) **on engaging with communities affected by decisions taken in relation to land**;
- **Part 5** proposes a **right to buy land to further sustainable development** for certain community bodies or a nominated third party purchaser (if significant harm/benefit can be identified which would be resolved by the transfer of ownership), and is modelled closely on the community right to buy in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (as well as the similar provisions in the Community Empowerment Bill);
- **Part 6** would **remove the current exemption from non-domestic rates for shootings and deer forests**;

- **Part 7** clarifies that where a **local authority wants to appropriate common good land for a different use to the use originally intended**, and it is unclear that the authority has power to do so, the authority may seek court approval;
- **Part 8** would expand the functions of existing **deer** panels to include engagement with local communities; introduce a power for SNH to require the production of a deer management plans if appropriate deer management is not taking place in an area; and increase the penalties for failure to comply with a Section 8 deer control scheme;
- **Part 9** makes minor changes to the provisions in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 on **core paths plans** around reviewing and amending such plans and on service of court applications;
- **Part 10** reforms the law on **agricultural holdings** and is divided into a number of chapters—
 - **Chapter 1** - sets up a new form of agricultural tenancy (the Modern Limited Duration Tenancy);
 - **Chapter 2** - removes the requirement for a tenant to register an interest in acquiring the holding under Part 2 of the Agricultural Holdings (Scotland) Act 2003;
 - **Chapter 3** - introduces a new power for the Land Court to order the sale of the holding to the tenant or on the open market where the landlord repeatedly breaches his obligations;
 - **Chapter 4** - changes the procedure for rent reviews and the test to be applied in determining the rent of an agricultural holding so it is based on the productive capacity of a holding;
 - **Chapter 5** - expands the class of persons to whom leases of agricultural holdings can be assigned or bequeathed or transferred to on intestacy (where no valid will is present), as well as streamlining the processes around the landlord's objection to a new successor tenant;
 - **Chapter 6** - provides for a 2 year amnesty period for tenants to seek approval of certain improvements to agricultural holdings so that compensation can be claimed in relation to them at the end of the tenancy; and,
 - **Chapter 7** - introduces a new procedure for tenants to object to any improvement proposed by the landlords if the tenant feels it is not reasonable for the productivity of the holding.
- **Part 11** contains final general and miscellaneous provisions such as—
 - general interpretations;
 - details of subordinate legislation (and whether by affirmative or negative procedure);
 - ancillary provision;
 - Crown application;

- minor and consequential modifications;
 - commencement; and
 - the short title.
- The **Schedule** contains minor and consequential amendments to other agricultural holdings legislation.

RACCE Committee scrutiny

14. The Committee agreed its approach to consideration of the Bill at Stage 1 at its meetings on 17 and 24 June 2015. A call for views on the general principles of the Bill was subsequently issued and closed on Friday 14 August 2015. The Committee publicised its call for views via its webpage¹¹ and Twitter account, and also by a video¹² which was hosted on You Tube.

15. The Committee has received 185 written responses¹³ to its call for views to date.

16. The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) has published a briefing¹⁴ on the Bill.

17. The Committee intends to take oral evidence on the Bill from a wide range of people between September and November 2015 (including at formal public meetings in Skye and Dumfries) as follows—

Wednesday 2 September: Scottish Government officials (all aspects of the Bill);

Monday 7 September (in Portree, Skye from 10am): land reform (parts 1-5, and part 7 of the Bill);

Wednesday 16 September: agricultural holdings (part 10 of the Bill)

Wednesday 30 September: sporting rates (part 6 of the Bill); deer management; (part 8 of the Bill);

Wednesday 7 October: human rights issues theme (all aspects of the Bill); possible additional final panel TBC (theme(s) also TBC); and

Monday 2 November (in Dumfries from 5pm): Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment; and the Minister for Environment, Land Reform and Climate Change (all aspects of the Bill).

¹¹ Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee. Land Reform (Scotland) Bill - [call for views](#).

¹² Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee. Land Reform (Scotland) Bill - call for views [video](#).

¹³ Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee. Land Reform (Scotland) Bill – [written submissions](#).

¹⁴ Scottish Parliament Information Centre. (2015) Land Reform (Scotland) Bill. [SPICe Briefing SB 15/49](#).

18. The Committee will also take part in a series of fact-finding and engagement visits and events as follows—

- **Monday 14 September:** Fife (Falkland and Kinghorn);
- **Sunday 20-Monday 21 September:** Islay and Jura;
- **Monday 28 September:** the Scottish Borders (Roxburghe); and
- **Tuesday 6 October:** offices of the Registers of Scotland in Edinburgh.

19. If you would like to attend the meeting in Skye then please contact the Parliament for a free ticket by visiting scottish.parliament.uk/tickets-for-committees; or telephone 0131 348 5200.

20. The Committee plans to first consider its draft Stage 1 report on the Bill at its meeting on 18 November 2015 and will report to the Parliament in early-mid December 2015 in advance of the Stage 1 debate.

Clerks/SPICe

Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee

Review of Animal Disease Surveillance Centres Introduction

1. At its meeting on 24 June 2015, the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee agreed to undertake an oral evidence taking session to examine the progress of the ongoing review of Scotland's network of animal disease surveillance centres ("ADSC") currently being conducted by the Strategic Management Board of the SRUC, Scotland's Agricultural College.
2. There are currently eight ADSCs across Scotland. These are operated on behalf of the Scottish Government by SAC Consulting Ltd, commercial arm of the SRUC. The operation of the ADSCs is funded in part through public funds provided by the Scottish Government, and in part by commercial lab fees charged to private veterinary practitioners for ADSC services.
3. Between 1 June and 10 July 2015, the SRUC held a public consultation on the future of the ADSCs, and a summary of the responses to this review was published by the SRUC on 4 August 2015. The SRUC has stated that no decision on any changes to the ADSC network will be made until the outcome of discussions with the Scottish Government on this issue.

Evidence session

4. At its meeting on 2 September 2015, the Committee will take oral evidence from a panel of two witnesses: Mike Wijnberg, Managing Director of SAC Consulting Ltd, and Brian Hosie, Head of Veterinary Services for SAC Consulting Ltd.
5. To support this evidence session, the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) has published a briefing paper on the background to the ADSC network and the review of veterinary surveillance services in Scotland. This paper is attached at Annex A for information.
6. The SRUC's consultation summary document published on 4 August is attached at Annex B for information.
7. In advance of this oral evidence session, the Committee sought written submissions from any interested parties on this issue of the review of ADSCs. Three submissions have been received from the NFU Scotland, the UK's Marine Animal Rescue Coalition (MARC), and the Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC). These submissions are attached at Annex C for information.

Clerks/SPICe Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee

SPICe

The Information Centre

SPICe Briefing

Animal Disease Surveillance in Scotland

26 August 2015

15/47

Wendy Kenyon

Scotland's eight animal disease surveillance centres aim to provide early warning or prompt detection of new or re-emerging disease threats in animals. This surveillance is considered important as it can allow timely action to mitigate the impact of animal disease on public health, animal health and welfare, livestock productivity and wider society.

The disease surveillance centres are run on behalf of the Scottish Government by SAC Consulting, part of Scotland's Rural College (SRUC).

In response to recommendations made in a review of disease surveillance in Scotland, SRUC consulted on proposals to change the current system. There is strong stakeholder opposition to some of the options proposed, particularly the closure of the centre in Inverness.

This briefing summarises the background to the disease surveillance centres, sets out the options proposed and considers reaction to them. The aim of the briefing is to inform members of the Rural Affairs Climate Change and Environment Committee ahead of their session on the issue in September 2015.



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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BACKGROUND

At a meeting of the Scottish Parliament [Rural Affairs and Environment Committee](#) on 30 September 2009 the future of the Thurso Disease Surveillance Centre was raised by Liam McArthur MSP (Orkney). He stated (Official Report, Rural Affairs and Environment Committee on 30 September 2009, col 1967) –

“...the service that it is able to provide has been reduced in an area where livestock farming remains pretty intensive and extremely important to the local economy. The strategic importance of that lab to veterinary surveillance in that part of the country is beyond question and perhaps exceeds the importance of labs elsewhere in the country.”

This comment was based on concern from farmers, crofters, veterinary surgeons and others about the lack of a full-time veterinary investigation officer based at Thurso and the future of the Thurso Disease Surveillance Centre.

On 26 January 2010 the Scottish Government [announced a review](#) (Scottish Government 2010) of the way Scotland gathers and monitors information on the spread of animal diseases, to ensure swift action in the event of an infectious outbreak, and to ensure that the Scottish Government was getting value for money. John Kinnaird, former President of NFU Scotland, was chair. In announcing the review Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment Richard Lochhead said –

"Scotland's excellent reputation as a top quality producer boosts sales and profits and is due in no small part to the health of our livestock."

The result of the review was published in the "[Kinnaird Report](#)" in November 2011 (Scottish Government 2011). It recommended a number of changes to the current system including that:

- A Strategic Management Board be established to set the strategy for the service
- Scottish Government continue financial support
- Fewer DSCs (disease surveillance centres) are operated and laboratory services are centralised
- Active and passive surveillance is managed together to obtain better value for money.

In response to the Kinnaird report SRUC (who deliver disease surveillance on behalf of the Scottish Government) presented the Scottish Government with a series of options for taking forward the recommendations. A [public consultation](#) (SRUC 2015b) on the options was carried out between 1 June and 10 July 2015, seeking the views of stakeholders.

WHAT IS DISEASE SURVEILLANCE?

The Scottish Government (2011) define veterinary (or disease) surveillance as “the package of activities which provides early warning or prompt detection of animal health and welfare problems, together with tracking and analysis of the way they spread.” In practical terms this means (Meah and Lewis, 2000):

- Detection of rapidly spreading outbreaks of diseases, infections and intoxications in animals
- Provision of an early warning system for new animal diseases, infections or intoxications
- Early identification of known diseases/infections currently not found in the country
- Estimation of the level of occurrence and identify emerging trends among diseases/infections currently present in the country both temporally and geographically
- Confirming the absence of specific diseases or infections from the country.

Disease surveillance is achieved by offering individual farmers and crofters and their vets access to a subsidised post mortem and diagnostic services. Information from such examinations is collated and analysed. The data gathered provides a picture of animal health in Scotland, and can form the basis for further action.

WHY IS DISEASE SURVEILLANCE NEEDED?

Animal diseases and associated effects may have public health implications (for example, diseases such as Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), Salmonella, and conditions such as antimicrobial resistance), economic implications such as for international trade (e.g. Foot and Mouth Disease, Aujeszky's Disease, Bovine Tuberculosis, Brucellosis, Enzootic Bovine Leukosis, Bluetongue), or implications for Scotland's reputation for producing good quality food and drink.

The benefits of disease surveillance are (Defra, 2011):

- To measure the effectiveness of the statutory disease control programmes, e.g. to reduce prevalence of BSE or Salmonella in poultry
- To protect public health. Some diseases can be transmitted from animals to people (such diseases are known as zoonoses). These diseases may have occupational health implications for farmers, abattoir workers, sewage workers and others, or may pose risks to pet owners, visitors to 'open farms' or pet shops, or cause food safety concerns
- Understanding and measuring the impact of animal disease on climate change. Infections reduce the efficiency with which animal feed is converted into meat, milk, or other animal products for human use. The component of an animal's 'carbon footprint' which is due to disease is therefore an environmental cost.
- Detection of new and re-emerging disease, infection or toxicity. New disease may come about because of climate change (Bluetongue), disturbance of remote ecological systems allowing disease agents to move into domestic species (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome - SARS) or agents became resistant to drugs (Salmonella) (Scottish Government, 2011)
- Providing assurance of freedom from specified diseases. Ongoing disease surveillance in livestock provides the evidence to confirm national or regional freedom from specified animal diseases.
- Detection of exotic disease which is not usually present. For some designated animal diseases there is a defined "contain and eradicate" policy, should they occur, such as Avian Influenza in poultry in the UK.

CURRENT DISEASE SURVEILLANCE IN SCOTLAND

In Scotland, the Scottish Government Veterinary Disease Surveillance programme is delivered by SAC Consulting: Veterinary Services (part of SRUC) from eight disease surveillance centres located in areas with most livestock: Aberdeen, Ayr, Dumfries, Edinburgh, Inverness, Perth, St Boswells and Thurso.

In total 144 people are employed, comprising 25 vets, 4 consultants, 57 scientists, 28 support staff and 30 admin staff (SRUC, 2015a). The DSCs:

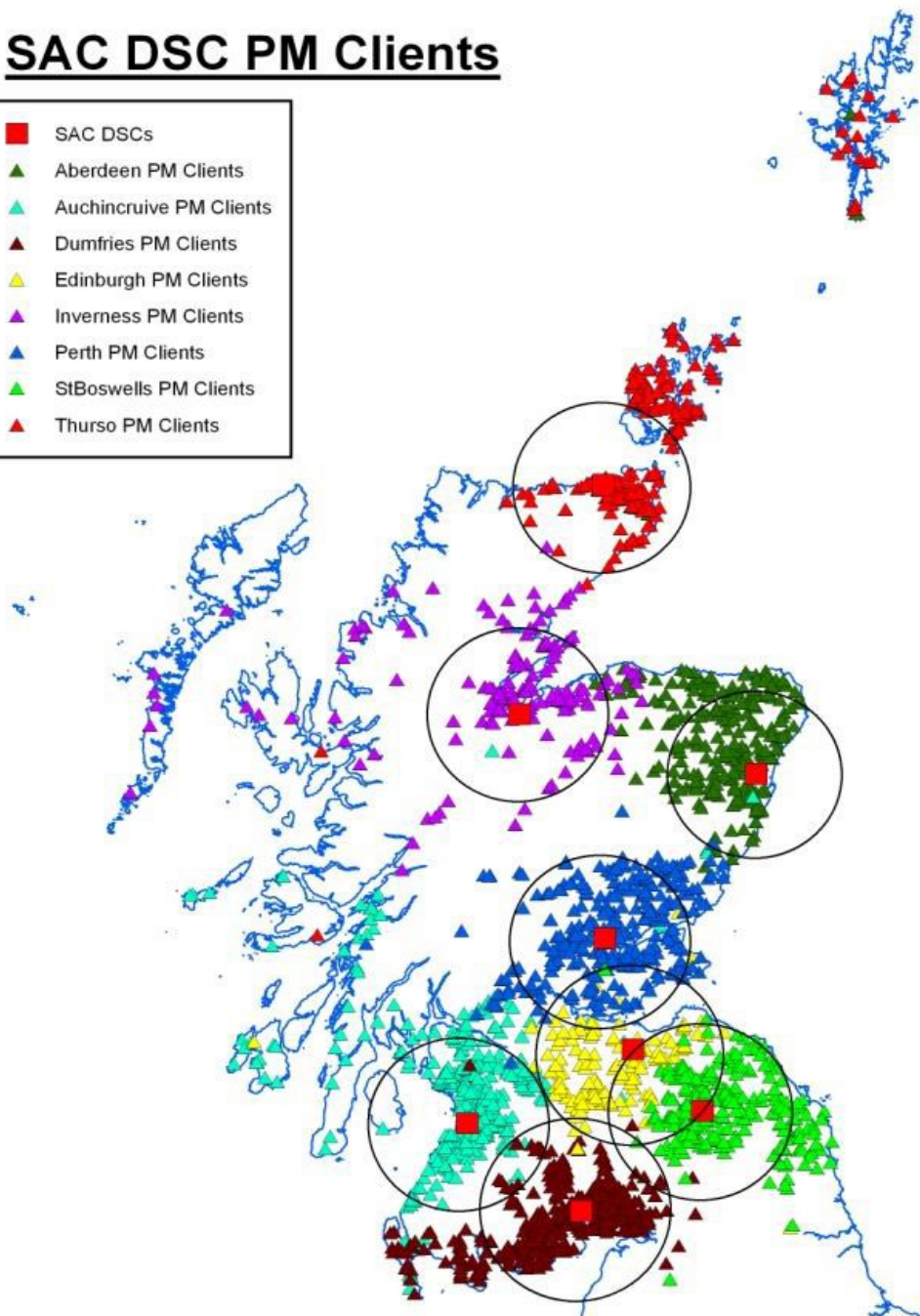
- Investigate via post mortems why animals have died and provide a report to the referring veterinary surgeon to enable future management and treatment decisions to be made
- Look for new or unusual diseases, infections and parasites
- Carry out diagnostic tests to investigate disease outbreaks
- Carry out testing in support of flock and herd health schemes and analytical testing of soils, plants and animal feedstuffs.

The SRUC (2015c) report [The Scottish Government's Veterinary & Advisory Services Programme 2014/15](#) (p4) says that during 2014/15 the DSCs “undertook diagnostic testing on some 5,000 carcasses of farmed animals and over 93,000 submissions of blood, faeces, swabs and other materials from veterinary surgeons in practice.” That information is used to monitor the current health and disease status of farmed livestock across Scotland. Interrogation of this information highlights changes in the occurrence of animal diseases, including liver fluke, clostridial enterotoxaemia in cattle and ovine caseous lymphadenitis in sheep and goats.

The map below shows the location of the current DSC and the post mortem clients that use each. The circle around each centre shows a 50 mile radius.

SAC DSC PM Clients

- SAC DSCs
- ▲ Aberdeen PM Clients
- ▲ Auchincruive PM Clients
- ▲ Dumfries PM Clients
- ▲ Edinburgh PM Clients
- ▲ Inverness PM Clients
- ▲ Perth PM Clients
- ▲ StBoswells PM Clients
- ▲ Thurso PM Clients



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Source: SRUC 2015a

SCOTTISH MARINE ANIMAL STRANDING SCHEME

In addition to animal surveillance, the Inverness DSC houses 3 staff who operate the [Scottish marine animal stranding scheme](#). This scheme collates, analyses and reports data for all cetacean, marine turtle and basking shark strandings around the coast of Scotland.

The SRUC have stated that they will discuss the most appropriate location for the team's base with the members of the marine strandings team.

FUNDING FOR ANIMAL DISEASE SURVEILLANCE IN SCOTLAND

Funding for animal disease surveillance comes from a mix of Scottish Government funding and income from fees paid by customers. Scottish Government funding comes from the veterinary surveillance and the animal health budget line (level 3) under environment and rural services budget (level 2) in the rural affairs, food and environment portfolio.

SRUC has provided SPICe with income and cost information on the disease surveillance centres in Scotland (copies available from the Scottish Government Animal Health and Welfare Division on request). The table shows income and costs associated with the Scottish Government funded Veterinary Advisory Service 2010-2015. In each of the years, SRUC have received additional income from Scottish Government to cover the deficit incurred in operating the service.

Table 1. Annual budgets from Scottish Government Funded Veterinary Advisory Service

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
	£ 000	£ 000	£ 000	£ 000	£ 000
Budgeted income from SG	4109	4073	3773	3773	3773
Additional income from SG	163	271	197	315	180
*Other income	1083	1187	1294	1255	1397
Total income	5355	5531	5264	5343	5350
Total costs	5678	6046	5248	5329	5357

*includes income from customer fees, income brought and carried forward, farmer and crofter discounts

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CURRENT SYSTEM

In response to the Kinnaird Review and particularly the recommendation that the number of DSCs be reduced, SRUC (2015a) [consulted](#) on the following possible changes to the current system.

Inverness Disease Surveillance Centre

The consultation proposed that the Inverness DSC could close in 2015. Alternative arrangements would be put in place to serve the Inverness region. These could include:

- that clients in the region be served from other DSCs
- that training and support would be provided for vets to carry out their own post mortems
- that a carcass transport service would be offered to take carcasses to an alternative DSC
- that a new post-mortem only facility could be built

SRUC (2015a) explained the proposed closure of the Inverness centre in meetings with stakeholders. They stated that:

1. the Inverness DSC has the lowest throughput of livestock post mortems of all DSCs
2. 25% of Scottish holdings are in the Inverness DSC area, but only 7.4% of the post mortems are carried out there
3. there has been a significant fall in the region's cattle and sheep populations.

Ayr Disease Surveillance Centre

A second possible change consulted on was that the Ayr DSC could, by 2017:

- remain at Auchincruive,
- move to a new site in Ayrshire or
- relocate to the University of Glasgow School of Veterinary Medicine.

Aberdeen Disease Surveillance Centre

A third change was that the Aberdeen DSC could relocate to Thainstone or another site in Aberdeenshire in 2017.

Edinburgh Disease Surveillance Centre

The consultation proposed that the Edinburgh DSC relocate to Easter Bush in 2017 alongside a new central laboratory facility shared with the University of Edinburgh's Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies. This new facility would will act as a central facility for the whole of Scotland and accommodate the full range of laboratory services (Biochemistry, Chemistry, Haematology, Microbiology, Molecular biology, Parasitology, Pathology, Serology). This new facility would also house the Edinburgh post-mortem facility.

Perth, Dumfries, St Boswells and Thurso Disease Surveillance Centres

The consultation proposed that the Perth, Dumfries, St Boswells and Thurso DSCs remain in place.

RESPONSES TO THE SRUC CONSULTATION

In August, the responses to SRUC consultation were placed online and a summary report published ([SRUC, 2015d](#)). The report states that most of responses related specifically to Inverness, and almost all of these supported the continued operation of the Inverness DSC. In addition there were emails received in support of retaining the status quo and one vet practice submitted pre-printed letters signed by 205 individuals requesting the retention of the

Auchincruive DSC. Another Ayrshire practice presented a petition signed by 24 farmer clients. David Stewart MSP organised an on-line petition seeking to retain the Inverness DSC that attracted 1,100 signatories, while the Scottish Farmer hosted an on-line opinion poll on the future of the DSCs.

The SRUC report states that there was “strong opposition to the closure of the Inverness DSC”, and a widespread view that loss of the service would have a damaging impact on the viability of livestock farming in the region.

One of the proposed alternatives set out in the consultation was that private veterinary surgeons (PVS) might be able to carry out some of the activity currently carried out by the Inverness DSCs, such as post mortems. The report points out that PVS “were united in their opposition to ... providing post mortem services to their clients....based on concerns regarding accurate diagnosis, lack of competence and experience, cost to the client, inadequate facilities, health and safety issues and professional indemnity.”

Another of the proposed changes in the consultation was that a carcass collection service might be set up for the Inverness area. However, respondents were opposed to this because of the distances involved and the potential high costs.

On the proposed changes to the Ayrshire DSC, “the overwhelming consensus was for the retention of the existing DSC at Auchincruive in order to provide a flexible, accessible post mortem service to the local livestock farmers.”

STAKEHOLDERS VIEWS ON THE PROPOSED CHANGES

There has been considerable comment in the press and social media about the proposed changes. The majority of concerns relate to the proposed closure of the Inverness DSC. The following issues can be found in the public comment made in the Scottish Farmer (27 June 2015, 4 July 2015, 11 July 2015), [press release](#) from the NFUS (02 July 2015), and the Press and Journal (26 June 2015).

- The practicalities of transporting a carcase to alternative DSC if Inverness is closed are difficult
- Inverness staff have developed local knowledge of farms, estates and coastline that would be a loss to the Highlands
- Highlands is famed for the quality and high health of our livestock, loss of the DSC puts that at risk
- Closure of the Inverness DSC could lead to authorities missing the early signs of a disease outbreak since animal carcasses will not be tested
- The chance of spreading disease throughout the Highlands would increase as farmers would be forced to transport carcasses long distances to access the nearest DSC
- The Outbreak Committee of NHS Highland is reliant on receiving good information from disease surveillance centres to be able to control potential outbreaks of e-coli, salmonella and other health threats. The closure of Inverness could compromise the information available.

NEXT STEPS

The SRUC consultation closed on 10 July 2015. In a meeting of the Strategic Management Board held on 23 July the results of the consultation were discussed. There is no fixed timetable for the next steps, but the steps include providing the Cabinet Secretary with an update on the consultation responses and an evaluation of the options, together with the views of the Strategic Management Board. The Cabinet Secretary will then make the decision about the future of disease surveillance centres in Scotland.

SOURCES

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Summary Report on the SRUC Consultation on Veterinary Disease Surveillance in Scotland

04 August 2015

Introduction

On Monday 1 June 2015 Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) opened a six week consultation, seeking the views of stakeholders on the provision of veterinary surveillance in Scotland. The consultation period ended on Friday 10 July following a series of meetings with staff, local veterinary practice clients, farmers, crofters, MSPs and other interested parties. There were also opportunities to access the background information available on the SRUC website or elsewhere and submit questions or comments. This report contains a review of the various responses, concerns and suggestions made during that period.

Background

Surveillance for incursions of livestock disease is delivered by SRUC's SAC Consulting Veterinary Services (SACCVS) on behalf of the Scottish Government. The service is underpinned by the post mortem examination of diseased farm animals and it is currently delivered from eight SACCVS disease surveillance centres located in Aberdeen, Ayr, Dumfries, Edinburgh, Inverness, Perth, St Boswells and Thurso. The DSCs were located in areas of greatest livestock density to maximise access to the PM services. Veterinary disease surveillance is part-funded by the Scottish Government through the Veterinary and Advisory Services (VAS) programme and part funded by laboratory fees paid by private veterinary practitioners who in turn benefit from the disease diagnostic service.

In 2009, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, Richard Lochhead, appointed former NFUS President John Kinnaird to Chair a review of Scotland's veterinary disease surveillance system. The review panel published its report in November 2011, (<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2011/11/09091744/0>)

A key recommendation of that report related to the establishment of a Strategic Management Board (SMB) tasked with setting and implementing the strategy for veterinary surveillance in Scotland. It is that SMB which will receive the feedback on the consultation and recommendations on restructuring at a meeting on 23 July.

Following that meeting we understand that the Scottish Government's Chief Veterinary Officer will provide an update to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs,

Food and Environment on behalf of the SMB giving details of the SRUC's consultation and proposed way forward.

The Kinnaird Report also concluded that the existing system for delivering veterinary surveillance can not continue in its present form without significant additional resources, and these are very unlikely to be forthcoming in the present financial climate. It recommended action be taken to rationalise the service so that an efficient

and appropriate veterinary surveillance programme for Scotland could be maintained.

It was on that basis SRUC opened the recent consultation on the options presented to the SMB. The options for changes to the infrastructure of the disease surveillance system were as follows:

- Inverness – consult on options to improve the delivery of services to vets and farmers in the north of Scotland which may involve alternatives to an Invernessbased DSC. The options include training and supporting veterinary practitioners to carry out post mortem examinations on farm or at some other convenient location, carcase transportation to the facilities in Aberdeenshire, Perth and Thurso and building a new PM only facility.
- Ayr – provision in the West of Scotland will be developed in conjunction with the University of Glasgow Veterinary School. Options to be considered are to remain at Auchincruive, move to a new site in Ayrshire, or to relocate to the University of Glasgow School of Veterinary Medicine. These changes to be completed by 2017.
- Aberdeen – will relocate to Thainstone or another site in Aberdeenshire in 2017.
- Edinburgh – will relocate to nearby Easter Bush in 2017.
- Perth – to remain.
- St Boswells – to remain.
- Thurso – to remain.

The key elements driving the proposed changes to the disease surveillance system so that it is fit for the future included:

- The need for a more efficient service delivery, within a budget that is reducing in real terms but that meets local demand for services and offers the opportunity to cover the catchment area for the DSCs by other means or from other sites.
- The release of funds to allow active or targeted surveillance to provide an evidence base for decisions to be taken by the livestock industry.
- The retention of skills and the maintenance of a critical mass of specialist staff within the service to ensure that there are true centres of excellence.
- The age and condition of the DSC buildings and the associated costs of refurbishment.

Consultation Process

SRUC publicised the consultation widely throughout the six week consultation by issuing press statements at the start, middle and towards the end of consultation, writing to stakeholders including individual veterinary practices, farming and veterinary organisations, politicians, local authority and other organisations including charities and holding four meetings with farmers and vets at Dingwall and Ayr. The

meetings were attended by a total of 61 veterinary practitioners and farmers plus members of SACCVS staff from the local DSC. Two independent members of the Strategic Management Board attended the meetings; Colin Manson the Dingwall meetings and Freda Scott-Park, the Ayr meetings. Professor Ewan Cameron and Professor Sandy Love, University of Glasgow also attended the Ayr meetings.

Many written responses were received. Those responses where the responder gave their permission are available to the SMB and are publically available on the SRUC website. Most of responses (including 8 that concerned marine strandings only) related specifically to Inverness. In addition there were emails received in support of retaining the status quo and one practice submitted pre-printed letters signed by 205 individuals requesting the retention of the Auchincruive DSC while another Ayrshire practice presented a petition signed by 24 farmer clients. David Stewart MSP organised an on-line petition that attracted 1,100 signatories while the Scottish Farmer hosted an on-line opinion poll on the future of the DSCs.

Responses

There were several common themes in the responses relating to both locations. The principal amongst these was the value practitioners and farmers placed on easy access to diagnostic post mortem facilities. In Ayrshire this related to farm livestock whereas in Inverness mention was also made of the service provided to gamekeepers, wildlife organisations, other public bodies including the NHS, SNH, RSPB and the Police. The wildlife park in Aviemore and pet owners were also mentioned by some respondents.

While the PM service was the most valued activity, access to independent local advice was appreciated by the veterinary practitioners and the independence of SAC Consulting: Veterinary Services from local veterinary practices were mentioned by farmers. Many respondents expressed a strong view that the existing means of provision must be retained at all costs and showed little appreciation for the fact SRUC provided surveillance activities as a public good funded from the public purse and required to work within the agreed budgets. Some respondents made much of the perceived “profit” that SRUC would obtain from the sale of the properties were the DSCs to close.

Interestingly respondents from Ayrshire disagreed with the references in the consultation to the numbers of holdings, preferring to consider livestock density while those from the Highlands were critical of reference to the lack of submissions to Inverness. One of the more considered responses came from a veterinary surgeon working in research who stated that “the local DSCs provide a central point for the collection of information from veterinary practices and for the dissemination of relevant information to practices”. Outsourcing diagnostic services to private practices was not a solution. She advised strengthening existing links with private practices for effective collection and dissemination of animal health information and formalising a role for DSC vets in animal health emergencies (such as Foot and Mouth Disease).

The BVA and Scottish Branch response stressed that it is essential that any decisions on closures or changes to the current provision must:

- be based on robust surveillance and diagnostic outcomes, not on pure financial savings
- protect against loss of expertise by retraining and redeploying existing staff
- ensure a good balance of species expertise at the appropriate locations, taking into account local need
- avoid at all costs undermining Scotland's capacity to identify and respond to emerging and exotic disease threats
- be thoroughly tested and risk managed before any irreversible dismantling of the existing system takes place
- consider the wider surveillance picture, recognising GB as a single epidemiological unit

While they accepted that the Highlands is the least likely area of the UK to be exposed to the threat of exotic disease incursion, the BVA and Scottish Branch also proposed a third option for the Highlands. This is for a post mortem and pathology facility supported by a practitioner CPD centre at the HIE Inverness Campus where access to the expertise of SRUC staff would be valuable in up-skilling PVS.

In the West of Scotland they support the relocation to the Glasgow Garscube Campus backed up by a carcase transportation service as a better more sustainable long term investment. The BVA and Scottish Branch welcomed the principal of bringing both the Scottish Vet schools into the surveillance network as a means of strengthening the core expertise in pathology and epidemiology and improving undergraduate exposure to veterinary investigation work.

Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) recommended a radically different approach to addressing the particular challenges to a surveillance network in Scotland where there is already poor geographical coverage from the existing model. They recommended a systems-based approach based on the principal of casting the surveillance net wide and then, on detection of an anomaly, to focus down and investigate more comprehensively. This approach depends on the private veterinary surgeons (PVS) being willing and able to provide an initial scanning network. A smaller network of DSCs would support this first tier of investigation and diagnosis. Three DSCs are envisaged; two alongside the veterinary schools at Glasgow and Edinburgh and a third in the North of Scotland close to livestock dense areas. APHA also have proposals for improved intelligence analysis and sharing that would enable PVS to contribute data to mutual benefit and skills development in partnership with SACCVS and the Universities in Scotland.

NFU Scotland (NFUS) felt that there was insufficient information included with the consultation and sought "detailed proposals that consider a range of options --- supported by proper cost/benefit analysis". They also suggested that it might be time for the Scottish Government to introduce a proper tender process. NHS National Services Scotland – Health Protection Scotland sought reassurance that the possible changes to diagnostic and surveillance services would not disrupt the flow of surveillance data on zoonotic infections, the availability of epidemic intelligence and expert advice on zoonotic disease outbreaks.

A veterinary researcher based in Inverness, commenting in a private capacity, recommended a different approach, retaining the existing network of DSCs but on a much reduced basis being manned by two veterinary investigation officers (VIO) supported by the minimum of scientific and administrative staff.

The Moredun Research Institute did not have specific comments on the options for the DSCs at Aberdeen, Ayr and Inverness. In their response they comment on the site of the centralised diagnostic laboratory and expressed general concerns about the ability of PVS to remove brain and spinal cord from carcasses without damaging them in a manner that might compromise their specialist examination. The unions, Prospect (although prominent in press coverage) and Unison, did not submit responses to the consultation.

Inverness

There was strong opposition to the closure of the Inverness DSC. There was a widespread belief that loss of the service would have a damaging impact on the viability of livestock farming in the region. Respondents accepted that the resource was currently under-used but believed that retention of the facility was important “insurance” for the livestock health in the region. Many believed that the low throughput was due to the high health status of stock in the Highlands although none presented evidence that losses from disease were less severe than elsewhere. Others stated that the low throughput was due to the “severe geographical constraints placed by remote agricultural holdings and the economically marginal nature of the businesses”. A few individuals pointed to the benefits they had obtained by utilising Inverness DSC and so preventing otherwise devastating losses of livestock on their holdings.

There was recognition that the existing site at Drummondhill had problems with access and several pointed out that moving the PM facility to a new location outside Inverness such as Dingwall where there is already a livestock market and abattoir might encourage greater use of the service. One private vet recommended promotion of the PM service to vets and farmers and crofters. Another respondent commented that some PVS did not always inform their farmer clients of the results of laboratory tests and examinations and as a consequence the farmer was less likely to use the service in the future.

The private veterinary surgeons (PVS) were united in their opposition to their providing PM services to their clients. In a letter signed by 20 private vets working in 7 practices in the Highlands it was stated that “as a group we have decided that we are not prepared to carry out on-farm post mortem examinations for the purpose of disease surveillance. This decision is based on concerns regarding accurate diagnosis, lack of competence and experience, cost to the client, inadequate facilities, health and safety issues and professional indemnity.” Another vet commented on lack of capacity among farm animal vets working in the Highlands to undertake more work such as post mortem examinations. He stated that veterinary practices in the Highlands were unable to attract suitably qualified vets to work in the area. This respondent pointed to “palpable market failure” and intense competition between veterinary practices. One PVS in the west Highlands said he was willing to carry out PMs if suitable facilities and training were provided.

There was no enthusiasm for a carcase collection service as the respondents considered the distances travelled and the complexity of setting up such an arrangement in this area would be prohibitively expensive and time delays would result in unsuitable material being presented for examination. They were also concerned that the costs of such an operation would be prohibitively high.

Respondents valued the contact between VIOs working in the Inverness DSC and access to their local intelligence and some considered that more could be done to develop this dialogue to mutual benefit. Two alternative visions for a revised service were presented by a few respondents and one of these was raised at the farmer meeting. The first was to establish a PM-only site in the region (possibly near Dingwall) that would be staffed by SACCVS VIOs and a PM room attendant. Other diagnostic samples would be sent directly to the appropriate DSC. The second proposal was for a mobile PM service with experienced VIOs that would be able to respond to requests for PMs on-farm rather than requiring the carcases to be transported to a remote location. However, the vet who proposed this also felt there was benefit in having a local base or bases in veterinary practices in the region.

Retention of the PM service

and the expertise of the SACCVS VIOs were seen as the benefit of both of these approaches. The Scottish Crofting Federation stated that crofters who use the Thurso facility have commended the efficiency and ease of operation with liaison between crofters, local vets and SRUC vets. NFU Scotland and the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association were among the respondents with the mistaken belief that Thurso did not deal with the carcases of cattle and horses. This same misunderstanding may have coloured other responses. A veterinary practice on Orkney asked that consideration was given to increasing the veterinary staffing at Thurso and for this to include vets relocating from Inverness.

Ayr

The overwhelming consensus was for the retention of the existing DSC at Auchincruive in order to provide a flexible, accessible PM service to the local livestock farmers. Farmers liked the flexibility of the existing site such they are able to access it with a tractor and trailer whereas a drive to Glascube through Glasgow would be unattractive to many. Their particular problem was uncertainty as how long their journey might take given the congestion on some of the access roads. However, one veterinary practitioner from a practice north of Glasgow was more positive about the move to Glascube and suggested that there was an opportunity for the provision of weekend services from that site. Many respondents pointed out the heavy workload at the existing site at Auchincruive and questioned whether much or any of that work would relocate to Glasgow University. The NFUS Ayrshire Region stated in their response "...made resoundingly clear by farmers who currently use the DSC centre at Auchincruive that they WOULD NOT, under no circumstances, be willing to take samples or animals for post mortem to the Glascube Campus". One veterinary practice in their response supported a move to a new building elsewhere in Ayrshire as offering efficiency savings in the longer term. They advocated a location near Kilmarnock and Mauchline where there is the greatest density of livestock. It was the PM services that were most valued by both farmers and vets. Some vets wished to use the central lab directly and have local

interpretations of the results rather than the existing service with clinical samples (e.g. blood samples) routed through the Auchincruive site.

As in Inverness, the private veterinary practitioners were not willing to carry out post mortems themselves on-farm or at knackeries. However one vet did point out that “vets have always carried out PMs on-farm or at knackeries” but said that advice on the appropriate samples to collect was appreciated. An unwillingness for the veterinary practices in Ayrshire to cooperate in the development of surveillance alongside other veterinary services from the Auchincruive site was also very apparent at the meeting and in the responses received. There was support for closer cooperation with the veterinary school but most respondents saw benefit in students going to Auchincruive to learn about disease investigation and pathology rather than their remaining in Glasgow.

Aberdeen

The NFUS also commented on the proposed relocation of the Aberdeen DSC, within Aberdeenshire. They sought reassurances that were it to be located near a large livestock market the potential impacts on trade in the event of a major disease outbreak would be taken into consideration.

Next Steps

The SRUC consultation closed on 10 July 2015. In a meeting of the Strategic Management Board held on 23 July the results of the consultation were discussed. There is no timetable for the next steps, but they include a recommendation on the proposed changes to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment by the Strategic Management Board. Final decisions are dependent on the outcome of these discussions and will be made public in due course.

Written submission from NFUS

Veterinary Disease Surveillance in Scotland

Executive Summary

1. NFU Scotland (NFUS) welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee on the SRUC's proposals for its Veterinary Disease Surveillance Centres (DSCs) in Scotland. This response has been compiled from the submission NFUS made to SRUC's consultation on this topic, which closed on 10 July 2015.
2. It is pertinent for NFUS to firstly recognise that budgets are shrinking, and therefore the costs associated with the delivery of surveillance cannot be immune from budgetary cuts. However, NFUS considers that the DSCs provide a vital service across Scotland and the current proposals come with no details of any cost-benefit analysis or reference to alternative options that may have been considered. Without figures or comparisons, it is unclear whether the current proposals are capable of delivering the required efficiencies. NFUS would go as far to suggest that the proposals, as they currently stand, could do some serious damage to the surveillance capabilities of Scotland.
3. The proposals put forward include plans to close the centre at Inverness and the centre at Ayr, whilst possibly creating a new facility in collaboration with the Glasgow vet school in Glasgow. The closure of Inverness and the closure/relocation of the Ayr centre will leave significant gaps in passive surveillance. The Kinnaird Review of Veterinary Surveillance did include a recommendation for a reduction in the number of DSCs, but it also included a series of caveats to that recommendation that appear to have been overlooked in this proposal, including:
 - a) Ensure that priority is given to areas of high density in each livestock sector;
 - b) Conduct a cost-benefit analysis to ensure that the benefits created by closing a DSC will be justified;
 - c) Consider alternative methods of gathering surveillance material, such as collaboration with one or more local veterinary practices or other provider, or establishing a collection service;
 - d) Ensure that all parts of the country remain adequately provided for by regional Veterinary Investigation Officers.
4. Kinnaird also recommended that alternative methods of gathering surveillance data should be considered. Whilst SRUC's proposals do refer to options of collection services and the use of private vets, there has been no work carried out examining the feasibility of such services. Experience of collection services established in England would tend to show that such systems are simply not viable or cost effective and from our own investigation there appears to be little appetite from private vets to provide a substantial service. NFUS would look for a

firm commitment to having identified long term deliverable alternatives prior to any decisions being made on the future of any centre.

5. With manpower and time becoming a significant limiting factor for farms it would be fair to say that other than under very serious circumstances it is unlikely that any keepers would be willing to drive much further than an hour at most to deliver a carcass to a centre. With that in mind a proper collection and delivery service may be the best answer for surveillance but it is unlikely to be a cost effective alternative and the farmer cannot be expected to carry the full cost.
6. From the SRUC consultation, NFUS understands that private veterinary surgeons are currently unwilling to support the modified network by carrying out post-mortems either on farm or at alternative premises. The Management Board should also be mindful of the future cost and ongoing viability of any collection service, especially in outlying areas, as costs can rapidly increase for these necessary services with limited competition to help keep a lid on costs. They should also consider the loss of personal contact with the farmer. Many farmers value the contact they have with the staff at the DSC and that relationship between farmer and DSC should not be underestimated in terms of value to surveillance and industry.
7. Furthermore, following discussions with local veterinary surgeons this is unlikely to be a feasible alternative. Costs involved in training of staff, waste disposal, unsuitable facilities and time away from practice would be prohibitive. It may be possible for small carcasses like lambs but is very unlikely for cattle, requiring a special service for those carcasses anyway. In terms of support very low cost training, given that time away from practice for training is already a significant cost, would be required and some form of easy access for waste disposal would be essential.
8. NFUS would propose that with budgets under pressure and SRUC unable to maintain its current level of service within the current budgets it might be time to return to basics and for Scottish Government to introduce a proper tender process. Such an approach could open the way for consideration of alternative options that may be able to deliver the service more effectively, rather than simply adapting an old service that may actually need to be more radically reformed if it is to deliver effectively and within budget.

Ayr

9. The Auchincruive surveillance centre in Ayr is located in one of the most densely populated areas of livestock in Scotland and is the most utilised centre for Post Mortem submissions. The plan to work in collaboration with the Glasgow vet school to provide an alternative facility is welcome in terms of improved collaboration but if the new facility were to be relocated into Glasgow, at the vet school, it would immediately receive a drop in the number of submissions, impacting on effective surveillance and value of the collaboration. Although the distance from Ayr to Glasgow on paper may not appear insurmountable, the

prospect of driving through Glasgow traffic with a carcass for submission will be unappealing to many.

10. Therefore, retaining the surveillance centre in Ayr would be the preferred option of our members. The current centre is conveniently located, well known and familiar. It is also located in a relatively well screened location which helps keep the unloading of carcasses away from public view. The Auchincruive site was gifted to the farmers of Ayrshire and they feel very strongly that the site should remain. The costings given for the maintenance of the DSC alone over the next 10 years would appear somewhat high and should be investigated further to see if savings could be made.
11. It is also prudent to note that the centre at Ayr is also used by many farmers within Dumfries and any movement away from Ayr would prohibit that from continuing. If the centre cannot remain at its current site the preference would be for it to remain around Ayr in an easily accessible location, with similar discrete unloading facilities to those currently available.

Inverness

12. The closure of the Inverness centre would leave about half of Scotland without any vet facility. Although there is a facility at Thurso it is extremely limited in use, unable to examine cattle or horses, and its future is questionable since the vet it relies upon is close to retirement. It seems an extremely risky policy to leave such a large area of Scotland without facilities and surveillance cover and it is unrealistic to expect that those livestock keepers north, west or surrounding Inverness who currently utilise the facility would make the journey to Aberdeen or Perth due to the distances involved.
13. The provision of the post-mortems is of significant value to the region. Post-mortem provisions, with the necessary laboratory support, help farmers be more informed about what they are dealing with and be more targeted in their treatment. It is a general benefit to both health and welfare of the farm's livestock and the industry as a whole through surveillance and early warning of what new or re-emerging diseases may be affecting stock.
14. The Inverness centre has also become very experienced in examining carcasses that have been suspected of being killed by sea eagles and in particular identifying whether they were taken alive or dead. This is a very valuable level of expertise within the area and one which must be protected.
15. Some of the current problems associated with the DSC at Inverness relate to its current location. Farmers are unwilling to drive into built up and residential areas, especially with deadstock on-board. An alternative location that is close to Inverness, accessible and not within a built up/residential area would be expected to result in increased submissions to the facility. Given the geography of the region there are already considerable distances involved for many farmers wishing to use the facility and again some sort of on farm collection service may appear logical but the same concerns would exist over the long term viability and

cost of such a service as discussed for Ayr. If Inverness were not relocated there would be very limited samples being submitted from the region, leaving half the geographic area of Scotland without any effective passive disease surveillance. This would most certainly obstruct the early detection of a specific new or re-emerging disease threat.

16. Indeed, the same problems would exist for using private veterinary surgeons in Inverness as discussed for Ayr. The cost of training, waste disposal, time away from practice and unsuitable facilities would all prevail – and again, NFUS' discussions with vets in the area would suggest that this would not be a welcome or viable option.

Alternative options

17. Without detailed knowledge of the budgets across all the DSCs it is not really possible to comment on alternative solutions. Increasing the commercial services provided, to help spread fixed costs, or undertaking a more fundamental look at service provision, identifying if a more radical solution is available beyond 'tweaking' the current structure would be possible options.
18. Although the current proposals focus mainly on the impacts of the proposals for Inverness and Ayr, NFUS would also like to comment on the proposed relocation of the Aberdeen DSC, within Aberdeenshire. It is recognised that the centre needs to move from its current location but there have been concerns raised over the currently proposed new site. Industry has some concerns over the location of DSC in close proximity to a large livestock market and the potential impacts this may have on trade during a disease outbreak should the DSC be being utilised for handling affected material. NFUS would like reassurance that any inadvertent consequences have been thoroughly considered alongside accessibility questions before such a site is chosen.

Written Submission from Marine Animal Rescue Coalition (MARC)

MARC evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee regarding the future of the Scottish Marine Animal Strandings Scheme

August 2015

The UK's Marine Animal Rescue Coalition (MARC) is a national forum for those involved in the rescue and welfare of marine animals. MARC welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee regarding the Scottish Rural College (SRUC) review of veterinary services and the future of the Scottish Marine Animal Strandings Scheme.

This response is supported by the following MARC affiliates:

- British Divers Marine Life Rescue
- Cornwall Seal Group Research Trust

- European Cetacean Bycatch Campaign
- Humane Society International – UK
- International Otter Survival Fund
- Marine Connection
- Marine Conservation Society
- Orkney Seal Rescue
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Skye Environmental Centre
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation

MARC is concerned at the proposed closure of the Inverness disease surveillance centre and the likely impact this would have in particular on the strandings assessment work carried out there.

We are very concerned that the current consultation is likely to lead to the removal of a necropsy and laboratory facility in Inverness and no clear solution for the subsequent delivery of the SMASS work appears to have been presented. It is particularly concerning that the requirements for effective delivery of the SMASS projects have, so far, seemingly been largely ignored during this process. Inverness is without doubt the most central location from which to base the staff and facilities for the marine strandings work, and we are concerned that attempts to deliver the same level of service from other SRUC centres, namely Thurso, Perth or Aberdeen, will result in a significant degradation of service. These existing centres are in geographically difficult locations from which to provide a rapid response to all regions of the Scottish coastline. Should the current Inverness site close, a post mortem facility in Inverness appears to be an absolute minimum requirement to 1) provide effective terrestrial livestock disease surveillance to the Highland region, 2) provide the capacity to investigate animal welfare cases (for example including shot seals) and 3) maintain delivery of the stranding scheme work. We sincerely hope that this provision will be considered by SRUC.

We have worked with the SMASS for over 20 years and have refined and improved our rescue techniques for stranded cetaceans as a direct result of their findings on post mortem examinations. We believe at this time that we are seeing an increasing number of cetacean strandings and we are committed to helping SMASS to carry out detailed post mortems of all animals that we cannot return to the sea.

As illustration of the need for strandings-related work, over just the last three weeks parties to the MARC network have worked with the SMASS team after 21 pilot whales stranded on Skye, a minke whale stranded on Harris and an entangled Humpback whale was found near Wick. However, it does not appear that strandings work features in the SRUC's business plan or outlook.

The significance of the loss of a swift response facility for stranded whales and dolphins may not have featured in reviews which were mainly taken from a terrestrial perspective, but we wish to emphasise that this work is of considerable significance. The UK has in many ways led the world in investigations into the health of stranded animals and also investigations into why they strand. Scotland has played a prominent role in this and in health studies in marine mammals more generally

through work largely conducted from Inverness or in consort with the team there. Not only has this helped us to design effective protocols for rescue but it has conservation implications too. This is also an important contribution to the UK's requirement under European law (e.g. the Habitats and Species Directive) and ASCOBANS to monitor cetaceans which are highly protected and the centre now plays a key role in monitoring seals killed under the Marine Scotland Act (2010). It is not clear to us how these legal requirements will be covered effectively elsewhere.

Bearing these matters in mind, we strongly recommend that the post mortem facility remains in Inverness and, should the facility close, we sincerely hope adequate alternative facilities will be provided in the vicinity of the current site.

Written Submission from Whale and Dolphin Conservation

SRUC Review of Veterinary Services and the future of Scottish Marine Animal Strandings Scheme (SMASS)

WDC, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, is the leading global charity dedicated to the conservation and protection of whales and dolphins. We defend these remarkable creatures against the many threats they face through campaigns, lobbying, advising governments, conservation projects, field research and rescue. Our vision is a world where every whale and dolphin is safe and free.

I write to express our concern at the proposed closure of the Inverness disease surveillance centre and the likely impact this would have on the strandings postmortem work carried out there. WDC both provide support for and rely upon the vital role that SMASS plays in conservation and welfare of marine wildlife.

We are very concerned that the current consultation is likely to lead to the removal of a necropsy and laboratory facility in Inverness. Inverness is the most central location from which to base the staff and facilities for the marine strandings work all across Scotland.

Should the current Inverness site close, a post mortem facility in Inverness appears to be an absolute minimum requirement to 1) provide effective terrestrial livestock surveillance to the Highland region, 2) provide the capacity to investigate animal welfare cases (including under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, for retrieved seals that have been shot) and 3) maintain delivery of the stranding scheme work. We sincerely hope that this provision will be considered by SRUC.

We have worked with the SMASS for over 20 years, including by providing support for and assisting with post mortems and promoting the training of volunteers in sample collection through our extensive community network. Scotland has played a prominent role in strandings investigation and in health studies in marine mammals. The long term dataset collected by the work conducted under the SMASS team is world-leading and the conservation and welfare of marine wildlife around Scotland has been improved as a direct result of their findings on post mortem examinations.

Critically, strandings data are essential to the achievement of UK's European and national reporting requirements on marine mammals, under the EU Habitats Directive, ASCOBANS (Agreement on the Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas) and the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010.

We urge you not to move the post mortem facility from Inverness and, should the facility close, we sincerely hope you will provide adequate alternative facilities in the vicinity of the current site.