



The Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare

An all party group for members of both houses at Westminster formed to promote and further the cause of animal welfare by all means available to the Parliaments at Westminster and in Europe

MINUTES FOR 1st July 2014:

ANIMAL HEALTH & WELFARE BOARD AND CANINE & FELINE SECTOR GROUP

Political Members: Angela Smith MP, Neil Parish MP, Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP, Duke of Montrose, Rob Ffello MP

Associate Members: Rachel Cunningham (Blue Cross), Marc Abraham (Pup Aid), Claire Robinson (RSPCA), Lord McNair (ECMA), Becky Thwaites (Blue Cross), Sally Phillips (RSPCA trustees), Sheila Crispin (Dog Advisory Council), Mike Radford (Dog Advisory Council), Marilyn Lewis (NARPSUK), Heather Peck (Dog Advisory Council), Fiona Wright, Neil Smith (RCVS President), Paula Boyden (Dog's Trust), Sally Everitt (BSAVA), Katie McConnell (BSAVA President), Jan Rogers (Equine Sector Council), Keith Meldrum (World Horse Welfare), Laura Mc Anea (Animal Welfare Party), Katie Rook (Vet), Dan O'Neil (Vet Compass), Rowena Parker (Royal Veterinary College), Carol Fowler (Dog Breeding Reform Group), Charlotte Burn (Royal Veterinary College), Dee McIntosh (Battersea Dogs & Cats Home), Claire Horton (Battersea Dogs & Cats Home), Mike Webb (Battersea Cats and Dogs Home), Serena Cowdry (Journalist), Peter Collins (Animal Welfare Party), Tiffany Hemming (BVA AWF), Chris Laurence (RSPCA/Dog Advisory Council), Sean Wensley (PDSA), Jacqui Cuff (Cat's Protection), Lady Tabor (Dog Theft Action), Arnot Wilson (Dog Union), Debbie Matthews (Vets Get Scanning), Brett Cochrane (Dr Hadwen Trust), Alpesh Patel (Dr Hadwen Trust), Josh Kaile (World Animal Protection), Ian Butterworth (Equine Register), Stewart Everett (Equine Register)

Chaired by Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP

Presentation by Michael Seals MBE, Chairman of the Animal Health & Welfare Board for England (AHWBE)

The AHWBE is the principal source of Departmental advice to Defra Ministers on all strategic health and welfare matters relating to all kept animals in England. It is a functioning part of the civil service but, uniquely, contains external appointee members as well as civil servants. The AHWBE serves Ministers according to their priorities.

Key dates in the History of the Board:

- 2008-10: The drivers for change: balance of responsibility and taxpayer funding
- 2010-11: Rosemary Radcliffe's review completed
- 2011: Beginnings of the Board: a different way of working: independent chair; executive and non-executive members
- Nov 2011: First Meeting; Open Policy-making; Unique model in Whitehall

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The Board is unique and so it is not always obvious how it fits into existing structures. As part of Defra, it serves Ministers and works according to their priorities. The Board is formed of 4 senior Defra officials, 6 'external' (non- civil servant) appointees and an independent chairman. The external members serve in an individual capacity and are appointed on merit. They are there because of their broad knowledge of the industry.

The Board's main work consists of:

- Developing strategic policy and budget priorities within the vision and parameters laid out by Defra Ministers.
- Leading and building partnership working between government and industry, working towards shared responsibility.
- Building capability, capacity and engagement in the sectors of industry allowing them to engage in policy development and delivery of service.

What the Board does not do:

- Policy on health and welfare of circus and zoo animals (except in relation to disease prevention)
- Policy on animal testing, which is for the Home Office
- Wildlife control implementation
- UK-wide or international policy: this is an England Board
- Lobbying on behalf of sectors or industry: the Board is here to consider all sides of an issue

The Board works across animal health and welfare disease policy in Defra. It meets external colleagues (e.g. industry groups) as frequently as possible and builds relations with policy officials. It makes itself available for informal discussion as well as formal consideration of policy papers.

There are 8 Full Board meetings a year (i.e. a meeting approximately every six weeks). Alongside this, there are 'Task and Finish' Groups and Sub groups looking at specific issues. Informal one-to-one discussions also take place.

Key work over the past year has included TB Strategy and Engagement, Exotic Disease Contingency Plan, VDDP, Surveillance 2014, Empowering Industry, Hot Branding of Semi-feral Ponies, Canine and Feline sector group, Exotic Disease review of compensation, EU Animal Health Regulation.

Questions

Carol Fowler (Dog Breeding Reform Group) I read the minutes of the Board since January 2013 and the thing I noticed was little reference to animal welfare. It is more about disease control, public health, human food chain and so on. A concern I have is that welfare is not very prominent. There is little reference to companion animals too. Is this something the Board will look at?

Michael Seals – The title of the Board is the Animal Health & Welfare Board for England so welfare is an important part of our remit. Substantive welfare issues that don't appear in our minutes may not have been raised with us, but we have worked hard on welfare codes, recommending industry-led voluntary welfare codes that can be more easily kept up to date. In general, companion animal issues have not been raised so much as farm animal issues but there has been some activity with rabies and TB in cats. If Ministers requested that we look at companion animal matters we would of course do so.

Lord McNair (ECMA) – How should we as an organisation be engaging with the AHWBE?

Michael Seals – Directly through Prof Tim Morris as he is the Board member whose portfolio contains that area. The Feline & Canine Sector Group is not part of our organisation as it is the industry group but of course it feeds into us so it is worth working through that too.

Keith Meldrum (WHW) There seems to be gap in the surveillance structure in the interim period whilst the new structure comes into practice and I wonder if it is fit for purpose as we cannot afford a new emerging disease.

Michael Seals – That is an interesting question that is not quite within the remit of the Board as it lies between policy advice (where we operate) and delivery. Our policy advice was to accept Surveillance 2014. It is now more the work of AHVLA. However, I will make enquiries.

Dan O'Neil (Vet Compass/RVC) 5 or 6 years have passed since the APGAW and Bateson reports which identified genetic health and conformation issues in dogs. Has there been any action from the Board relating to those issues?

Michael Seals – We have not been asked the question so no.

David Cavil (Animal Care College) I am concerned that little focus is on companion animals, for instance has anyone brought to your attention the importation of puppies coming in from the continent? If it has not why not? Whose responsibility should it be?

Michael Seals - Yes we have been advised and our response was to look at the enforcement around the importation rules. Again you then come away from policy to enforcement.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP - How does the Board work with Defra in delivering its messages?

Michael Seals – Advice comes directly from the Board to Ministers, and I and my fellow Board members also act as a channel to help information flow between Defra and outside colleagues

working in the sector. The Board structure is unique in Whitehall and is something of an experiment.

Duke of Montrose - Do you envisage any new regulations on the import of exotic diseases?

Michael Seals – Good surveillance is key to identifying exotic diseases. A good surveillance system is the key to this, such as Surveillance 2014; this is a new way of working and one that the Board considered last year.

Angela Smith MP I am interested in how you present recommendations to the Minister. For example, in Local Government you attach the implications of that recommendation particularly the financial ones. Do you do this? Does the Board see it as responsible for advising of the consequences and financial implications relating to a proposal?

Michael Seals – Any Board recommendation to Ministers is a comprehensive submission with both the headline recommendation and a background paper containing full information about the proposal including costs and benefits. We seek to deliver the aim of the policy and the Minister can then fully consider the cost and benefits themselves. Recommendations are published on the website. AHVLA is the delivery arm of Defra and is represented on the Board.

Professor Sheila Crispin (Dog Advisory Council) – How can we engage with you better? I have written several times and had no response.

Michael Seals – I will ensure I answer if you email me directly and I will provide my email address this evening for you.

Chris Laurence (Dog Advisory Council/RSPCA) – How does the Board work with other administrations for example the Welsh Assembly which has just laid regulations down on dog breeding.

Michael Seals - I hold periodic meetings with groups in Wales and Scotland. Similar groups have been set up there so we feed in in a myriad of different ways. We shall watch the outcome of action in Wales with interest and we may well make recommendations to Ministers depending on how that goes.

Sally Phillips – (RSPCA Trustee) – Regarding bovine TB most of the scientists and studies said culling badgers was not the answer and the trial cull failed yet we hear it is going to start again and I wonder what your views are on this?

Michael Seal – I refer you to the Secretary of State's comments and also the strategy for achieving TB free status for England which talks about the need to attack the disease where you find it. The Board has spent a lot of time on this topic with its sub group on TB and we believe we have a map that takes us forward with the industry and Government working in partnership to deliver solutions.

Professor Steve Dean – The Canine & Feline Sector Group

I was asked to come and speak as a complementary act to the Board as the sector group was formed to fill the gap for companion animals. Michael's board acts as a link between external knowledge and the policy debates in Defra. That language comes very much from the agricultural side but in the cat and dog side industry it is not such a defined industry. Those of us with the funds and remit to make things happen decided to get together and form the Group with the primary purpose to be functioning sector council that advises the Board in a coherent and efficient way. It has barely been going a year and so much of its work has been picking up some of the issues which have been of interest to the Board such as exotic disease. We strongly raised the illegal importation of dogs into the country because of this and gained the Board's interest against stiff opposition from the Deputy CVO. We were focussing on risk assessment but what was needed was local enforcement and changes to passports have arisen from that.

Pets have never been high on the Government's agenda as the view is that they are for owners to look after but the Group realises that its real role would be to draw attention to issues where we felt like we needed policy development. Compulsory micro-chipping is one example.

The Group is not a delivery body itself but it is made up of organisations who are able to act as delivery bodies. We aim to deliver a consensus views from the "industry" or point up the differing views. The Minister can be reasonably certain that he is dealing with a balanced view from the industry representing the sector when we send recommendations to him.

We are UK wide so we do talk to Northern Ireland and Scotland. The Group is there to find solutions to pet animal problems for cats and dogs and we turn to the Board and Defra when we need help. We plan to use combined resources to communicate with the wider sector and we are there for the Board and Defra to sound out issues so, for example, if they decided to follow the Welsh regulations for breeding then they may come to us for views.

Questions

Jacqui Cuff (Cats Protection) – What is the early thinking on possibly looking at the extent of commercial cat breeding as it has not been well understood or looked at?

Steve Dean – It is on our radar. At the moment we are developing a strategic plan and there are so many issues relating to cats and dogs so we need an order to work on them. Home boarding is another issue we are looking at for both cats and dogs.

Carol Fowler (Dog Breeding Reform Group) – Will genetic health and welfare be included in that strategic plan?

Steve Dean – It is currently in our draft plan that both inherited disease and conformation problems are to be included. However, where groups are already working on an issue the Group would not

seek to reinvent the wheel and duplicate work. We might direct or ask questions but we would expect the experts to deal with it. Sheila Crispin and Chris Laurence came along to our last meeting and they are very involved in that area.

Lord McNair (ECMA) – How should the electronic collar manufacturer association be engaging with the group?

Steve Dean – As you know, a lot of the sector group are likely to not be favour of collars but it does not stop you writing to me and we can discuss it. We do invite people to come and speak to us.

Duncan McNair (ECMA) - The ECMA is in discussion with Defra about best practice in instruction and manufacturing so it seems to be that there is a role for the trade association in the Group even just to brief them.

Steve Dean- So far there has been nothing from Defra or ministers in terms of asking CFSG for views on the collars.

Charlotte Burn (Royal Vet College) – Will the Group be addressing the important conformational issues relating to short muzzles on certain dog breeds in the future?

Steve Dean - We do not have that specific issue on our agenda at the moment as separate to inherited disease and conformational issues. It is a dog breeding matter and as such we would expect those engaged in that issue to continue dealing with it as I mentioned a moment ago

David Cavill (Animal Care College) – Will you work with the Pet Advisory Council?

Steve Dean – Our understanding is that the Pet Advisory Council representatives relating to cats and dogs are also members of CFSG and are therefore represented.

Heather Peck (Dog Advisory Council) – I am left with a slight concern about the Group not wanting to duplicate the work being done elsewhere. Whilst I understand the reasons for that it seems that if the group is representing the industry and if the Animal Health And Welfare Board does not have much time what is the route for work being done by RCV and others getting to Ministers?

Mike Radford – Steve mentioned Government has not much given priority to companion animal welfare. I think it is stronger than that. Companion animal welfare has long been the poor relation for public policy. There has not been the same commercial imperatives to focus on them over farm animals. There is not the back up of a body of EU law to focus attention and the feeling amongst a succession of Ministers is that companion animals are a private matter unlike commercial animals. When the Animal Welfare Bill was in Parliament there was concern on its impact. A huge range of animals are kept as companion animals and they are kept in all sorts of circumstances and the relationships people have with them is very varied and complex. We have only seen ad hoc action when particular problems arise. What are your views on this?

Steve Dean – It is obvious why Government would take more of an interest in farm animals and I have some sympathy with the notion that companion animals should be a private matter. I do think the sector itself can work to resolve some of its own problems.

Michael Seals – When the AHWBE was set up there was debate over the extent of the remit of the Board as to whether it should just be farm animals but Ministers strongly requested that it be all kept animals.

Stewart Everett - Equine Register

We have been working with guidance from Tim Morris and other involved bodies to find out what the industry wants to enable them to trace animals effectively. We have talked with everyone involved in the equine sector and it seems they have own silos of information and belief structures but they all want the same thing. They can only go so far and whilst they are brilliant at doing what they do they are often isolated in their areas and so we have asked to become more involved and spoken to vets who have legal implications if they cannot identify animals. Part of the reason why local authorities cannot do this is they do not have the infrastructure to trace and prosecute. Our system links certain parts of data in live time which can solve these problems.

Paula Boydon (Dog's Trust) Do you mean an infrastructure which will interrogate the various databases to get the right information?

Stewart Everett- Yes but it will only interrogate the right and needed information. We are getting buy in at the moment from all the databases. So for example Dog's Trust has lots of data but it about enabling you to tie it up in a safe way which does not threaten anything. There are over 70 databases, we are dealing with a small proportion of them at the moment to iron out the bugs,

Paula Boydon– We used to have the micro-chipping group for dogs and we attempted to create this hub to interrogate but there was no agreement.

Stewart Everett - There has to be agreement for it to work but it can be an organic thing. We can start on a small item of information to gain the confidence. The equine sector was very complicated but we are getting there.

Neil Parish MP –We do need the Government to move forward on a central database.

Stewart Everett - The legislation is being voted on 3rd July calling for National Equine Database.

Fiona Wright – Everybody signing up are the good guys how do you tackle the bad ones like those shipping horses out for meat? How will this improve welfare?

Stewart Everett– 80-90% actually want to do the right things by their animals. We can give the people who care the infrastructure to locate and identify animals by stopping abattoirs, auctioneers

and dealers from passing animals through. Defra needs to meet certain legal requirements and it needs to be able to identify horses in real time at ports. They have not had the opportunity with the previous technology as it has not been fit for purpose. We can provide that infrastructure for people to do their jobs and provide the real time information delivery.

Neil Parish MP – I have a meeting coming up with Rupert de Mauley so I will raise this with him.