

British Veterinary Association Day Speech

Dr. Anna Judson, BVA President

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AS DELIVERED

When we gathered this time last year, on a very soggy Friday at Trades Hall in Glasgow, the profession was still digesting the news that the Competition and Markets Authority was to undertake a review of the veterinary services market for household pets. The announcement came hot on the heels of the then prime minister's commitment to ban American XL Bully dogs by the end of December and the arrival of a ruminant notifiable disease, Bluetongue Virus 3 into the country. So, as I began my year as BVA President, I knew that I, my fellow officers and the team at Mansfield Street were set for an incredibly busy 12 months.

I was struck by the immediate and sharp impact of the CMA's announcement on vet teams in practice, with members reporting abuse from some clients after some highly critical, unfair and frankly, in some cases, irresponsible media reporting.

BVA's response was equally as swift and I want to thank BVA's Senior Vice President Malcolm Morley in particular, for his tireless work this year speaking up for members and the wider profession during scores of radio and television interviews on this issue. He's faced tough questioning and whilst acknowledging the opportunities the CMA's investigation provides, he has been resolute in his defence of hard-

working vets whose priority is always the welfare of the animals in their care.

Thank you, Malcolm.

Our work, in partnership with BSAVA, SPVS, BVNA and VMG, continues to ensure the CMA's investigation is well informed and that any recommendations are scrutinised for unintended consequences for both the profession and animal welfare. Malcolm will shortly give us a full update on the investigation and BVA's work representing the profession.

As a member of the Dog Control Coalition, BVA has long campaigned for the overhaul of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, which has consistently and tragically failed to tackle the root causes of dog bite incidents and fatalities. It was therefore disappointing when the previous government announced American XL Bullies were to be added to the list of banned breeds in England and Wales, rather than ceasing the opportunity to implement a more strategic approach that would make a real difference.

With the American XL Bully not even a registered breed, this was a challenging and upsetting time for dog owners and vets trying to navigate the ban. Recognising the impact on vet team capacity, BVA lobbied Defra and the Scottish and Northern Ireland governments to implement a manageable timeline.

We also secured an extension to the neutering deadline for dogs under the age of one year, to the welfare recommended 18 months. Our live Frequently Asked Questions resource kept members updated with the

latest developments as the ban rolled out. A special thanks to our incoming President, Elizabeth Mullineaux for representing the vet voice in these critical negotiations and leading on our work to support members.

Campaigning and lobbying governments, politicians and decision-makers on the issues that matter most to our members has resulted in important legislative wins this year that will secure the welfare of animals across the UK.

Whilst it was extremely disappointing to see the Kept Animals Bill scrapped so close to the finish line, we continued to press for action, and we're pleased that key elements are now either in law or close to being secured.

In March, new licensing rules came into effect that effectively bans the keeping of primates as pets. In May, the Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Act received Royal Assent which includes banning live exports. The introduction of the puppy smuggling bill ahead of the general election was a positive step, it has since been dropped and so BVA will keep the pressure on to see progress on this vital issue.

Securing ongoing access to veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland remains a top priority as the end of grace period extension looms. Whilst excellent progress has been made this year to raise awareness of the issue thanks to Malcolm alongside Northern Ireland Branch colleagues

Esther Skelly-Smith and Mark Little, and Sharon now, there is still work to do.

Supporting you, our members, is in BVA's DNA and I'm proud of the initiatives and practical support we've delivered this year linked to my presidential theme 'a profession for everyone'.

After 30 plus years working in this profession, I continue to be inspired by the dedication, passion, and warmth of my fellow veterinary colleagues; however, we know this hasn't always translated into positive workplace experiences for everyone. If we are to continue to build a sustainable veterinary workforce we need workplaces where everyone feels welcome, safe and valued.

In response, BVA launched our Return to Work toolkit which is helping both employees and managers welcome people back into the workplace after time away. You can find it in our new employment hub, which brings together useful employment related resources and advice including how to have tricky conversations around pay.

At BVA Live in June, we celebrated the first workplaces to secure accreditation through *Great Workplaces by BVA*. The scheme is helping to support a thriving veterinary workforce by recognising and rewarding positive workplace culture. Congratulations to Westport

Veterinary Clinic in Linlithgow and South Moors in Devon, both practices secured Silver accreditation and have since been joined by a further five accredited workplaces. BVA's Membership and Commercial Director Oliver Humi will give us a full update on the scheme's progress shortly.

I can't move on without saying a little more about BVA Live. Held once again at the NEC Birmingham and in its third year, it was our biggest and best event yet with a record number of exhibitors and delegates. I was delighted to be able to provide fully funded educational bursaries to BVA members this year, which meant that more people than ever could attend and access the CPD on offer. The programme for next year's event is already taking shape and I look forward to seeing many of you there.

There's so much to be proud of this year, but if I mentioned everything we would be here until midnight. But, I would like to express my pride in BVA retaining its Investors in the Environment's (iE) 'green'-level accreditation for the second year running. And every year the bar gets higher.

Later this autumn, we'll be publishing a brand-new report outlining how practices can play a part in the UK reaching net zero, so keep your eyes peeled for that. The profession has an important role to play in environmental sustainability and I'm so pleased that BVA continues to play a leading role on this major issue.

We were also delighted to welcome His Majesty King Charles as BVA's new patron, carrying on decades of royal patronage for BVA and recognises the important role vets play in society.

Before I finish, a few thank yous. Firstly, I want to acknowledge the work of volunteer Council and committee members, and our divisions too. Your knowledge, insight and perspective are incredibly valuable.

A thank you, of course, to my fellow officers, who have guided and supported me through the last two years, both professionally and personally. As I handover the reigns to Liz and welcome Rob Williams to the team, I know BVA is in excellent hands.

I want to thank BVA's staff. The team in Mansfield Street are the backbone of this organisation, they take our ideas, your ideas, insights and issues and translate them into incredible support for the profession. Thank you.

And so, it's the end of a successful, albeit challenging year. I've always personally valued BVA and the support it's provided me with as a vet over the years, but it's in the difficult moments, when we face pressure as individuals and as a profession when the value of being a BVA member comes to the foreground. BVA brings us together and provides us with a powerful collective voice to respond to events and to make change happen.

It's been an absolute privilege to represent you as President, thank you all for your support.

Thank you.

ENDS