

# BVA response to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee's survey on how they can better engage with stakeholders in the new Parliament

The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom. With over 19,000 members, our mission is to represent, support and champion the whole UK veterinary profession. We are a professional body and our members are individual veterinary surgeons. We take a keen interest in all issues affecting the profession, including animal health and welfare, public health, regulatory issues and employment matters.

We welcome the opportunity to engage with the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee on how MPs in the Committee can better engage with BVA and other stakeholders in the new Parliament.

## 1. What major unresolved policy challenges are you or your stakeholders facing?

- 1. Outdated Veterinary Surgeons Act in need of reform:** The current Veterinary Surgeons Act is dated 1966, so it was designed for a different era. It fails to embrace the potential of the wider veterinary team. Veterinary surgeons do not work in isolation but in conjunction with registered veterinary nurses, vet technicians, musculoskeletal professionals and equine dental technicians, however, only veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses are regulated. The current legislation does not regulate allied professionals, aside from veterinary nurses and it also fails to offer any legal protection for the title of veterinary nurse. Highly skilled and qualified, registered veterinary nurses work closely with veterinary surgeons, yet no formal training or qualifications are actually required for someone to call themselves a 'veterinary nurse'. In addition, the Act only regulates individuals and not veterinary practices, meaning that individual vets and veterinary nurses are held accountable for business decisions which can directly impact on animal health and welfare. This is simply not appropriate. New primary legislation that modernises the regulatory framework, making it fit for purpose and protects the title 'veterinary nurse' is needed. This will benefit animal health and welfare, delivery of veterinary care and retention of veterinary professionals. The new VSA should also ensure that RCVS standards are mandatory as this will help to ensure public confidence. Lastly, It would also be important for the potential new VSA Act to have the provisions to adapt to a changing future.
- 2. Access to veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland beyond 2025:** Northern Ireland is expected to lose access to a significant percentage of veterinary medicines at the end of 2025 due to the changes required by EU regulations. These include the only licensed salmonella vaccine for cattle, the loss of which could represent a serious public health emergency. BVA has identified several solutions to this issue including the negotiation of a veterinary agreement with the EU – see following bullet point-; the negotiation of a Mutual Recognition Agreement with the EU; or alternative mitigations such as re-routing veterinary medicines through Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, applying the grandfather rule

to allow veterinary medicines that were aligned with regulation before Brexit to continue to be supplied to Northern Ireland with newly licensed veterinary medicines then adhering to EU rules; or an amendment to EU law to allow veterinary medicines with a Marketing Authorization Holder located in Great Britain to be used in Northern Ireland.

3. **Lack of a UK- EU veterinary agreement:** After Brexit, the UK can set its own standards for food safety and plant and animal health in Great Britain (GB), independent from the EU. The absence of an EU-UK veterinary agreement means that all goods of animal origin (such as meat, fish, dairy, and live animals) are subject to SPS checks when they cross borders. These checks, while essential for maintaining biosecurity, have led to disruptions in trade. The current Government committed in its manifesto ahead of the election to negotiate a veterinary agreement with the EU. We strongly believe that this should be one of the priorities of DEFRA in the upcoming months as this will: reduce SPS checks on products thus facilitating trade; solve the issue of access to veterinary medicines for Northern Ireland and it could also ease the pressures on the workforce by including Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQs).
4. **Dangerous Dogs Act:** Breed specific legislation as enshrined in the Dangerous Dogs Act is ineffective and hard to enforce. It must be replaced with breed neutral legislation which deals with aggression in all dogs, and has responsible dog ownership and training at its core, to ensure public protection.
5. **Animal health and welfare legislation:** due to the changes in Government some of the key Bills to protect animal health and welfare have had to be dropped despite having extensive support. In April 2023, after years of campaigning the Government announced plans to ban the use of electric shock collars for dogs and cats in England. The Animal Welfare (Electronic Collars) (England) Regulations 2023 were laid before Parliament on 27 April 2023 and subsequently approved by the House of Lords in June. However, there is no confirmed date as yet for the legislation to be approved by the House of Commons. There is also a need to replace the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) 1953 Act with legislation that has clearer definitions of livestock worrying, livestock, where attacks occur, what it means to be at large, and expands police powers and sanctions. These Bills need to be prioritised alongside the Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill, which has recently been introduced to Parliament as a Private Members' Bill and which will prevent the immeasurable suffering of thousands of animals, by tackling puppy smuggling, minimising the spread of *Brucella canis* and other emerging disease and put a ban on the importation of dogs, cats or ferrets with mutilation which are illegal in the UK such as cropped ears.
6. **Lack of minimum standards for animal welfare in UK trade deals:** Following the signing of free trade agreements with Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, we are seeing repeated examples of the UK opening its market to goods produced under low welfare systems. We need to ensure in legislation that a minimum set of standards for all UK trade deals is guaranteed as this will safeguard our high animal welfare standards and prevent the UK market from being flooded with produce farmed under conditions we would never accept in this country.

## 2. What issues should the EFRA Committee prioritise in 2025 and why?

As per our response to question 1 we believe that the key areas for the Committee to prioritise are:

1. **Veterinary Surgeons Act reform:** EFRA should ensure that DEFRA and the Prime Minister prioritises the reform of the very outdated Veterinary Surgeons Act and that this is included in the next King's Speech.

2. **Access to veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland beyond 2025:** the Committee should look at the options available, which we will be very happy to discuss with MPs; and ensure that DEFRA priorities negotiating a solution with the European Commission before the end of the grace period in 2025.
3. **Negotiation of a veterinary agreement with the EU:** the Committee should explore the options available for the UK to negotiate a veterinary agreement with the EU, hearing from interested parties such as BVA. There are many veterinary agreement which the UK could use as a model, so it will be necessary for the UK to have a throughout understanding of the different agreements and to negotiate one that ensures the highest standards of animal welfare and health while allowing trade to continue and access to veterinary medicines for Northern Ireland to be guaranteed.

**3. Are there longer term or emerging issues that would benefit from Committee scrutiny over the next five years? For example, issues relating to climate change or new technologies.**

BVA believes that an area that will benefit from Committee scrutiny in the regulation of new technologies such as non-invasive diagnosis tests and new clinical impacts as well as the regulation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its use in veterinary practices. We are currently setting up our own internal working group to explore this issue and we would be very happy to share any learnings or insights with the Committee.

The Committee should also scrutinise the One Health impacts of climate change, including on animal health and welfare. A recent [study](#) highlighted how climate change poses significant challenges to tackling antimicrobial resistance, which will ultimately affect the health of animals and humans. We recently released our [Net Zero report](#), which sets out our vision for the sector to be leading as a strong advocate for environmental sustainability and its benefits to human and animal health and wellbeing. We would be very happy to share insights on this topic with the Committee.

**4. How could the Committee better gather and represent both your concerns and the views of those in your sector?**

The Committee must ensure that it proactively communicates with BVA, as the largest membership body for veterinary professionals in the UK; on any aspects impacting the veterinary profession, animal health and welfare, public health, food production and trade, One Health or any other related matters. Veterinary professionals play a key role in all these areas and it is crucial to ensure that the voice of the profession is heard both in the Committee and in DEFRA.

**5. Do you have any examples of good practice where you have shared your concerns with Parliamentary or public bodies?**

A recent good example of good practice involves working with the Veterinary Medicines Working Group. Following the group resuming its meetings in September, we noticed BVA was not part of this group and given the great amount of work we had done on veterinary medicines, particularly access to veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland and securing an extension to the grace period, we thought it was appropriate for BVA to be represented. Cabinet Office responded positively and so did the VMD and DEFRA including us in the Working Group and organising a meeting to discuss the progress of the group so BVA could be appropriately informed.

**6. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about?**

Another area that may be of potential interest to the Committee is the work BVA has done on

welfare at slaughter. We have been engaging with key stakeholders such as the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), the Food Standards Agency (FSA), Lord Trees and Halal certification bodies to raise awareness of the Demonstration of Life (DoL) Protocol among Halal slaughterhouses and the wider Muslim community. We have recently written to some MPs requesting a meeting to explore how we can increase understanding of the protocol and engagement with its principles. We would welcome the Committee's support for our work and any further insights or research that they may wish to do in this area.

**7. Are you representing an organisation? If so which one? Please leave your name and contact details**

British Veterinary Association (BVA)

Patricia Canedo

Head of Policy & Public Affairs

[Patriciac@bva.co.uk](mailto:Patriciac@bva.co.uk)