

Wednesday 26 February 2025

British Veterinary Association Annual London Dinner 2025

President Dr. Elizabeth Mullineaux speech

AS DELIVERED

Good evening everyone, for those of you that don't know me I'm Liz Mullineaux, I'm BVA President. It's my great pleasure to welcome you all to the British Veterinary Association's annual London Dinner. Thank you so much indeed for joining us and apologies for our slight delay, I hope you have all enjoyed chatting in the meantime.

I'd like to extend a special welcome and a big thank you to Daniel Zeichner, Minister of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, he's our guest speaker this evening.

BVA works closely with Defra on many important issues including animal health and welfare, UK biosecurity, international trade and One Health, ensuring the views of the veterinary profession are represented.

As we move through 2025, the veterinary profession continues to navigate many challenges. These include the ongoing threat of emerging diseases such as bluetongue 3, the workforce pressures on some cohorts of the veterinary profession and the ongoing Competition and Markets Authority's investigation into vet services for household pets. Following the publication of a series of working papers earlier in the month, we have been extremely pleased to see the CMA recognise that vets and veterinary nurses are highly trained professionals working in often complex and sometimes very time critical environments. We also warmly welcome their recognition of the "dedication and commitment to pet owners and their animals shown by individual vets and veterinary nurses". We continue to engage with the CMA investigation standing up for the veterinary profession and ensuring that the nuances of how the profession works are fully understood.

This evening, following the commitments from the new Government, I would like to focus on three key areas: firstly, the much needed reform of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966; second, the need to bring back legislation to tackle key animal welfare concerns left unresolved after the abandonment of the Kept Animals Bill; and lastly, the negotiation of a veterinary agreement with the European Union.

My presidential theme is "a profession that cares." Vets not only care for animals, putting their health and welfare at the centre of everything we do; but we also care for each other, our teams and our clients. To continue caring for animals and the profession, we need a fit-for-purpose modern regulatory framework that recognises the importance of all members of the veterinary team and the modern structures of veterinary businesses. The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 is woefully outdated and fails to recognise the importance of other allied professionals such as equine dental technicians, musculoskeletal professionals and vet techs, or to embrace the full potential of the wider vet-led team. Veterinary nurses are vital members of the practice team, they are highly qualified and experienced. It is therefore concerning that the title of veterinary nurse isn't protected in law, and anyone can call themselves a vet nurse. This has to be rectified. The current Veterinary Surgeons Act also fails to regulate veterinary practices, meaning that individual vets and nurses are held

accountable for business decisions which are often outside their control but can directly impact animal health and welfare. The CMA has already acknowledged this in its recently published working paper on the regulatory framework for vet professionals and vet services, outlining the changes that the industry has undergone in the last 60 years and setting out the challenges resulting from the absence of practice regulation. We are pleased that the CMA and Defra have listened to the profession, and we urge all of you in this room to support the development of a new Veterinary's Surgeons Act.

BVA is committed to the veterinary profession and animal welfare and health. The loss of the Kept Animals Bill in 2023 was incredibly disappointing for us and a step back for animal health and welfare reform. We are pleased that the commitment from the previous government to deal with the issues that were part of the Kept Animal Bills as independent pieces of legislation has been honoured by the new government.

One of the Bills that is currently being progressed is Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill, which will restrict the importation and non-commercial movement of these animals, including both a ban on the import of dogs with cropped ears, and the introduction of appropriate pre-import testing. This would help us tackle infections like *Brucella canis*, which can be transmitted to humans, although are not currently endemic in the UK. We have worked with our colleague Danny Chambers, veterinary surgeon and MP, who introduced this Bill with the support of Neil Hudson MP, another veterinary colleague who we are pleased to have here tonight. We would urge other MPs and Lords to support this Bill as it goes through both Houses.

Another positive development for the veterinary profession and potentially animal health and welfare, is the Government's election manifesto commitment to negotiate a veterinary agreement with the EU. We welcomed this commitment and have already increased our engagement efforts with not only the UK Government but also with the European Union and other stakeholders to ensure that the negotiation of such an agreement is prioritised and that the veterinary voice is considered when the agreement is being further developed.

Since Brexit, BVA has consistently advocated for measures that support the veterinary workforce while safeguarding animal health and welfare. In 2022, we published our position on the facilitation of trade in live animals and animal products between Great Britain and the EU Single Market. This position supports the effective and efficient use of veterinary capacity whilst upholding animal health, animal welfare and public health standards, as well as recognising the importance of veterinary input and signature on SPS [Sanitary and Phytosanitary] related trade documentation.

A veterinary agreement would help to solve the issue of access to veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland post December 2025, however, given these very short timescales we continue to engage with the Government and key stakeholders separately on this matter to find a solution outside of a veterinary agreement.

We believe that a veterinary agreement with the EU provides the UK with an opportunity to ensure efficient use of the veterinary workforce while ensuring high standards of animal health and welfare and we are looking forward to continuing working with the UK Government and other relevant stakeholders in achieving the best possible outcome.

During this evening, we would like to hear your thoughts on how best we can support and work with you to continue ensuring that the role of veterinary surgeons is understood and valued, to drive progress on animal health and welfare and to support the future of the veterinary profession.

If everyone would like to please rise, and raise your glasses, I would like to make a toast to the future of the veterinary profession. [Toast]

It's now my great pleasure to hand over to Daniel Zeichner, Minister of State at Defra [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs].

Thank you.