

RESTRICTED - EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MEMORANDUM EC (01)

FROM: BRÍD RODGERS
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Date: 26 March 2001

TO: EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

1. This paper updates colleagues on developments on the ground, and provides advice on a number of issues raised at the Executive meeting on 22 March.

SITUATION REPORT

2. There have been no further confirmed cases in either Northern Ireland or the Republic. Some 4000 animals have so far been slaughtered and buried in Co Louth. We are keeping closely in touch with colleagues in DAFRD, both at Ministerial and official level. The Irish have now told us that they have located a number of sheep which they believe are the animals 'missing' from the original consignment from Carlisle.
3. The revised guidelines we considered last week appeared in the three main Northern Ireland newspapers on Friday. Provision has been made for the same material – or amended guidance as appropriate – to appear in the local weekly papers later this week.
4. Tenders are being sought for mechanical vehicle washers to be installed at Belfast, Larne, Warrenpoint, Stranraer and Cairnryan.

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5. Vehicles are being disinfected and movements are being monitored on cross-border roads in South Armagh, and the RUC are continuing to undertake roving patrols in a wider area.

RISK ASSESSMENT

6. The outbreak in Co Louth is a setback, but as long as it is confined to the single case, I do not believe it represents a dramatic deterioration in the situation. The 10k surveillance zone around the Co Louth outbreak extends into Northern Ireland, but almost the whole of the Northern Ireland portion lies within the existing Meigh surveillance zone. Because of these developments, the retention of movement controls in parts of Northern Ireland where the two surveillance zones overlap will be necessary. Further slaughter and destruction of dangerous in-contact animals in Northern Ireland may also be necessary. We shall continue to liaise with the Irish about this sort of practical issue.
7. Nevertheless, I do not believe that we face a significantly increased risk of further spread of the disease, provided farmers as the first line of defence continue to behave sensibly and responsibly.

REGIONALISATION

8. The EU moved with remarkable speed on 22 March to grant regionalised status to the Republic of Ireland, who may now legally export live animals, meat and meat products from the whole country except Co Louth. Northern Ireland is, of course, still caught by the UK export ban. This has provoked a predictably hostile reaction among farmers throughout Northern Ireland and is wholly unacceptable. Colleagues will recall that as long ago as 28 February, I secured a commitment from the Prime Minister that the UK Government would support a case for regionalisation of Northern Ireland as soon as it was practical and possible to make it. Colleagues will also recall that the

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following day we confirmed our first and only outbreak. Following my meeting with the Prime Minister and the UK Agriculture Minister last Thursday I wrote to Nick Brown to raise this matter. Accordingly, he arranged for the UK delegate at Friday's Standing Veterinary Committee to register the fact that Northern Ireland would be pressing its case forcefully for a regional approach to be adopted, at the next SVC meeting, tomorrow. The proposal would be that the whole of Northern Ireland with the exception of the Newry and Mourne District Council area would qualify for regionalisation. I also spoke personally to Commissioner Byrne yesterday to press our case, and I am confident of his support. Senior DARD officials, including our Chief Veterinary Officer, are now in Brussels discussing our case for regionalisation, and the CVO will present our case to the SVC tomorrow. I cannot predict the outcome of that meeting, but my view is that the NI case for regionalisation, leading to an immediate lifting of the generalised controls on exports, and an early lifting of most of the rest, is irresistible. A successful outcome would, of course, enable Northern Ireland producers and processors, other than those within the Newry and Mourne District Council area which would remain excluded until 6 April, to export goods throughout the EU while the rest of the UK could not, and would represent an enormous marketing opportunity. **I will keep colleagues informed of developments.**

PORTS AND AIRPORTS

9. All commercial vehicles arriving in NI have been subject to inspection and where appropriate disinfection for some time. We are steadily upgrading our activity as we obtain resources, and currently all cars and lorries arriving at Larne, Belfast and Warrenpoint are having their wheels washed. Harbour Commissioners are co-operating with plans for the siting of mechanical equipment and encouraging ferry companies to comply with Departmental guidance. Currently over 100 staff are involved in disinfecting operations around the clock. While the bulk of these are from my own Department's Rivers Agency and Forest

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Service, I am grateful for the assistance given by Water Service, who have responsibility for the Seacat terminal, and the Environment and Heritage Service who are assisting at Larne. There are, of course, many other staff from my own Department who are interviewing arrivals and inspecting documentation and cargo.

10. There are limits to what people with hand equipment can do. To ease the staffing burden and to achieve as high a standard of disinfection as possible I have authorised the purchase of mechanical equipment. Tenders for the supply of mechanical wheel washing equipment are due to be submitted on 27 March and orders will be placed as soon as possible thereafter. Delivery will take perhaps three weeks. Ferry companies have indicated that they are content that machines be placed at Stranraer and Cairnryan. Because the frequency and volume of traffic is less from other destinations, other machines will be installed in Northern Ireland at Victoria Dock, the Seacat terminal and Warrenpoint. Back-up machines will be installed on DARD property at Redlands Road (Larne) and Dufferin Road (Belfast). We have investigated a suggestion to use the ships' fire sprinklers to disinfect vehicles, but have abandoned this for technical (safety) reasons.
11. Ferry foot passengers and air passengers who have been in contact with farms or farm animals, or who will be in contact with animals on arrival in Northern Ireland, are required to contact DARD inspectors at all main points of entry, where they will be offered advice and personal disinfection.
12. Disinfectant mats, leaflets and posters will be provided shortly to the port authorities at Northern Ireland's smaller ports, Coleraine, Derry, Kilkeel, Portavogie, Ardglass, Annalong etc., and to the yachting marinas at Bangor, Carrickfergus and Ardglass. We will follow this up with advice to the numerous yacht clubs in NI coastal waters.

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13. I believe that the current controls are working well, but that the installation of the new equipment will be a significant improvement in efficiency.

THE BORDER

14. Of some twenty cross-border roads in the Surveillance Zone around Ravensdale, 11 are being monitored by DARD staff. A further 9 are unmanned but mats have been placed and are visited regularly. DARD staff are keeping them disinfected. Staff from the DRD Roads Service are responsible for manning the A1, with DARD providing the mats and disinfectant. The Ravensdale operation absorbs over 100 people around the clock, excluding veterinary staff. You will appreciate that this burden is telling on staff and their families, and we have concerns. We must take care that we acknowledge the personal effort made by these people in exposed and lonely circumstances.
15. I should emphasise that the purpose of these interventions is simply to disinfect vehicles and ensure that they are not carrying live animals. Staff do not have the power to stop and search vehicles, and cannot, therefore, check that they are not carrying prohibited foodstuffs, particularly meat or meat products. Even if we took such a power, the manpower implications are prodigious. The risk is abated in respect of raw meat, since its documentation will be inspected by DARD veterinary staff on its arrival at meat plants in Northern Ireland. There is, however, no effective control at present on the import of unauthorised meat or dairy products from the Republic of Ireland. Given the very localised extent of the Irish outbreak, and the stringent controls in place in that area, I believe the risk of infection by meat products from the South is extremely small and in present circumstances acceptable. Should the disease spread in the Republic, we will have to review the issue.

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16. **I have spoken to John Reid and to Adam Ingram, and am satisfied that support from the RUC is satisfactory.** They are operating random mobile patrols in the border areas within and close to the Surveillance Zones and will continue to do so for as long as is necessary. If staff on the ground have concern that the passing traffic may be carrying livestock they will pass the information to the police so that action can be taken away from the border checkpoint.
17. Having said that, there is an obvious comparison to be made between our efforts and those in the South. I am satisfied that on veterinary grounds our measures are effective. However on the major roads our "garden sprayers" targeted at northern bound traffic are clearly much less impressive than the power washers and other sophisticated spraying machines in operation for southern bound traffic. There is no doubt that the travelling public expect a serious attempt to clean vehicles entering Northern Ireland, and will continue to make a comparison between the two administrations. To upgrade our efforts is, however a task which is beyond the resources of my Department, and if we wish to do so, other Departments will need to move from a supporting role to a leading role on major crossing points.
18. We estimate that the effort taken to date dealing with the totality of this emergency has absorbed perhaps 600 staff. The main load has of course fallen on the Veterinary Service who are severely stretched. Against this background we now need to consider what else is desirable and possible.
19. The measures we have undertaken at the Border are under considerable scrutiny, and have the potential to cause considerable embarrassment. For presentational reasons, there would be advantage in maintaining an official presence at all 175 recognised border crossing points. We estimate that to maintain a presence on all 175 would require around 2000 people. Even if we monitored only the most important ones on a 24-hour basis - and there are perhaps 35 of these

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- we would still require of the order of 600 people. This would have huge implications for the provision of other public services throughout Northern Ireland. Within DARD, the Rivers Agency and Forest Service have been occupied exclusively with FMD for three weeks, so that about one third of their total industrial manpower is tied up in the ports and a small part of the border area. They are carrying out virtually none of their own functions in the eastern half of Northern Ireland. The Water and Roads Services contribution is proportionately less at this stage, but they have concerns even about the effect of this level of commitment on their operations. Even if we could identify further industrial staff within the Civil Service, they could be released only at the expense of a reduction in delivery of what are critical services, such as maintaining essential water supplies, winter gritting etc. This could possibly be sustained over a short period, but would be unacceptable for more than a couple of weeks. Moreover, I have to say that such an extension of our activity on the Border will not be effective, simply because fixed checkpoints can be easily by-passed over fields or through forests if someone really wants to move animals or other goods illegally.

20. We have already acknowledged that it is impossible to seal the border, and the only real advantage of this course of action is presentational. I believe that we would do better to continue to concentrate our efforts in the immediate area of the outbreaks, and **I therefore recommend to Executive colleagues that we adopt this approach, which I am convinced is fully defensible.**

CONTINGENCY PLANNING

21. In the event of a spread of the disease within Northern Ireland, we face enormous problems. The resources required to patrol Protection and Surveillance Zones are formidable. Each fresh outbreak will immediately need 70 to 100 people to contain the outbreak and begin slaughter at a rate of around 300 sheep or 100 cattle a day. This

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excludes veterinary staff. To double that rate will require an additional 20 people a day. We would also face a serious shortage of specialists, particularly vets, even with the assistance of Private Veterinary Practitioners, and of slaughter-men. We estimate that it would take only three or four concurrent outbreaks to overwhelm us, depending on the location and the number of animals in the affected area. We would almost certainly need to second administrative staff not only from other Government Departments, but also from the Health and Personal Social Services and from Education Boards, from District Councils and from other parts of the public service. This could, of course, only be achieved with significant cuts in the provision of other services. Nor could we compel public servants, particularly those not employed directly by Departments, to work in unfamiliar and potentially uncongenial circumstances. Moreover, even if we were able to find enough staff, newcomers will need a period of training and adjustment before they come close to the levels of efficiency and effectiveness of experienced staff.

22. We should have to seek considerable logistical and other support services from the RUC and the Army.
23. We should also need to consider the measures at the ports and airports. Were the disease widespread in Northern Ireland, there would be little justification in trying to prevent its introduction from Great Britain, and the resources currently deployed at points of entry might be much better deployed elsewhere. We should need carefully to consider the presentational implications of such redeployment, and a decision could only be made with certainty at the time.
24. We are not yet faced with a crisis on the scale I have described. Nevertheless I register these concerns with colleagues, and would **welcome their support in principle to the proposal that they would make every endeavour to identify staff resources who might be redeployed to FMD-related work. Further guidance on the nature**

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of the responsibilities which would need to be covered will be provided to departments shortly. In those circumstances colleagues will acknowledge that the FMD issue would no longer be simply a DARD problem, but one which would require collective consideration. Given that addressing any deterioration of the FMD situation would require service reductions in other areas of Executive responsibility, the Executive would, of course, wish to consider priorities across the full range of its functions.

RATE RELIEF AND OTHER SUPPORT

25. Colleagues will be aware that Ministers in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland have already announced a range of financial and other support measures for some of those most seriously affected by the FMD outbreak. I am aware that we are seeking details of what is proposed in both jurisdictions, and OFMDFM will be providing further advice in due course. I believe that it is politically unacceptable for us not to be seen to be providing similar support in Northern Ireland. I have already raised the specific issue of rate relief with the Minister of Finance and Personnel.

GUIDELINES

26. If, by the time we meet on Monday, the situation has not deteriorated and we still face just the two current cases of FMD, I think we should revisit the revised guidance attached to my paper of 21 March. The problems faced by the tourist industry are considerable, and I believe we risk losing public sympathy and support if we do not continue to demonstrate flexibility and proportionality. Moreover, the Irish Agriculture Minister announced last week a slight easing of restrictions and is unlikely, we understand, to reimpose them despite the Ravensdale outbreak. There would be advantage in being seen to act consistently with the Irish in this case. Equally, if we are successful in our efforts to achieve regionalisation, it could appear inconsistent if we

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were seen to be maintaining very strict controls throughout Northern Ireland.

27. While my own freedom to open facilities such as the forest parks will remain constrained because of the staff resources already committed to ports and the border, and the risks of contaminating animals in forest parks, **I nevertheless recommend that we adopt the revised guidelines attached at Annex A and arrange to have them published in the three main papers and the weekly papers as soon as possible.**

BRÍD RODGERS
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

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NORTHERN IRELAND EXECUTIVE

KEEP FOOT AND MOUTH OUT

Foot and mouth disease is still a threat. Although there has been only one confirmed case in Northern Ireland so far, and one in the Republic of Ireland, there is still a risk that it could spread, or that the virus could be brought in from outside Northern Ireland. This would have a devastating impact on our economy.

The Executive's main objective is to prevent the reintroduction of the disease, but also to maintain its proportionate response to the putbreak. We are grateful that the strict guidance issued three weeks ago and reissued last week has generally been followed and has been effective. We are now issuing revised guidance to suit the changing circumstances. We still need your help.

FARMERS are still in the front line. They and their families should continue to:

- Keep movement on and off farms to an absolute minimum.
- Observe strictly the hygiene and cleanliness measures already announced by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (see below).
- Stay away from sporting, cultural and social events.
- Stay away from ports, airports and any other areas where they might possibly come into contact with the virus. In particular they should avoid going anywhere near the two surveillance zones in Co Armagh and Co Louth.

VISITORS TO NORTHERN IRELAND are very welcome. Nevertheless, they:

- Should follow the DARD guidance distributed by the airlines and ferry operators.
- If they have been in contact with farms or livestock in Great Britain or elsewhere, they must declare this to a Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Inspector on arrival.
- Should avoid any contact with farms or livestock during their stay, and should stay well clear of the surveillance zones.
- Should not bring any foodstuffs into Northern Ireland.

THE PUBLIC

- May visit the countryside, but should avoid farmland, or land immediately adjacent to farmland, and contact with livestock. They too should avoid going anywhere near the two surveillance zones.
- May travel freely to Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, but should avoid contact with farms and livestock there. On their return to Northern Ireland they should follow the guidance for visitors to Northern Ireland, and co-operate with all measures put in place at ports and airports.

EVENTS AND PUBLIC AMENITIES

- Sporting, cultural and social events may resume, but farmers and their families, and others who have had contact with livestock should avoid them.
- Events involving large gatherings of people close to farmland should not take place.
- Public amenities in rural areas including tourist attractions, country parks and the Public Angling Estate may re-open, other than those which house livestock or other animals susceptible to the disease. Appropriate precautions should be taken in all cases. Because of resource difficulties, not all venues may open at once. Visitors should therefore check before making their journey.
- All vehicles should be parked in designated car parks.
- Dogs must be kept on a lead in rural areas.

This guidance is in response to the current assessment of risk. These measures will continue to be kept under constant review and revised advice offered if necessary.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

WHAT FARMERS NEED TO DO

- Keep any movements on and off your farm to a minimum.
- Maintain the highest standards of hygiene for all movements on and off your farm.
- Use one combined entrance and exit.
- Keep the gate locked where possible and provide a means of contact between the farm entrance and house for essential callers.
- At the entrance supply a tub of disinfectant, a brush for scrubbing footwear and a spray pump. Keep the disinfectant solution clean and renew it daily.
- All vehicles must be cleaned and disinfected before entering the premises
- All vehicles entering and leaving the premises should have their wheels sprayed with approved disinfectant.
- Stop all non-essential vehicles and visitors from entering the farm. Arrange, whenever possible, for collection and delivery of supplies to take place at the farm boundary.
- Keep a record of all deliveries.
- House all animals if possible or keep them away from the perimeter of your farm.
- Complete all records of stock movements as required by existing legislation.
- Treat farms as independent units.
- Keep dogs, cats and poultry under control.
- Make every effort to destroy rats and other vermin, they may spread disease.
- Keep your stock away from household waste, bones or swill.
- Limit contact with other people's livestock and with other keepers of livestock. Should you have any contact with them, disinfect your footwear, change your clothes and wash with hot water and soap, including your hair, before you go near your own animals. Any item or object that may have had contact with disease must also be disinfected.

TELEPHONE HELPLINE: 028 9052 4279 or 028 9052 4590

Website address: www.dardni.gov.uk/footandmouth