1. Meeting opens (Wednesday 15 April 2020)

1.1 The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the 53rd AHWBE meeting.

2. COVID-19 (Group Discussion)

2.1 The Board discussed the impact of COVID-19 with some sectors looking at the possibility of virtual inspections or alternative approach to the normal procedure. The Animal Welfare Committee have been asked to look at the impact of COVID-19 specifically looking at welfare across all species. The work will look at the impact as several time points, starting with impact from 2-months then to 6-months and anything that may go into next year.

2.2 There was a discussion on possible implication on long term social distancing and the impact on businesses. There is potential for flexibility to social distancing in the future for different counties and age groups and they expect the rules to be relaxed.

2.3 Social distancing is being enforced strictly for vets and farmers and the guidance is constantly being reviewed as it keeps getting updated. However, it was noted that the near miss reports on injuries went up as many staff have to work on their own.
2.4 Companion animal sector has come together during the COVID-19 outbreak. They have been working on guidance’s for staff to help them to continue to work whilst enforcing social distancing. From a welfare point they have also issued guidance for pet owners on how to get the best out of their pets during this period which has been published.

3. Update on bull calf welfare (Gwyn Jones)

3.1 Over the last two years, Gwyn Jones has now been working with Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) on updating the bull calf welfare guidance. AHDB have worked with over 80 organisations in compiling the draft guidance.

3.2 Gwyn Jones presented an interesting slide show that demonstrated the extent of the issues around dairy bull calves. Industry commitment is to rear all calves with care and to eliminate the unnecessary euthanasia of calves by 2023.


4.1 The Board were presented with an update on the enforcement and regulation aspects of the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway. It was also pointed out to the Board that some of the key members of the Defra policy team have been re-prioritised to work on COVID-19 for the near future.

4.2 In line with established good practice for regulation, Defra consider that the regulatory framework should be:

- Effective, delivers outcomes
- Flexible and adaptive
- Customer focused and partnership led
- Transparent and accessible
- Preventative proportionate and fair
- Efficient and value for money

4.3 Regulation sets the standard of welfare for farmed animals across all farms. It is right that those responsible for farming have high standards of welfare. The government will continue its focus on maintaining world-leading standards through regulatory requirements and statutory codes of practice. It will do so in a way which is sustainable for the sector and is informed by the latest scientific developments and best practice.

4.4 Stewart Houston supported the proposal to identify possible warning indicators on a farmer’s journey to non-compliance as a good opportunity to use social science to shape future policy.

4.5 Michael Seals and Stewart Houston met with the Chair of Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) Nick Saphir on the 14th April and part of the discussion was to make him aware of the work on Animal Health and Welfare Pathway. The response was very positive with AHDB wanting further meetings to discuss with the offer to help where they can.
5. Health and Welfare Standards – (Chris Kebbell (New Zealand))

5.1. Chris Kebbell Primary Industries Counsellor from the New Zealand High Commission attended to provide an update on the approach NZ takes to animal health and welfare and related systems. Chris Kebbell is a vet and has worked in several leadership and management roles including leading the Government Veterinary Verification Agency and does not presently consider himself to work at the “coal-face” of animal health and welfare.

5.2. It’s worth noting that New Zealand’s Island status, relatively small international trade, biosecurity systems (including intensive controls at the border of goods and people) and distance from other countries helps materially reduce the risk of many animal (and other) diseases being introduced. To date they have not had many outbreaks of significant animal health concern and all have been controlled through to eradication.

5.3. New Zealand does not have an animal health strategy per se given the low incidence of domestic diseases of concern and instead takes a more holistic Biosecurity ‘systems-based ‘approach to prevent introduction and management of unwanted diseases whether this is animal or plant etc. The biosecurity policy and ‘systems approach’ used to be focused on keeping it out (pre-border risk management and border intervention), surveillance and managing incursions through appropriate response. Focus has now shifted to implementing a ‘Biosecurity 2025 Strategy’ which aims to further strengthen the system by enrolling businesses, establishing networks, information exchange and influencing general Population behaviour (a team of 5 million) managing future Biosecurity risk.

5.4. Separately New Zealand has an “Animal Welfare Matters” strategy to support care of animals and to protect and enhance New Zealand’s international animal welfare reputation.

5.5. New Zealand approach to regulation is to set the ‘outcomes’ to be achieved and introducing enabling regulatory frameworks which provide for the use of a flexible range of regulatory tools (including prescriptive standards if needed) and collaborative government / industry relationships. Where issues are identified, the NZ government will where possible work with Industry to encourage them to take control of the issue to resolve without government needing to regulate. If the Industry does not resolve, or a level of regulation or prescription is required to manage the risk of the commons and ultimately NZ reputation, then Government will work in consultation with Industry to ensure any measures are justifiable and achieve the outcome in the most effective and efficient manner.

5.6. It is worth noting that due to New Zealand being heavily focused and dependent on export markets, which means integrity and reputation is of key importance to Government and Industry, this enables an environment which allows each industry participant to come together with Government to solve issues to maintain their reputation.
5.7 The Board thanked Chris Kebbell for attending and shining light on how New Zealand manages animal health and welfare and it was very beneficial to learn how other countries work. The Board also offered to send information on Defra the pathway work to get his thoughts."
6. Horse ID Next Steps

6.1 The policy team presented ideas for building on the current pilot with a digital portal and discussed the associated legal, financial, and transformation challenges.

6.2 The Board members were supportive of the idea of moving to a digital system to increase accuracy of the data, reduce transaction costs and minimize the risk of fraud, but recognized that it would be a transformation and the non-digital change aspects needed further thought.

7. Trade Negotiation and Implication of Animal Health and Welfare

7.1 The policy team in Defra confirmed the UK government is still preparing for trade negotiations with USA, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. Talks themselves are currently on hold due to COVID-19.

7.2 On the approach to welfare measures in upcoming negotiations the government is considering options and committed to not compromising welfare standards. There are no plans to allow products that don’t meet UK import standards, for welfare or food safety.

7.3 The policy team mentioned that once the UK has left the EU then the responsibility will become fully the UK’s. So, they are working with devolved administrations to agree new legislation. This will include looking at new challenges and risks.


8.1 Barry Johnson, the Chair of the horse welfare board (HWB) attended and gave an update to the Board on HWB welfare strategy. The HWB was established in April 2019, it was felt that there was a need for greater cross-industry collaboration on horse welfare.

8.2 The HWB considers that the three interlocking areas of:- Strong welfare, effective communications and robust data are all essential in ensuring that British racing has the trust and confidence of the public and politicians. It will also provide racing with greater self-confidence in its own performance.

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 15th July (PM) & Thursday 16th July 2020 (AM)