



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

1B Nobel House
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London SW1P 3J

[Redacted]

Our ref: RFI6634
Date: 23 June 2014

[Redacted]

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: *Minutes of meetings held with stakeholders under the Injurious Weeds Policy*

Thank you for your request for information about minutes taken from meetings held with stakeholders on Defra's weeds policy, which we received on 31st May. As you know, we have handled your request under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs).

I enclose a copy of the information you requested:

1. Minutes Comms Campaign Group 20th January 2014
2. Minutes Comms Campaign Group 21st March 2014
3. Minutes Comms Campaign Group 2nd May 2014
4. Notes and e-mail from meeting Defra-Buglife 29th April 2014

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the EIRs, and in keeping with the government's Transparency Agenda, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. Therefore, the information released to you will now be published on www.gov.uk together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context. Please note that this will not include your personal data.

I attach Annex A, which explains the copyright that applies to the information being released to you.

I also attach Annex B giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service you have received.

As injurious weeds policy is a devolved matter, you may wish to speak to the Scottish Government directly about ragwort, but if you have any further queries about this letter, please feel free to contact me again.

Yours

[Redacted]



1. Meeting to discuss Ragwort communications campaign

1130 – 1pm, 20 January 2014, Defra offices, London

Attendees

	Defra
[Redacted], Animal Health & Welfare Board	[Redacted], Sustainable and Competitive Farming Strategy team
[Redacted], British Horse Society	[Redacted], Sustainable Agriculture team
[Redacted], British Horse Society	[Redacted], Animal Welfare and Dangerous Dogs team
[Redacted], British Equine Veterinary Association	[Redacted], Sustainable Agriculture team

Meeting summary

1. Communications

- 1.1. The proposal for a targeted comms campaign on ragwort was supported, but it would need to be targeted intelligently to ensure that it was proportionate and not heavy handed. Key target groups included the 'hard to reach' owners, equine vets, private horse owners. There would also have to be dialogue between local authorities and other government bodies/agencies with ragwort responsibilities to demonstrate that concerns about ragwort, were being taken seriously. It was agreed that a campaign would need to consider the level of existing knowledge and expertise on ragwort, so that any key messages on prevention or management could be adapted accordingly.
- 1.2. It was felt that as most good horse owners were ragwort aware, there could be the potential for a ragwort 'tool kit' which would deliver different messages or guidance according to the level of knowledge or experience. Users could be signposted to the most appropriate information as to what to look out for and what to do where ragwort posed a risk to their livestock.
- 1.3. We agreed that a good coverage across a broad range of horse owners/keepers could be achieved by using the existing British Horse Society membership and engaging with them early on in this process. In addition to directing key messages to horse owners/keepers, a campaign would also have to consider the

management of the public perception of ragwort, i.e. that populations are increasing and very little action is being taken to halt its spread. Therefore it was felt that an element of 'myth busting' might also be needed, as well as clear guidance around risk and what an individual could do to control or report ragwort depending on their circumstances. It was also noted that consideration would need to be given to the type of campaign, for example starting with an engagement type campaign with surveys, before moving to targeted messages.

1.4. We also explored what could be done comms wise this year including a potential announcement by the SoS at the next National Equine Forum on 6 March. This would provide a good opportunity to raise the profile of joint work to improve the approach to ragwort control. We also discussed the potential of holding a ragwort summit later this year with a wider stakeholder grouping to discuss comms and wider issues; we agreed to follow this idea up in as we hold further discussions.

- **Action point: Defra to develop an initial suggestions or 'wish list' of actions for a comms campaign including the intended recipients of the campaign, key messages on ragwort (based on experience and knowledge of the horse owner) etc. To be circulated to attendees for further comment.**

2. Evidence

2.1. The group discussed existing evidence base, and in particular the evidence gaps e.g. spread of ragwort and true impact on horse health. The evidence of liver disease caused as a direct result of ragwort ingestion was difficult to detect without biopsy/autopsy and the number of deaths were generally relatively low and vary regionally. However, there was scope to obtain a rough idea of the number of ragwort related horse deaths from equine pathology centres. The data on ragwort spread is also fairly thin, plus there are gaps in practical impacts such as time spent by horse owners in dealing with ragwort. While acknowledging there is limited funding available for new research, the group agreed to put together a list of evidence gaps (and possible research/survey proposals) to further consider whether there were areas which could be addressed.

- **Action point: Defra to circulate an initial list of potential areas for further research on ragwort for consideration and addition.**
- **Action point: [Redacted] to contact pathology centre(s) to investigate the scope and possibility for reviewing histopathology records.**

3. Legislation and guidance

3.1. We discussed some of the challenges in bringing successful prosecutions under the Weeds Act 1959 and Animal Welfare Act. It was agreed that Trading Standards provisions could be effective where ragwort is baled in hay and in situations where ragwort was a contributory factor in the death of an animal, it could be given a higher priority for taking a prosecution case to court. It was also agreed that there could be clear guidance in the ragwort 'tool kit' to explain what a BHS member or complainant could do in these circumstances.

3.2. The group also discussed the existing Code of Practice and what can be done to improve it to make it a more focussed document. It was suggested that a

'reformed' Code could be possible without going through the Parliamentary process, but this would need to be explored with Defra 'Red Tape Challenge' colleagues.

- **Action point: Defra to liaise with Red Tape Challenge team and lawyers to explore options for improving or reforming the ragwort CoP.**

4. Partnership working and next steps

4.1. It was agreed to continue dialogue on a comms campaign with current attendees (see below) and to bring in other relevant colleagues as and when required. We also discussed the potential of a ragwort coordinator and how this could be used to improve the approach across stakeholder groups and Government departments. It was agreed that this would probably sit within the Government's remit, but it was also suggested that a more innovative approach could be considered (e.g. a secondment to BHS) to fully understand some of the key issues on ragwort.

- **Action point: Defra to organise a date for the next meeting in mid-February.**

2. Ragwort communications campaign

11 – 12.30pm, 21 March 2014, Room 102 Defra offices, London

Attendees

Equine industry representatives	Defra
[Redacted], Animal Health & Welfare Board for England (by phone)	[Redacted], Sustainable Agriculture team
[Redacted], British Horse Society (BHS)	[Redacted], Sustainable Agriculture team
	[Redacted], Sustainable Agriculture team

Apologies: [Redacted] (BHS), [Redacted] (BEVA) and [Redacted] (Defra)

1. Actions from the last meeting

1.1. Most of the actions from the last meeting were discharged. As the comms plan for the survey had yet to be finalised, it was agreed that the action to '*Consider an initial list of questions for the survey*', could be deferred until the BHS's comms plan had been developed further. The outstanding actions from the last meeting to be followed up are:

- **Defra** to finalise and circulate a précis of owner/occupier responsibilities on ragwort with stakeholder survey (in progress), and
- **BEVA** to also explore whether their members could be contacted about ragwort's risks and impact via an online survey.

Meeting summary

2. Communications campaign

2.1. There was general agreement with the approach and timings set out in BHS's draft communications plan and the group discussed a number of the key aspects of the campaign including timings, funding sources for the 'paper' (leaflets etc.) element of the campaign, targeting key stakeholders and publicity/media handling of the summit and survey. There was also some scope and benefit in coordinating certain aspects of the campaign such as joint comms/media activity from BHS and Defra. We also discussed the actions post-summit specifically the ragwort toolbox and how it could be presented, e.g. Ragwort microsite or a 'glove box' guide. BHS felt that it would be more manageable to employ a known agency to organise the work on gathering the data from survey. They also agreed to organise a

separate meeting with a tried and tested contractor [Redacted] to discuss our needs and their capacity for managing the survey.

Actions

- **BHS** to revise the comms plan in light of suggestions made at this meeting
- **BHS** to discuss a revised comms plan and management of the survey with [Redacted]
- **Defra** to organise a meeting between BHS and Defra communications team to discuss possible coordinated messaging on the campaign

3. Ragwort summit

3.1. The group were informed of the Secretary of State's agreement to an autumn summit and was expecting to participate in some way. It was suggested that the ideal time for the summit would be late October/early November as it coordinated with other key events in the equine calendar, e.g. the World Horse Welfare conference in November.

3.2. The group felt that the aim of the summit had to be around limiting the number of horse and livestock ragwort related illness and deaths and suggested that the agenda might include the following:

- A current/historical look at the perceptions of ragwort;
- What the evidence tells us, i.e. data gathered from the FERA evidence review, BEVA sampling and the BHS survey, and
- How we need to adjust behaviours to minimize the risks of ragwort poisoning, e.g. myth busting, raising further awareness etc.

3.3. The group discussed stakeholder attendance and concluded that the audience should represent a broad range of relevant interests, e.g. biodiversity groups, public bodies and farming bodies such as the National Farmers Union, Country Land and Business Association and Tenant Farmers Association. The group also discussed media coverage of the event would also help to disseminate the key messages from the summit. BHS and Defra agreed to consider suitable equine and government media networks to invite to the event.

Actions

- **All:** to consider any further suggested items for the summit by the next comms group meeting, and
- **Defra** to speak to key biodiversity groups to advise on this work and the timing of the summit.

The date of the next comms meeting will be circulated shortly.

3. Ragwort communications campaign group meeting, 2 May 2014

11 – 1pm, Room 103, Defra offices, London

Attendees

Equine industry representatives	Defra
[Redacted], Animal Health & Welfare Board for England (by phone)	[Redacted], Sustainable Agriculture team (SAT)
[Redacted], British Horse Society (BHS)	[Redacted], SAT team
	[Redacted], SAT team

Apologies: [Redacted] (BHS), [Redacted] (BEVA) and [Redacted] (Defra)

1. Review of action points from last meeting.

Action outstanding: BEVA action to explore whether BEVA members could be contacted about the risks and impacts of ragwort via online survey ([Redacted] to follow up).

2. Communications/awareness campaign

The group discussed funding and BHS confirmed that [Redacted] quoted in the first draft of the comms schedule, represented the actual costs. The paper elements such as leaflet printing had been excluded from this figure. Defra mentioned that a case could be made to fund the campaign as evidence gathering. BHS suggested that they would continue to seek funding to cover the costs of the producing leaflets, as this was seen as a key way of encouraging member participation in the survey.

The group also discussed the details of procuring a contract for this work and it was proposed that if the bid was successful, BHS should lead the work project and subcontract as appropriate. Notwithstanding this, the group were also asked to give some thought to other elements for the campaign including coverage in a relevant magazine, design of the survey (plus any associated fees), questions and reporting the analysis of the survey.

Priority actions: Defra initiate the procurement process by drafting the appropriate procurement forms. To supplement this action, BHS ([Redacted]) will draft a detailed proposal for project procurement, taking into account the 2014 and 2015 costs for the campaign.

i) Autumn summit

The group agreed that a summit around late Oct/early November was considered the most preferable. It was also agreed that it would also be helpful to explore more strategic ways

of launching the survey including making the most of our work with FERA to provide a review of evidence and publishing their evidence review alongside the Injurious Weeds report to launch the survey. It was felt that the summit should have an evidence session which included an analysis and highlighted the concerns/perceptions of equine vets. For example on the latter, the findings from the small analysis of pathology samples (already provided by BEVA) and a session on the equine practitioners' view on ragwort would help to promote the summit.

Action: Defra to follow up with Board Secretariat on the availability of Room 808 and to seek advice from Private Office on SoS's availability for Oct/November.

The group also agreed that it would be worth including a session on the welfare aspects associated with ragwort (e.g. abandonment) and the approach taken by trading standards for inspecting hay/haylage and tracking hay bales that might be contaminated with dried ragwort. Whilst there was legislation in place to deal with the safety of feedstuffs it was not clear what the requirements were for bringing a successful prosecution to court or what the penalties were. It was also agreed that a trading standards element could be included in the campaign; as part of the survey, as a summit item or included in the 'tool kit' (i.e. what to look out for in animal forage).

Action: Defra to make contact with [Redacted] (Equine sector council member and Trading Standards) to find out the procedures for checking for ragwort.

Defra informed the group that we had recently met Buglife to update them on our general progress and of the work we were taking forward on the campaign. Buglife were receptive and agreed to forward a list of relevant biodiversity groups who might also be interested in this work. It was also suggested that the scope of the campaign could be broadened to consider biodiversity, for example to gauge whether horse owners would be willing to encourage other pollinator-friendly plants to grow in place of ragwort.

3. Evidence

Update on publication of FERA report of review of evidence on ragwort

The group were advised that this was still under revision. It was also agreed that it would be more appropriate to publish this in tandem with the injurious weeds report to launch the survey/campaign.

Work with HSE – herbicides labelling

Defra had made contact with HSE and were currently exploring changes to the labelling of herbicides including strengthening the existing wording on the clearance of dead/dying weeds treated with herbicide.

4. Date of next meeting

The group agreed to arrange a meeting for early June and to hold a teleconference to discuss any priority issues in the interim.

4. *Notes from meeting Defra-Buglife 29th April 2014*

The meeting between the Sustainable Agriculture Team (Defra) and Buglife was a general exchange of views on the Injurious Weeds policy, with focus on ragwort's incidence.

The main points discussed:

- views on spread
- control methods
- risks to livestock/horse deaths
- welfare issues
- involvement with other colleagues in industry to raise awareness of risks
- general evidence review
- willing to build a more shared understanding amongst all stakeholders
- BHS survey and potential autumn summit
- Law Commission review
- cross compliance provisions for injurious weeds

Protracted e-mail 29th April 2014

From: [Redacted] (Defra)
Sent: 29 April 2014 18:37
To: [Redacted]
Cc: [Redacted]; [Redacted] (DEFRA); [Redacted] (Defra)
Subject: RE: Ragwort

[Redacted],

Thanks to you and [Redacted] for coming to talk to us about ragwort. It was really helpful to hear your views and for us to share our initial thinking on the evidence etc.

Just to confirm, you agreed to forward names of any other organisations, in addition to the ones you mentioned, (i.e. Wildlife trust, Plantlife, RSPB, CeH, National Trust, Butterfly/Bumblebee conservation trusts, [Redacted] (FoE) and Wildlife and Countryside Link), who might be interested in this work. If you could provide us with any additional information at your earliest convenience, we can consider the best way to engage with them over the coming months.

We also discussed the existing evidence on ragwort and you also agreed to put together a short list of any key evidence areas on ragwort that Buglife have identified, and any gaps in the current knowledge/evidence that might be worth exploring.

Thanks again and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

[Redacted]

[Redacted] | Sustainable Agriculture team | Defra | Area 1B, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR Tel: 0207 238 [Redacted] | Email: [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Save paper! Please consider the environment before printing this email

From: [Redacted] [[Redacted]]
Sent: 11 February 2014 14:01
To: [Redacted] (Defra)
Cc: [Redacted]
Subject: Ragwort

Dear [Redacted]

I have an appointment with [redacted] on the afternoon of the 29 April. Would this be soon enough? If so can we pencil in 4pm for our meeting and confirm exact times close to the date.

Is that OK.

Cheers

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Twitter - [Redacted]

[Redacted]– [Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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Annex A

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Annex B

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If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, section 50 of the FOIA and regulation 18 of the EIRs gives you the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Please note that generally the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

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Water Lane
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Cheshire
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