Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

T: 03459 33 55 77 or
08459 33 55 77
helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/defra

Your ref:
Our ref: RFI 6680

Date: 22 July 2014

Dear [Redacted],

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: REQUEST FOR DETAILS OF A MEETING ON RAGWORT HELD ON 20 JANUARY 2014, DEFRA OFFICES, LONDON

Thank you for your request for information about a meeting on ragwort which was held at Defra on 20 January 2014, which we received on 25 June 2014.

As you know, we have handled your request under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs). I have provided the information you have requested (see below) and also a note of a meeting held on 21 February 2014 which should have formed part of the information disclosed in the request to which your current enquiry relates, i.e. '*Minutes of meetings held with stakeholders under the Injurious Weeds Policy*' [reference RFI6634].

The other information you requested is as follows:

1. A copy of a note of a meeting held with stakeholders under Injurious Weeds Policy, dated 20 February 2014;

2. Copies of the 'wish list' of initial suggestions produced in response to action point and copies of any correspondence that were received from attendees at that meeting (attached as a separate document due to size);

3. A copy of the initial list of potential areas for further research on ragwort produced in response to an action point and any comments received as a result. You should note this document and the 'wish list' referred to in point 2 are draft scoping documents, and no activity has been planned or actioned from them to date; and

4. Details relating to correspondence on an action point for *"[redacted] to contact*

POSITIVE ABOUT DISABLED PEOPLE
INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

pathology centre(s) to investigate the scope and possibility for reviewing histopathology records."

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.

Please contact us again if you have any further queries about this letter.

Yours

[redacted]

[redacted]

Ragwort communications campaign
2pm – 3.30pm, 21 February 2014
Room 115 Defra offices, London

Attendees

Equine industry representatives	**Defra**
[Redacted] Animal Health & Welfare Board for England [Redacted] British Horse Society (BHS) [Redacted] British Horse Society (BHS) [Redacted] British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA)	[Redacted]Sustainable Agriculture team [Redacted]Animal Welfare and Dangerous Dogs team [Redacted] Sustainable Agriculture team

A summary of the main points discussed at the meeting are as follows

1. **Action points:** all agreed as discharged.
2. **Communications/awareness campaign**
   - **2.1.** The group discussed the timing of the campaign and the proposed actions to be taken over the summer including a different approach to the comms campaign. It was felt that it was more productive to identify the horse owning community's concerns over ragwort first before launching an educational type campaign. BHS offered to survey their members to assess their perceptions and current understanding about the impacts, risks and any other concerns over management could achieve the desired outcome. Evidence from a survey would be gathered over the summer and possibly extended to take advantage of different evidence sources (such as NFU, wildlife and plant life organisations).
   - **2.2.** Defra informed the group that the Secretary of State was content to hold a summit, but the industry group proposed holding this event at the end of the flowering season and at a suitable time to allow the data from the survey to be collected and analysed. There was general agreement to this approach. Defra also noted that that there had been a Ragwort Awareness Conference held in 2006 and a summit this year could be presented as a 'stocktake' to that event. It was agreed that it would also present good opportunities to discuss a range of issues including a presentation based on FERA's literature review.
   - **2.3.** Whilst the survey was being conducted, there was also scope for a preliminary 'tool kit' to be disseminated to BHS members. This toolkit would contain basic information, for example signposting to NE website or a one page précis of owner/occupier responsibilities. It was agreed that there was sufficient guidance and information in the Ragwort Code of Practice to provide the basis of this summary.

Actions:

- **All –**To consider an initial list of questions for the stakeholder survey. **BEVA** to also explore whether their members could be contacted about ragwort's risks and impact via an online survey;
- **Defra** to explore options for including a précis of owner/occupier responsibilities on ragwort with stakeholder survey;

- **Defra** to clear proposed timing of summit with SoS and to check all diaries for suitable dates in November; and
- **Defra** to liaise with Defra comms colleagues about key messages to convey this season and how this could be done (social media etc.)

3. Resources

3.1. The group acknowledged that some form of financial commitment would be necessary for certain aspects of the campaign. Further resources would also be required to process the data from the survey, but also any face to face discussions industry might have with the hard to reach groups (e.g. travelling communities). No firm commitments were made at this meeting on but all parties agreed to consider this before the next meeting.

Actions:

- **All** – Consider possible funding sources for comms campaign
- **BHS** to scope possible options for funding and disseminating information about the survey to members. BHS ([Redacted]) will also explore other funding opportunities for the campaign.

4. Evidence

4.1. BEVA presented results of a small poll of 14 pathology labs on cases of ragwort poisoning in horses. Out of a total of 14 centres, 10 submitted results gathered from 2008 to 2013. There were 72 cases (approx. 8.3% of total autopsied samples) cases of ragwort poisoning. It was agreed that these findings would be another topic to present at the summit but the data would require further manipulation to show different information (demographic of autopsied samples)

Actions:

- BEVA to consider the level of resource and the required to manipulate this data into a useable format; and
- Defra to check procedures for publication of the FERA literature review the procedure to allow usage by other stakeholders (e.g. inclusion in veterinary research journals etc.).

5. The 3rd meeting of the comms group would be organised for mid-March.

Ragwort Communications campaign group – potential areas for further research

There is no commitment from Defra to fund further research into ragwort at the current time. However, the following is a list of suggested evidence gaps and potential areas for further research in relation to ragwort, its ecology, impacts and control measures.

This list is intended to stimulate discussion into how we might together improve our understanding of the various issues around ragwort. However, it is not meant to be definitive in any way, and we welcome your thoughts on gaps in our knowledge and innovative and collaborative ways in which we could address them.

For ease of reference, the areas for potential research have been broken down into specific groups:

1. *Ragwort ecology, spread and establishment;*
2. *Control and management;*
3. *Impact on livestock health;*
4. *Associated biodiversity and ecosystem services;*

1. Ragwort ecology, spread and establishment

a) Ragwort ecology, seed ecology dispersal and establishment, and associated risk

It is clear that only a very small proportion of ragwort seeds disperse long distances, but the mechanisms for longer-distance transport are not well understood. Nor are the conditions favouring colonisation, establishment and short term fluctuations in abundance. Better understanding of the factors affecting the ecology and seed dispersal of ragwort, could be combined with modelling and consideration of risk to develop a more robust approach for risk assessment. This analysis could be used to highlight potential risks based on, for example, weather conditions in the previous year, giving opportunities to take appropriate action in years and areas where a range of factors combine which are particularly positive for Ragwort growth or spread.

b) Surveillance and monitoring

Available surveillance and monitoring is not able to detect short term changes in abundance and distribution of ragwort. New, cost-effective approaches to data collection including volunteer surveys/citizen science, building on existing initiatives, need to be explored.

2. Control and prevention of Ragwort infestation

a) Pasture, grassland and other land management to prevent/avoid ragwort establishment

Evidence from Europe suggests that several management practices (moving grazing, additional fertilisation of the sward etc.) can have positive effects on reducing ragwort establishment in fields. Testing UK-relevant management options to prevent or reduce ragwort establishment could help in providing evidence for future advice on sward management in England where there is risk of ragwort establishment, or following removal.

3. **Cost-effectiveness of alternative control methods**
   a) There is need for comparative assessment of alternative control methods, including pulling, to test their effectiveness, costs, likelihood of uptake and potential impacts on biodiversity, environment and other interests.

4. **Impact on livestock health**
   a) **Understanding the effects of ragwort on health of affected livestock**

   There is need to build up the evidence base on toxicity of ragwort on horses, cattle and sheep for example and eventual life outcomes. This is a complex area to study due to the mode of action of ragwort poisoning and the difficulty of undertaking controls, options may include analysis of pathological records or testing of slaughtered animals.

5. **Associated biodiversity and ecosystem services**
   a) **Status, distribution and dependence on ragwort of many associated species**

   There is insufficient evidence on many species of invertebrate and fungi associated with ragwort, with respect to their status, trends, distribution and degree of dependence on ragwort. There is a need for reconciliation of the various data sources for host-invertebrate interactions and easier access to up-to-date systematic information on conservation status and distribution of invertebrate species to better understand the importance of ragwort in maintaining populations and the potential impacts of control measures.

6. **Value of ragwort to wider biodiversity and ecosystem services.**
   a) Better understanding of role of ragwort within ecosystem functions, food chains and supporting services such as pollination.

From: {redacted}
Sent: 26 February 2014 20:59
To: [Redacted] [Redacted}
Cc: [Redacted] [Redacted] [Redacted] [Redacted] [Redacted]

Subject: RE: Comms campaign meeting notes

Hi [redacted]

Yes – that is fine. The only thing to add perhaps is that 865 liver samples (biopsy and autopsy combined) were reported back to me – of which 72 were ragwort-related pathology.

All best

[Redacted]

From: [Redacted]
Sent: 27 February 2014 00:55
To: [Redacted]
Cc: [Redacted] [Redacted] [Redacted] [Redacted] [Redacted]
Subject:

RE: Comms campaign meeting notes

Thanks [redacted] – I'll include these points in V2.

[Redacted]: I wasn't sure that I had noted down your main points about the cases of ragwort poisoning correctly – would you mind checking my wording please?

[Redacted]

From: [Redacted]
Sent: 26 February 2014 11:13
To: [redacted]
Cc: [Redacted] [Redacted] [Redacted] [Redacted] [Redacted]
Subject: Re: Comms campaign meeting notes

I have two comments

1. We should reflect that BHS would lead in surveying its members and also reaching out to other equine interests via the Sector Council members
2. I would suggest [redacted] with BEVA HQ if this would be a BEVA sponsored progression or whether BEVA would prefer him to ask as more independent expert advice.

[Redacted]

[redacted]

T: [redacted]
M: [redacted]

Skype: [redacted]
Website: [redacted]
LinkedIn: [redacted]

On 25 Feb 2014, 15:50, [redacted] wrote:

Thanks for coming in to see us last week for a really productive meeting. I have attached a first draft of the notes from that meeting so let me know if you've any amendments to make to it – particularly if there's an important point of detail or action point missing.

I'll be back in touch soon with a date for our next meeting but if there's anything specific you'd like on the agenda, you can forward details on to me.

[redacted]

Email: [redacted]

<14.02.25 Ragwort Stakeholder Group mtg 21 Feb.doc>

2. Annex A

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Annex B

Complaints

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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:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF