

Defra Science Advisory Council (SAC)

Minutes of meeting, 6th November 2025

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair, Professor Rowland Kao, welcomed attendees and reminded members to raise any potential conflicts of interest. Attendance is recorded in annex A.

2. Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) update

Defra's CSA updated the SAC on issues affecting Defra arising over the last month and invited questions from the SAC.

- Baroness Batters' Farming Profitability Review has been delivered to Defra.
- A sludge workshop is scheduled shortly to prepare for February's hackathon. The CSA thanked Professors Bardgett, Kao, Eigenbrod and Owens for their input so far.
- All three anchor days for the national exercise on pandemic preparedness have taken place, with SAC-ED having been stood up to assist and provide advice on the scenario.
- The [Carbon budget and growth delivery plan](#) was published on the 29th October.
- Defra published a summary of responses to the consultation on changing flood funding rules on 14th October [here](#), setting out its funding policy in three key areas, improving balance between maintenance and investment.

3. Cost and Responsibility Sharing

Defra sought strategic advice on evidence gathering in relation to Cost and Responsibility Sharing (CRS) approaches, following earlier engagement with the SAC subgroup for exotic diseases (SAC-ED). The discussion focused on identifying evidence gaps, data needs, and behavioural considerations to inform the development of a CRS framework for animal disease prevention, response, and management.

Potential conflicts of interest were noted on work proposed in this area - Professors Bonneaud and Kao.

The SAC:

- Recommended differentiating between exotic and endemic diseases when designing CRS mechanisms as risk profiles, controllability, and suitable interventions differ significantly.
- Supported linking compensation to biosecurity compliance.

- Highlighted the need for clear and simple evidence-based metrics and transparent processes to maintain trust and engagement from farmers and other stakeholders.
- Suggested barriers to compliance include complexity, administrative burden, and inability to observe farm-level actions cost-effectively at present.
- Suggested exploring insurance-linked incentives but recognised limitations due to small datasets making statistical modelling more difficult. Public - private co-funding models were also discussed.
- Identified key evidence gaps on the effectiveness of biosecurity practices, and economic and social science evidence on the benefits of disease resilience at the farm and wider societal levels.
- Recommended approaches include leveraging existing data and emerging technologies for compliance monitoring, conducting systematic reviews on economic and behavioural evidence, and using modelling - both for rare-event data gaps and scenario testing across different outbreak types.

Overall, the SAC recognised that policy design must be sensitive to the realities of farming life, including time constraints, financial pressures, and trust in institutions and especially Government.

4. Any other business

None were raised.



Annex A: Attendees and apologies

SAC Members

Rowland Kao (Chair)	Nick Hanley
Richard Bardgett	Chris Hauton
Marian Scott	Jane Hill
Camille Bonneaud	Susan Owens
Lisa Collins	Felix Eigenbrod

Defra

Anjali Goswami – Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA)
Exotic Animal Disease Preparedness Team
SAC Secretariat

Devolved administration observers

Johnathon Dalzell – Northern Irish Government Observer
James Skates – Welsh Government Observer

Apologies

Nicola Beaumont – SAC member
Justine Bejta – Deputy Chief Scientific Adviser (DCSA)
Alistair Carson – Northern Irish Government Observer
Mathew Williams – Scottish Government Observer