Report of Meeting of Equine Liaison Group held in Backweston on 11 July 2016

Attendance
DAFM: Martin Blake CVO - Chairman; Michael Sheahan SSVI, Sally Gaynor SSVI; Eoin Ryan SRO, June Fanning SVI, and B. Walsh.

DARDNI: Sam Nelson

INDUSTRY: A. Corbally, T. Connors HSI; A. Munnelly BBA; D. Leadon; N. Hannon, Irish Harness Racing Club; J.O Connor ITBA; Vivienne Duggan Vety. Ireland

Apologies: Eoin Griffin, IRTA.

Mr. Blake opened the meeting by welcoming all in attendance.

1. Minutes of meeting of 11 January 2016
Minutes of meeting of 11 January 2016 were agreed. Minutes will be published on the Departments website http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/animalhealthwelfare/equineliaisongroup/

2. Matter arising
With regard to discussions on veterinary medicines, there have been no changes which needed to be communicated for veterinary medicines. The chairman commented that current legislation was in force and acknowledged that the Department had received a few queries about this. The group was requested to communicate the current legislation to the industry.

3. TPA Update
The Tripartite Agreement (TPA) is reviewed by the 3 Member States every six months.

Dr. Fanning updated the group on the on the outcome of the TPA meeting which took place in the UK, on 31 March 2016. The meeting focused on a number of areas, how the TPA is operating, the uptake of DOCOMs by TPA groups, how the audit was progressing and on a general disease update – no outbreaks in Member States.

- TPA Operations: On foot of the Competent Authorities (CA) meeting France agreed to write to Commission requesting a reduction in the number of consigners which can be entered into Place of Origin.

    Update should minimize data entry errors. Dr. Fanning circulated a note on the change to the relevant stakeholders.
• Uptake of DOCOMs: The Irish and UK thoroughbred industry (racing and breeding) are using the TPA and DOCOMs system on a large scale roll-out. The situation is not as positive for France, due to the fact that only French breeding horses are approved.

• Data download: TPA bodies are issued with monthly downloads of the DOCOMs created on TRACEs in order to facilitate necessary audits. Irish bodies need to improve their quarterly returns; however overall there are few errors reported. France Galop has identified that unapproved Irish/UK shippers are creating DOCOMS for horses leaving France. Potential sanctions for this type of unauthorised use and the unwillingness of France to approve users will be discussed at the next meeting. The type of sanctions applicable for shippers/transporters will need to be looked at in conjunction with the legal implications.

• Portal checks – the Department carried out a number of checks at the ports and found a high level of compliance. The UK and France will be including these in their welfare checks.

   France Galop identified a few issues: UK and Irish premises were being used to assign mares back- designated shippers working quite well. France Galop becoming more open to included Irish shippers

   Next meeting to be held in Ireland 2017

   The chairman commented that the system seems to be working well, there appears to be a few glitches which will need to be addressed.

A summary of TPA movement for 2015 and the first quarter of 2016 were circulated to the group for information. Mr. Leadon commended that the figures may be good for risk analysis re. Diseases etc. if published on web site.

4. Update on Unwanted Horses.
Mr. Sheahan advised the group that the large imbalance between supply and demand for equines over recent years had now largely been corrected.

The number of horses being slaughtered in DAFM or Local Authority supervised plants had reduced considerably from its peak in 2012. The number of stray or abandoned horses being seized by Local Authorities under Control of Horses legislation had also reduced considerably, and the number of equine welfare cases dealt with by DAFM were also significantly reduced.

With a view to developing more long term and sustainable solutions to issues surrounding urban horses, DAFM has allocated substantial funding to various urban horses projects and related initiatives including education projects aimed at encouraging responsible horse ownership. DAFM has also supported a number of subsidized equine castration projects aimed at reducing indiscriminate breeding as well as subsidized Microchipping and passporting clinics.
The equine central database is up and running and is functioning well. At some stage there will be a need to “clean up” the data on the central database. The database has 685,000 records, and it is likely that many of the records relate to horses that are now dead or exported. The CSO figures indicate that there were 240,000 horses in Ireland in 2012. 30,000 horses on average are registered per annum. In some cases there is a lag between year of birth and year of registration e.g. 40% of Horse Sport Ireland registrations are not registered in the year of birth. There is room for improvement surrounding the data and systems in operation for recording horse numbers/movement when compared to the data and systems the Department has for cattle. However when compared to data held 10 years ago the situation is much better.

Registration of premises change of ownership in place seem to be working quite well.

Conclusions
The number of issues surrounding unwanted horses has reduced in recent years and the trend is going in the right direction. Accuracy in recorded data has improved over the past 5 years however there is plenty of room for improvement.

Mr. Leadon enquired whether the Department believed there was sufficient equine slaughter capacity following the consequence of BREXIT. Mr. Sheahan advised the group that based on current slaughter capacity there should not be any issues meeting the slaughter demand.

HSI enquired if it was possible to ascertain the number of horses permanently exported from the DOCOMs, to help calculate the overall number of horses in Ireland. Dr. Fanning advised that there was no way of determining permanent export –v- racing form the information contained on DOCOMs. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that there are a number of animals registered on database but are dead. They remain on the database because their passports have not been submitted. The Department has no access to numbers of horses which die on farms. In addition urban unregistered horses are not included in registration figures. Mr. Sheahan suggested the introduction of an amnesty/incentive scheme to encourage owners to return passports or notify associations of the horses’ deaths.

5. Disease Situation Update
Disease Situation
African Horse Sickness Virus
The OIE have indicated a number of studies into African Horse Sickness Virus (AHS), RVC consortium, in conjunction with Pirbright are heading the studies. RVC consortium presented the outline of one of the studies they have initiated to DAMF and the equine industry regarding various vaccinations. AHS is a major issue of work horses in parts of Africa and has a huge negative impact on the ability of the people to earn a livelihood.
The last outbreak of AHS in Europe occurred in Spain & Portugal in 1980, this was resolved by vaccinating the horses with live vaccines, however live vaccines have their own issues, currently there are 9 stereo-types required to treat the virus.

The consortium identified a few gaps in validating new tests; they are looking at the possibilities of developing new DIVA vaccine, and the possibility of the (European) equine industry in funding the research and development of the vaccines.

As part of the study Pirbright have developed an online survey on vaccine attributes i.e. what attribute might be appealing. RVC requested the Irish Equine Industry to participate in the survey. It was agreed that Bernadette Walsh would forward the e-mail addresses of members of the Equine industry who wished to participate in the survey to RVC.

TB Herpes Virus vaccine
Mr. Leadon advised the meeting that the industry has a full year’s supply TB herpes virus vaccine for use in the control of outbreaks of abortions. Mr. Leadon thanked the Department for its help in resolving the shortfall issues.

6. BREXIT
Discussion was held on the potential impact of BREXIT, the reality of the situation is that nobody knows what lies ahead but we need to be proactive, think about what might happen.

Heathrow is an official Border Inspection Post (BIP) for the EU and a large portion of imports/exports are processed trough Heathrow. One of the main issues from BREXIT is that Heathrow will no longer be an approved Border Inspection Post (BIP) for the EU this will have huge implications for Irish industry, from an equine point of view
- the way the industry moves horses to Newmarket,
- the knock-on effect to tripartite agreement etc.
- UK is a transit hub for the horses exported to other EU Member States from Ireland, with BREXIT horses will have to transit a 3rd country in order to travel to another EU country. There’s a possible alternative of transiting via France, the Department would need to talk to France about logistics etc. before any decision could be taken
- Cross border North/South industry may also be affected.

The general consensus was that it would be better for Irish industry, not just the equine industry if the UK go along the Norway model; however it is important that the Department and the industry make contingency plans to cater for all scenarios.

END