
**Response to the PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC)
Independent Review of the 2001 Foot and Mouth
Disease (FMD) Outbreak in Northern Ireland**

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in Northern Ireland**

**Announced through Ministerial Statement
by Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with responsibility for
Agriculture and Rural Development, Ian Pearson MP**

January 2003

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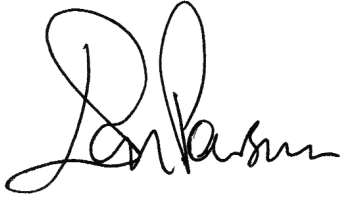
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1. Foreword

1. The outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in Northern Ireland last year presented one of the most serious threats to the agri-food industry in recent years. The extent of the outbreak was limited compared to the experience of many farming communities in Great Britain but was nevertheless devastating for those people most directly affected by the four cases in Northern Ireland.
2. Following on from the outbreak it is important that we learn lessons from the handling of the crisis. The response to FMD by the Executive Committee was one characterised by co-operation and support from all Government Departments and Agencies. The industry and general public were resolute in their support for the work of the Executive and I have no doubt that the degree of determination and spirit shown by the entire community in combating the outbreak was the reason for the eventual containment and eradication of the disease.
3. The review highlights a number of successes in the handling of the disease outbreak. Staff in the Department are to be commended for the resourcefulness shown in responding to FMD. Thanks are also due to all those who worked tirelessly from across the public sector, the agri-food industry and the general public for their support in dealing with the disease.
4. However, the review points up areas where the Department could and should have responded to the crisis better. Lessons have been learned. We need to prepare better. We also need to ensure that our controls are effective, both in terms of livestock movements onto the island of Ireland and within the island; and we also need to collaborate and communicate better to ensure that any future breakdown is tackled speedily and effectively.
5. As evidenced by the increase in funding secured in the recent budget, I am committed to controlling and eradicating animal disease. Through implementation of the European Commission's proposals for a new FMD Directive and through continuing to deliver the work programme that flows from this response we will seek to counter animal disease in partnership with the local industry.
6. In issuing this response I want to pay tribute to Bríd Rodgers for commissioning the independent review and for the way in which she dealt with the 2001 outbreak. It is widely acknowledged across Northern Ireland that Mrs Rodgers played a key role in taking the difficult decisions that were necessary and in leading, in a very public way, the effort against the disease outbreak.

7. I am also grateful to the PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) team for their review and for their many recommendations on how any such future outbreak in Northern Ireland should be handled.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Pearson', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ian Pearson MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State with responsibility for Agriculture and Rural Development

2. Executive Summary

1. The Terms of reference for the independent review of the handling of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in Northern Ireland commissioned by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development were:

"To review the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in Northern Ireland with particular reference to contingency plans, preparedness, cause, spread, handling, logistics, compensation, cross-border issues and trade implications and in light of the lessons learned, to make recommendations to the Minister on how any future outbreak of epizootic disease in Northern Ireland should be handled".

2. The independent review team has made a number of recommendations under various headings aimed at improving the way in which the Department, the wider public sector and the industry responds to any future outbreak of epizootic disease in Northern Ireland.
3. Some of the recommendations are related to specific actions designed to improve our ability to respond to an outbreak and others are more strategic and are aimed at improving the policy and legislative context of any response.
4. This response contains a wide range of actions, commitments and decisions. Inevitably, there are some areas where the Department can only report on work in progress and directions for future work. The Department accepts virtually all the detailed recommendations contained in the PWC report.
5. There are 35 key recommendations. Each of these has a sub-set of comments explaining either the rationale behind the suggested improvement or setting out the issues to be considered when implementing the recommendation.
6. Annex I sets out a summary response to each of the individual recommendations. The summary provides initial comment on the short recommendations which are covered in more detail under the chapter headings in the body of the response.
7. The PWC team was asked specifically to make recommendations on how any future outbreak of epizootic disease should be handled. In their review attention was also focused on prevention and detection of disease.
8. Annex II details the work programme being followed by the Contingency Planning Task Force to revise the contingency plan for epizootic disease.
9. The recommendations contained in the review were broken down into two sub-sets dealing with Contingency Planning and Animal Health Strategy.

10. Section 4.1- 4.7 details the response to the specific recommendations on our preparedness to deal with a similar epizootic disease outbreak in the future. The review emphasises the need for comprehensive and co-ordinated contingency planning arrangements, with all those involved in responding to an emergency situation fully understanding their roles and responsibilities.
11. The review team called for the substantial revision of the current FMD contingency plan and set out recommendations which, if implemented, should ensure that the plan will be more relevant to any future outbreak of epizootic disease in Northern Ireland. The Department accepts that the contingency plan, though approved by the European Commission in 1993, was inadequate to deal with the full scale of the events which took place last year. The structure and operational aspects of the plan are valid however and will be built upon as the process of revision is taken forward.
12. The review team's detailed recommendations on the content of the plan will be implemented. There has been a considerable amount of work done to improve our preparedness since the outbreak of FMD in 2001, however it is clear that more work is required to ensure that any future roll out of the contingency plan is systematic and effective.
13. The key contingency planning recommendations contained in the review concerning the appointment of a Contingency Plan Director and the establishment of a Contingency Plan Task Force have been accepted and implemented.
14. On the issue of containment and eradication measures undertaken by the Department to control the 2001 outbreak it is noted that both the European Commission and the Office International des Epizootics (OIE) have confirmed that the actions taken were in accordance with the provisions of the relevant Council Directive. The OIE's description of DARD's approach as 'appropriate, timely and comprehensive' is welcome.
15. The review team noted problems encountered with the slaughter and disposal process, particularly in the early days of the response to the outbreak. The revised contingency plan addresses these issues. Undoubtedly, the logistical arrangements for ground clearance activities, setting up of cull sites and transport of carcasses need to be detailed and capable of being operated at short notice. The team has recommended that the use of pyres should be restricted with preference given to other means of disposal. The Department accepts this recommendation. The need for utilisation of the skills of the police and the army are also highlighted in the review and accepted by the Department.
16. With regard to valuation and compensation the review team suggested the introduction of a reference-price schedule to be used to determine values for types and categories of animals in order to increase the consistency and transparency of the valuation process. This is an issue that will be subjected to further consideration by the Department.

17. In consideration of the controls operated in respect of the movement of animals during the crisis the PWC team highlighted that the ban on the importation of animals and animal products from Great Britain, introduced by the then Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Bríd Rodgers MLA, was a critical step in the fight against disease spread. The team's recommendations on the maintenance of animal movement standstills are noted. The introduction of restrictions on all animal movements from the 'first strong suspicion' of disease may be a disproportionate response depending on the full circumstances and context of the suspect case. Movement ban options will be kept under constant review therefore and the extent of any universal movement bans will be considered at the appropriate time.
18. The need for stakeholder involvement in the contingency planning process has been given considerable prominence in the review. The Department accepts that the contingency plan for epizootic disease was largely unknown to stakeholders outside DARD when the outbreak of FMD occurred last year. The operation of the plan on the ground and the reported tensions that existed between individual farmers affected by the respective culls and DARD staff highlights the need for communicating and demonstrating the nature of our contingency planning provisions in 'peace time' to ensure that their operation has greater ownership amongst the communities affected.
19. The PWC team has also highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the communication strategy deployed by the Department during the outbreak. It is accepted that a detailed communications strategy picking up the many layers of communication operated during a disease outbreak needs to be developed.
20. In response to the over-arching recommendations concerned with **Contingency Planning** in the review the key points in the Department's response are:
 - A Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease (CPED) Director has been appointed together with a CPED Task Force to assist the process of revising the contingency plan for epizootic disease. DARD will publish the revised plan following consultation with stakeholders, through the Rural Stakeholder Forum, and will train staff and rehearse the operation of the plan to ensure that it can be rolled out as effectively as possible in the case of emergency.
 - An interim Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease (CPED), which will inform discussion with stakeholders, has been placed on the Department's website to coincide with the publication of this response to the PWC review.
 - The recently established 'Stakeholder Forum' will be fully consulted and involved in the process of simulation exercises to test the revised CPED.

- The regional 'Command and Control' structure developed during the latter part of 2001 outbreak, as a contingency for wider incidence of FMD cases, will be further developed and introduced on occurrence of a future epizootic disease outbreak.
- An emergency facility for use by the Veterinary Service as a regional command centre in the event of an outbreak is now available.
- Stores of vital supplies to be used to combat an epizootic disease outbreak are now maintained in a warehouse for use in an emergency situation.
- The FMD Inter-Departmental Group Structure and working practices established during the 2001 outbreak will be reinstated in the event of an emergency.
- DARD will alert the army and police immediately a case of FMD is confirmed to activate their involvement in dealing with the disease outbreak. This will be on the basis of agreements reached during the process of revising the CPED. These liaison arrangements will be reviewed on a regular basis.
- A movement ban across Northern Ireland will be put in place on confirmation of a case of FMD or, depending on the prevailing circumstances, on the basis of considered veterinary advice. The outcome of the Government's cost-benefit study in GB, commissioned to inform decisions on the role of animal movement standstills in the future, will be considered as part of the ongoing review of movement controls in operation in Northern Ireland.
- Disposal of culled animals in future will be by rendering and licensed landfill where possible to avoid the use of pyres to destroy carcasses.
- The Department will continue to require the slaughter of diseased animals and other susceptible animals on the premises and of dangerous contacts as part of a 'stamping out' policy as detailed in EU legislation.
- As part of the revised contingency plan for epizootic disease a human resources strategy is being developed to ensure that staff with the requisite skills are available at short notice to assist the disease control effort.
- Consideration will be given to the use of vaccination to control future disease outbreaks in light of developments in vaccination policy as outlined in the European Commission's proposals for a revised FMD Directive.
- A Communications Strategy will form part of the agreed arrangements for communicating information both within Government and with the public during the course of a disease outbreak.

- To improve arrangements for the slaughter of cull animals 11 members of Veterinary Service staff have been selected to form a slaughter team for use in the event of an epizootic disease outbreak. Appropriate weapons and ammunition have been procured and training provided.
21. Section 4.8 – 4.11 details the response to the recommendations contained in the review dealing with the strategic framework within which an outbreak of epizootic disease is handled. The review team has made a number of recommendations on issues such as port and airport controls, legislation, animal health strategy, organisational structures and biosecurity.
 22. The review team has recommended the introduction of a Northern Ireland Animal Health Strategy as part of an over-arching All-Island Animal Health Strategy. As part of the strategy the review team endorsed the 'Vision for the Future of the Agri-Food Industry' Report recommendation that an objective assessment of the animal health status of Northern Ireland should be undertaken and also recommend that this should be extended to an all-island assessment. The team suggested that any revised contingency plan should be placed within the context of this wider Animal Health Strategy. With regard to the development of an All-Island Animal Health Strategy the team also recommended that an all-island multi-sectoral stakeholder group should be established to provide input to the strategy and broaden its ownership beyond the public sector.
 23. Having examined the origin of the disease outbreak in Northern Ireland through the illegal importation of sheep the review highlights the need to strengthen the controls at ports and airports compared with those that existed 'pre-FMD'. The team also recommended a review and strengthening at UK level of controls on both commercial and personal imports. This is an area that has been addressed by the Government in response to the FMD Inquiries carried out in Great Britain.
 24. In their review the consultants observed that the implementation of tighter controls at ports and airports will provide the necessary assurances to the agri-food industry which in turn should lead to greater adherence to best practice with regard to biosecurity at farm level. Clearly, the industry must lead the effort to improve biosecurity, in their own interests.
 25. On the question of organisational structures within DARD the review team highlighted the perceived existence of a 'silo mentality' between the various divisions within DARD which tended to limit the efficiency of the response to the FMD outbreak. The team advocated the establishment of an Animal Health Strategy Group as part of the Department's wider modernisation efforts.
 26. It is noted by the review team that the legislative framework for dealing with an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease is largely based on European Community Law. The emergence of European Commission proposals for a revised EC FMD Directive provides an opportunity to update the legislative base for dealing with future disease outbreaks. The team has

recommended a review of existing legislative provision leading to consolidation within a new Animal Health Order and Animal Welfare Order.

27. The PWC team endorsed a number of 'Vision Report' recommendations aimed at securing the adoption of practices that will improve biosecurity at farm level. The team encourages the industry to operate 'fortress farming' as part of their ongoing routine and not just as a response to a disease outbreak.

28. In response to the recommendations under the broad heading of **Animal Health Strategy** the key points in the Department's response are:

- A Northern Ireland Animal Health Strategy is being developed. The Strategy will be developed alongside the GB Animal Health and Welfare Strategy, and will, as far as possible, be complementary to it.
- Discussions are taking place with the intention of setting up an All-Island industry forum to provide input to the development of the All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy.
- The work of the All-Island Animal Health Working Groups will include agreement on a 'common chapter' in the respective contingency plans in operation in both jurisdictions.
- An Animal Health Strategy Group has been established within DARD to agree priorities and co-ordinate actions in the field of animal health and welfare across the policy, agri-food, science and veterinary services of the Department.
- An Animal Health Bill Team has been established to consider existing legislative provision to deal with epizootic disease emergencies and to consider the scope and nature of possible future animal health and welfare legislation.
- A NI Veterinary Surveillance Strategy is being developed, as part of both the UK and All-Island surveillance arrangements.
- The publicity campaign on illegal imports launched in August 2002 will continue with a new campaign aimed at alerting travellers to new EU rules being introduced.
- Under new EU rules, coming into force on 1 January 2003, personal imports of meat, meat products, milk and milk products will be prohibited for travellers entering the UK from outside the European Union.
- The NI Veterinary Service Portal Inspection Team has been strengthened from 19 to 52 staff members. There is now 24hr/7day inspection cover at Belfast & Larne ports. The complement of staff required to ensure appropriate portal inspection arrangements are in place will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

- All FMD susceptible livestock imports are currently channeled through Larne port only. All sailings to Warrenpoint and scheduled flights to Belfast City, Belfast International and City of Derry airports are now covered by portal staff.
- There is now improved reconciliation of imported animals through to destination. 'Direct for Slaughter' imports are verified at slaughter plants.
- Documentary (and welfare) checks are now in place. A proportion of livestock, imported for breeding, are unloaded at Larne and physical (species, breed) and identity checks undertaken.
- Portable vehicle cleansing and disinfection capacity at ports has been retained. Large automatic machines will be stored and maintained for further deployment as required.
- A computer database is now used to record all livestock imports, inspections carried out and follow-up action at point of destination.
- An All-encompassing NI biosecurity code will be developed.

3. Introduction

1. The epidemic of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) in 2001 was not only an outbreak of a serious livestock disease with the inevitable losses and suffering for the farming industry but also had an impact on the everyday lives of the entire community in Northern Ireland.
2. Everyone with an interest in the future of farming and the wider rural economy will want to learn the lessons of the 2001 FMD outbreak. The implementation of the recommendations contained in the independent review of the outbreak in Northern Ireland affords an opportunity for the industry and Government to make changes that will hopefully ensure that the experience of 2001 is not repeated.
3. In accepting most of the recommendations in the review, the Department is signing up to measures designed to reduce the risk of FMD virus entering Northern Ireland and an action plan to improve the way any subsequent outbreak is handled. The recommendations will be implemented in an open way, consulting with all who have a view on the matter and building a new framework in which outbreaks of disease such as FMD can be handled in partnership with the farming industry, rural dwellers and all other concerned parties.
4. The PWC report was issued to stakeholders. Actions emanating from the review, such as revision of our contingency planning arrangements, proposed legislative changes and the development of an All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy will be the subject of consultation with stakeholders. This is not a final once and for all response but maps out future programmes of work which should prevent such an outbreak arising again, or at least ensure that it can be combated more effectively.

Background

5. Alongside the very severe outbreak of FMD in Great Britain during 2001 disease outbreaks were recorded in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, the Netherlands and France.
6. The outbreak experienced in Great Britain was unprecedented. Undoubtedly the time delay between the outbreak of disease in England and its subsequent detection in Northern Ireland gave the Executive in Northern Ireland an opportunity to attempt to get ahead of the disease. This 'window' was regrettably not afforded to colleagues in Great Britain.
7. The experience of Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001 has caused Governments across the world to revisit their contingency planning arrangements to deal with epizootic disease outbreaks. The European Commission has brought forward proposals for a directive which will seek to deliver a comprehensive European Union approach to combating FMD.

8. The review of FMD in Northern Ireland must be seen in the wider context of potential EU policy changes and scientific commentary on animal disease prevalence and spread. As recommendations are implemented to address issues of relevance to Northern Ireland the lessons learned from other outbreaks and recommendations made in other reports and inquiries will have to be considered to ensure that Northern Ireland keeps alert to the threat of epizootic disease and abreast of the best veterinary and scientific expertise to combat disease.

Link to Other Reviews

9. When considering the response to the PWC report and, perhaps more importantly, when implementing the recommendations contained therein, account will be taken of recommendations contained in other reports including:

Vision for the Future of the Agri-Food Industry Report;

The Foot and Mouth Disease Crisis and the Irish Border Report by the Centre for Cross Border Studies;

Lessons Learned Inquiry into the 2001 Epidemic of FMD, chaired by Dr Iain Anderson; and the

Royal Society's Inquiry into Infectious Diseases, chaired by Professor Sir Brian Follett

10. A description of the terms of reference, working methods, timing and key findings of each report are contained in Appendix D of the PWC review.

4. Response to Recommendations

4.1 Contingency Planning

- 4.1.1. The work to ensure that Northern Ireland was better placed to deal with any subsequent outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) commenced during the latter half of our response to the 2001 outbreak. Lessons were learned during the outbreak and plans to implement a command and control structure to deal with further outbreaks were put in place at that time should the need have arisen.
- 4.1.2. There is a considerable amount of work to be done to revise the contingency plan for epizootic disease (CPED), consult on its content and test and validate the plan. Having now received the detailed recommendations in the PWC report and taken account of additional commentary contained in the GB 'Lessons Learned' and 'Royal Society' reports the Department is well placed to take forward that task. The recently announced review of the Veterinary Service, which will examine the relationship between the service and the rest of the Department, may have implications for the organisational structures set out in the revised contingency plan.
- 4.1.3. In response to the PWC report a veterinarian has been appointed as the Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease Director within the Department. The Director, reporting to the Policy Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer (DCVO) and the Animal Health Strategy Group in the Department, will continue the revision of the contingency plan for epizootic disease. The full implementation of the plan will be taken forward in accordance with the detailed recommendations contained in the PWC Report.
- 4.1.4. A Contingency Plan Task Force has been established. Annex II sets out the action required to develop a new Northern Ireland contingency plan for epizootic disease.
- 4.1.5. The timescale for publishing the fully revised version of the contingency plan for epizootic disease is as follows:

Action	Deadline
Publish revised interim contingency plan for comment by stakeholders	22 January 2003
Consultation on revised plan with other Government Departments	By 29 January 2003
Consultation with GB Government Departments	By 13 February 2003
Consultation with DAF, Rol	By 20 February 2003

Response to the PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) Independent Review of the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) Outbreak in Northern Ireland

Action	Deadline
Forum meeting to invite contribution and comment from wide range of stakeholders	By 20 March 2003
Table-top exercise to test revised contingency plan involving key stakeholders	By 24 April 2003
Final version of revised contingency plan published	By 30 June 2003

- 4.1.6. The contingency plan, when fully revised, will be a living document requiring ongoing update and augmentation as new policies are developed and exercises completed.
- 4.1.7. It is clear that during the early days of the response to the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in Northern Ireland the response to the emerging crisis was not as systematic as it might have been. Perhaps the greatest gap in the contingency plan then in place was that it failed to adequately engage staff in the Department, beyond the Veterinary Service, as to what was required to implement the plan in the event of a major disease outbreak. However, although the plan was consistent with and approved by the European Commission, an outbreak of the scale experienced with FMD in GB during 2001 had simply not been envisaged as a real risk previously.
- 4.1.8. Following the outbreak of the disease in GB there was obvious recognition of the potential catastrophe facing Northern Ireland by the then Minister, Permanent Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Departmental Management Board. During early consideration of the emerging crisis the need to take preventative action in the hope of preventing the disease from entering Northern Ireland was agreed. The need to provide advice to farmers and the wider industry was also agreed. The way in which all sectors of the agri-food industry responded and their preparedness to work with the Department in such a constructive manner to deal with the emerging situation was a particularly successful aspect of the handling of the disease.
- 4.1.9. Following confirmation of the first outbreak of FMD in Northern Ireland on 1 March 2001 a working structure was quickly instituted with various layers to enable veterinarians in the field to deal with the local disease situation. The establishment of groups including a top level Departmental Group headed by the then Minister, an Inter-Departmental Group established to look at cross-cutting issues and an industry group was instrumental in bringing cohesion to the effort to eradicate the disease.

- 4.1.10. The involvement of the full Executive through regular update meetings and the Assembly through meetings between the Minister and the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee each week and statements given to the full Assembly on a weekly basis augmented the exchange of information and added to the decision-making process to deal with the outbreak immensely. It is hoped that the joint approach taken in dealing with the outbreak will ensure that the process of drawing up the revised contingency plan is one which will attract the support and interest of a wide cross-section of the entire community. The subsequent validation of the contingency plan will be conducted through the initiation of simulation exercises designed to test the plan for operational effectiveness. The programme of exercises planned will provide training opportunities for those involved in dealing with an outbreak as well as testing the efficacy of the plan.
- 4.1.11. The readiness of many Government Departments, agencies and district councils to provide personnel to support the effort to deal with the 2001 outbreak is perhaps understated in the PWC review. There is no doubt that the corporate commitment by the Executive Committee was an important factor in dealing with the outbreak. Deployment issues are an important part of the work to revise contingency plan arrangements. The Department acknowledges that the resources deployed to fight FMD were freely offered from a variety of sources and is a further reminder of the extent to which the effort to combat the disease was one by the whole community.
- 4.1.12. The Department is determined to ensure that all those involved as operational partners in the contingency planning process should understand their roles and be able to contribute to developing the contingency plan.
- 4.1.13. Ensuring the participation of private veterinary practitioners (PVPs) in any disease outbreak scenario will be addressed through consultation with PVPs as key stakeholders in a new contingency plan.
- 4.1.14. It is accepted that the development of a resource plan to ensure that Northern Ireland has the legal and administrative framework in place to respond to a disease outbreak is imperative. The development of a detailed Operational Plan to ensure that veterinary and other staff throughout Northern Ireland have a complete set of instructions to deal with any future outbreak is also accepted. The resource intensive nature of drawing up both documents is also acknowledged.
- 4.1.15. Contingency plans are of course not only concerned with operational issues. They reflect and build on disease control policies. The revised contingency plan will be based on current disease control policies which include time targets for carrying out the slaughter of animals on infected premises, implementation of a Northern Ireland wide movement standstill of susceptible livestock and policies for the disposal of carcasses. If policies change, the contingency plan will be reviewed and amended accordingly.

4.1.16. As part of the revision of our contingency planning arrangements a range of disease control options will be explored and made available. Each disease outbreak is different, each has to be tackled at speed and often with imperfect information. There is therefore a need for a flexible approach, which recognises that different approaches may be needed in different geographical areas or to deal with different diseases or different species.

4.1.17. Decisions on the different types of disease control strategies will include consideration of factors such as:

- strain of disease and its infectivity;
- species involved and stocking density;
- types of farms and topography in the area(s) involved;
- seasonal factors, e.g. volume of animal movements; and
- environmental/climatic conditions (e.g. airborne spread).

alongside wider issues such as the:

- availability of human resources (veterinary, slaughter teams etc.)
- availability of physical resources (e.g. for carcass disposal or of vaccine stocks);
- legal framework, public opinion, stakeholder views; and
- economic considerations.

4.1.18. Another key component of disease control and preparedness is the role of veterinary surveillance. Work to develop a NI Veterinary Surveillance Strategy is underway in order to:

- enable prompt recognition and appropriate response to disease outbreaks;
- enable the effectiveness of control measures for diseases or infections to be assessed;
- enable the early recognition of important trends to inform risk management policies; and
- enable the identification of new potential hazards.

4.1.19. An important part of this work is the development of the systems needed to improve data collection and management.

4.1.20. The strategy will build on the strengths and address the weaknesses of the current approach to veterinary surveillance. It will link to public health and food safety surveillance, and deliver better integration with research.

4.1.21. There are five strategic goals:

- to strengthen collaborations between the providers, users and beneficiaries of veterinary surveillance;
- to develop a transparent and open prioritisation process;
- to derive better value from surveillance information and activities;
- to share information more widely; and
- to enhance the quality assurance of outputs.

4.1.22. On the island of Ireland, the disease surveillance programmes North and South are broadly similar, based as they are on EU requirements and founded in a common interest to facilitate exports of animals and animal products from the two parts of the island.

4.1.23. As part of the process of developing an All-Island Animal Health Strategy, it has been agreed to develop the priorities within an animal disease surveillance strategy for the island of Ireland.

4.1.24. It is envisaged that both the NI and All-Island disease surveillance strategy will cover all major diseases, and will be compatible with the UK Veterinary Surveillance Strategy recently published.

4.1.25. With regard to North/South preparedness, through ongoing work being taken forward by the All-Island Animal Health Working Groups a 'common chapter' between the Northern Ireland Contingency Plan and the plan in place in the Republic of Ireland is to be agreed to highlight the need for joint action and co-operation in response to any future epizootic disease outbreak.

4.1.26. The experience of the 2001 outbreak has led to a significant number of changes within the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) with regard to their contingency planning arrangements including:

- the development of an Emergency Preparedness Programme to oversee a wide range of work on contingency planning,
- the introduction of a protocol for managing the increase in staff numbers in emergencies,
- the development of set criteria by which Government would make choices between different control strategies during an outbreak and;
- the establishment of a new Science Advisory Group to, amongst other things, keep risk issues under review and set up robust arrangements for providing advice to the DEFRA Chief Scientific Adviser in an emergency.

All of these measures will provide a rich source of advice, guidance and practical support to the Department in Northern Ireland as it revises its contingency plan.

- 4.1.27. The expertise of the Government's Civil Contingencies Secretariat, set up in July 2001, will be utilised by the Task Force drawing up the revised contingency plan. It is acknowledged, based on the experience of the 2001 outbreak in Northern Ireland, that whilst individual Government departments have their own contingency plans, significant emergencies rarely follow departmental boundaries. As the Food Standards Agency is part of the Civil Contingencies framework, any new or emerging food safety risk issues will be dealt with effectively during a crisis. The Central Emergency Planning Unit of the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFM/DFM) will provide local expertise to the Task Force set up to revise the Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease (CPED).

4.2 Containment and Eradication

- 4.2.1. The introduction of FMD virus to Northern Ireland was a massive setback to the entire farming sector and wider community. However, the PWC Review team acknowledge, quoting from comments given to them by the European Commission, the 'appropriate, timely and comprehensive' approach adopted by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in seeking to eradicate the disease.
- 4.2.2. Recent experience of FMD demonstrates the importance of having a local screening capacity. Serological testing, in terms of its value to the confidence in the containment of the outbreak and the rapid clearance of zones around infected premises cannot be overstated. The ability of Veterinary Sciences Division of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to test over 500,000 blood samples for the presence of FMD antibody was a tremendous advantage in the effort to eradicate the disease.
- 4.2.3. As part of recently announced plans to modernise the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), partly in response to the O'Hare Review of the arrangements for the provision of agri-food education and R&D in Northern Ireland, the need for the Department to retain core analytical and diagnostic provision for emergency response and surveillance purposes was acknowledged and accepted.
- 4.2.4. The Pirbright Reference Laboratory for FMD in England will continue to be the primary diagnostic laboratory for FMD for these islands. However, the facilities and skills to prepare us to deal with other epizootic diseases such as Classical Swine Fever, Newcastle Disease and Avian Influenza exist in NI at present. The maintenance of such facilities has the added advantage of ensuring that we can access and apply newly developed test techniques for the future benefit of the local industry.
- 4.2.5. The practical capacity to undertake local screening of blood samples and maintenance of the skills to conduct tests will be retained in Northern Ireland. This maintenance of local capacity should be allied to ongoing monitoring of the latest scientific developments in screening technology.
- 4.2.6. In response to the Review Team's recommendation that the Veterinary Service Enforcement Unit should be strengthened, arrangements are in hand to recruit an additional 12 staff members to a Central Veterinary Enforcement Team
- 4.2.7. The Central Veterinary Enforcement Team is responsible for enforcing animal health legislation while the Department's Central Investigation Service (CIS) provides the department and its agencies with fraud investigative services on a wide range of programmes.

- 4.2.8. Both areas require expertise in their own field to ensure that breaches of regulation or fraud are thoroughly investigated and properly prosecuted as appropriate. The current structures meet business needs. Both teams are being augmented with additional staff over the coming months and as part of this expansion, the scope to establish a single DARD Prosecutions Branch, as suggested by PWC, is being examined. The final decision to prosecute is of course a decision of the Director of Public Prosecutions.
- 4.2.9. Whilst the PWC team did not address the individual merits of vaccination policy, it is accepted that exploration of this issue at European Union level by the Commission is likely to result in substantial debate on the merits of various vaccination options. There are a variety of vaccination options open to deployment as part of any response to an outbreak of FMD.
- 4.2.10. During the 2001 outbreak of FMD in Northern Ireland the use of vaccination was not favoured, it was accepted however that the scope for its introduction had to remain as an option in the fight against the virus. The lack of support from the agri-food industry to vaccination on the grounds that the saleability of products from vaccinated animals would prove problematic was a significant factor in deciding not to pursue a vaccination policy. The trade implications of implementing a vaccination policy for a region such as Northern Ireland, with its heavy dependence on exports, needs to be weighed carefully during such considerations.
- 4.2.11. The relatively limited nature of the Northern Ireland outbreak of FMD in 2001 meant that the accepted EU response of 'stamping out' the disease could be followed without recourse to other options such as ring vaccination, as used in the Netherlands as a means of managing disposal (with all vaccinated animals subsequently slaughtered).
- 4.2.12. In their report into infectious diseases the Royal Society took the view that "rapid culling of infected premises and known dangerous contacts, combined with movement controls and rapid diagnosis, will remain essential to controlling FMD and most other infectious diseases", but "in many cases this will not be sufficient to guarantee that the outbreak does not develop into an epidemic". It also accepts that much work needs to be done on what the potential of vaccination might be, "emergency vaccination should now be considered as part of the control strategy from the start of any outbreak of FMD". (Royal Society key recommendation 7). The Department accepts this and the other central recommendations on disease control of the Lessons Learned and Royal Society inquiries.
- 4.2.13. The Lessons Learned and Royal Society inquiries investigated the issues involved in employing emergency vaccination. Between them they highlighted a range of significant questions that would need to be addressed, particularly as regards vaccination-to-live, but concluded that

once these were resolved, the option of emergency vaccination to live should be the preferred approach.

- 4.2.14. The Department accepts that if emergency vaccination is used it should be on the basis of vaccinate-to-live wherever possible. As the inquiry reports recognise, there is still a lot of work to be done on the testing, on logistics and on marketability of products from vaccinated animals to make emergency vaccination-to-live a fully viable option. European Union legislation will be a determining factor in some of these areas.
- 4.2.15. The Department is completely satisfied that meat and meat products from vaccinated animals can enter the food chain. The Food Standards Agency advise that the health implications from eating meat, milk or other produce from animals that have been treated with authorised FMD vaccines are negligible.
- 4.2.16. Emergency vaccination can only take place as the subject of EU decision. In order for a vaccination strategy to be fully effective there would need to be a concerted EU approach and a new legislative framework at EU level. The UK Government will actively pursue with the Commission the need for a new framework for the use of vaccination and for research effort on FMD and animal disease across the EU.
- 4.2.17. The EU's current policy of 'FMD free without vaccination' status for all Member States will be reflected in the revised contingency plan.
- 4.2.18. The Commission's proposals for a revised Council Directive on FMD reflects an orientation away from vaccination being viewed as a weapon of last resort. Should a form of vaccination in response to a disease outbreak become a more accepted means of controlling disease in future outbreaks across the EU it will not of course signal scope to weaken efforts to keep FMD virus out of the EU and away from susceptible animals.

4.3 Slaughter and Disposal

- 4.3.1. The slaughter of just over 50,000 animals during the outbreak of FMD in Northern Ireland during 2001 was a harrowing experience for all concerned but particularly so for the farmers who owned the animals.
- 4.3.2. The need for speed when implementing a 'slaughter policy' to deal with FMD is paramount. The Department officials responsible for dealing with each of the four outbreaks are to be commended for ensuring that animals requiring to be culled were slaughtered humanely and effectively and in as timely a way as was possible.
- 4.3.3. The reported problems encountered with the slaughter and disposal process, particularly in the early stages of the outbreak, are regrettable. To address the very practical issue of ensuring that staff are trained and equipped to deal with the job of slaughtering diseased or suspect animals a team of 11 has been selected and has undertaken training. Equipment, appropriate for the task of slaughtering animals of different species, has been procured by DARD.
- 4.3.4. Animal welfare issues will be considered as part of the revision of the Department's contingency plan. In the case of a disease outbreak or emergency where animals are killed, the plan will include the already well established procedures to maintain welfare standards during emergency slaughter. The plan will also look at the wider welfare impact of culling - culling can of course have a welfare benefit if it shortens the time course of the outbreak.
- 4.3.5. During the course of the disease outbreak in 2001 the movement regime was changed on a number of occasions to include transfer to slaughter and farm to farm movement on the grounds of animal welfare. Incremental changes were also made to deal with specific circumstances such as moving lambing ewes to their home farm and weaning pigs to fattening units. These measures were introduced, after veterinary risk assessments, to alleviate animal welfare concerns.
- 4.3.6. The role of private contractors to undertake work in connection with the slaughter of animals or provision of rendering facilities or licensed burial sites will be addressed in the revised contingency plan.
- 4.3.7. The support of the army in helping to prepare pyres and burial sites was a tremendous asset in the effort to contain and eradicate FMD virus. The logistical expertise of army personnel was invaluable in ensuring tasks were completed efficiently.
- 4.3.8. The liaison arrangements put in place during the outbreak between the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the army and police worked well. Staff who worked with army and police personnel at their HQ base located in the Department's Head Office benefited greatly from their logistical and organisational expertise. The intervention of military support assisted greatly with the establishment

of systematic communication protocols. These control and command principles were built upon as part of the handling structure that emerged during the second half of the disease control effort in preparation for any further outbreaks. As part of the process of revising the contingency plan discussions are taking place with the PSNI and Army to establish clearly their potential roles in any future disease outbreak.

- 4.3.9. As part of the arrangements being examined towards the end of the Northern Ireland FMD outbreak, a great deal of work was undertaken to establish the most suitable burial site options available in the event of a widespread disease outbreak. It is welcome to note that these arrangements did not have to be progressed.
- 4.3.10. Work on disposal options is particularly important in the light of the concerns that carcase disposal generated during the 2001 outbreak. The need to avoid the use of pyres to dispose of carcasses is agreed. Options for rendering will be considered as part of revised contingency planning arrangements. Disposal plans must be set in the context of the current and developing legislative framework and will therefore involve those responsible for waste disposal policies.

4.4 Valuation of Animals and Compensation

- 4.4.1. The rationalisation of compensation arrangements is not only an issue under discussion as part of the review of the handling of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) but has also featured heavily in recently completed reviews of Bovine Tuberculosis and Brucellosis policy.
- 4.4.2. Unlike GB, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland has its own Departmental valuers. The recommendation to move to a reference-price schedule to determine compensation levels for animal diseases is noted. The issue will have to be subjected to further detailed analysis as part of an examination of compensation provisions for animal disease generally. In Great Britain the introduction of Standard Valuations during last year's FMD crisis, in an effort to speed up the valuation process, was not successful. Livestock owners retained the option of having individual valuation and the majority did so. However, it is likely that the establishment of an all-encompassing system that would pre-determine animal disease compensation rates, that was agreed by the industry in 'peace time', would prove more acceptable in an emergency situation.
- 4.4.3. It is noted that the operation of the price reference schedule could prove problematic in the case of an epizootic disease outbreak requiring the cessation of markets for a period. The experience of Standard Valuations in GB demonstrated that the absence of markets in effect withdrew a benchmark for the valuers which meant that Standard Valuations tended to set a floor on the market. In addition, during an epizootic disease outbreak, many animals are slaughtered at a time in their life when they would not normally be slaughtered or sold, such as the peak of their reproduction cycle. The Department is keen to address these issues in discussion with stakeholders.
- 4.4.4. The Department accepts that changes are needed to the way in which compensation arrangements for slaughtered animals are operated, both in the principles involved and in the administration. Any change to existing arrangements are likely to take place alongside the establishment of a definitive movements regime and continuing progress against the risk of importing animal disease through illegal imports.
- 4.4.5. In response to the PWC team's recommendation, it is not considered appropriate to adjust the existing provision to allow farmers to receive top-up payments to compensate for movements in prices upwards from the time of slaughter to the time of restocking. The introduction of such provision would be bureaucratic to administer and would require examination of compensation levels in the circumstance when prices were lower at the time of restocking than at the time of slaughter.
- 4.4.6. The proposal to link the rate of animal compensation payments to compliance with biosecurity measures as referred to by the PWC team was an issue considered as part of the work on the new Animal Health

Act for England and Wales. However, the provisions dealing with 'adjusted compensation' arrangements were subsequently removed from the final text of the Act. This issue will be examined further in light of discussions with the agri-food industry and other stakeholders towards the development of a Northern Ireland biosecurity code.

- 4.4.7. The PWC Team's recommendation to review the management structure within which the DARD valuation officers operate, with a further proposal to appoint a senior valuations officer, will be considered in light of progress on rationalisation of the compensation regime.

4.5 Control of Animals, People and Vehicle Movements

- 4.5.1. The decision to implement a ban on the movement of animals and animal products coming from Great Britain to Northern Ireland has been recognised by the PWC review team as one of the key steps taken to control the scale of the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in Northern Ireland.
- 4.5.2. The raft of movement controls introduced in the wake of the disease outbreak within Northern Ireland resulted in great hardship for livestock producers but undoubtedly were essential in containing the spread of the disease. The way in which the public responded positively to the inconvenience of having vehicles sprayed at ferry terminals is further evidence of the remarkable good will from the general public shown towards the farming community during the outbreak.
- 4.5.3. Notwithstanding the merit of animal movement controls the suggestion by the review team that, in any subsequent outbreak, all animal movements should be restricted from the first "strong suspicion of disease" may be a disproportionate response depending on the full circumstances and context of the suspect case. The priority in such a circumstance would be to declare the premises an infected place and impose local movement restrictions. Forward and backward tracing of animals on and off the farm would then commence. The appropriateness of any measures taken are kept under review depending on a range of prevailing circumstances. As risk analysis forms part of the Veterinary Service's role in providing advice to the Minister, any future potential disease cases will be dealt with in the most appropriate way deemed suitable to provide the necessary protection and assurance to the industry and general public, depending on the circumstances at the time.
- 4.5.4. In the circumstance where an outbreak is confirmed in Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland the merits of imposing a complete ban on animal movements would be considered.
- 4.5.5. The imposition of animal movement standstill periods is an issue which, whilst providing a heightened degree of biosecurity, should be considered in the context of the prevailing threat of disease. Movement controls in Northern Ireland have been kept under review since the FMD outbreak and adjustments to the movement policy made solely on the basis of veterinary advice.
- 4.5.6. The movement control regime in operation at any given time will of course be augmented by improvements in ID, traceability and biosecurity in the fight against animal disease.
- 4.5.7. The movements regime in operation in Northern Ireland needs to move to a balanced post-FMD one which is widely understood and supported. The Department believes, based on the scientific, veterinary and other advice available to it, that it will not be appropriate to return to the

pre-FMD position. Despite the improvements being made, absolute import protection will be impossible to achieve, therefore it is considered that some form of movement controls will be needed in the long term.

- 4.5.8. The link between animal movements, particularly those of sheep, in the GB outbreak of FMD highlights to the industry the merits of having in place more effective means of controlling such movements.
- 4.5.9. In response to the Lessons Learned inquiry in GB the Government has accepted a recommendation to carry out a detailed risk assessment and wide-ranging cost-benefit analysis, to balance the disease control benefits against the economic effects on the livestock sector and the wider rural community. The Royal Society report also recommended that the Government should undertake a cost-benefit analysis of various standstill periods. The Government has fully accepted these recommendations, and has commissioned a wide-ranging study in GB to inform a decision on the role movement controls should play in the future. The study has a number of strands including:
- an assessment of the risk of FMD strains entering the UK and reaching susceptible livestock;
 - studies to model the potential impact of such an introduction of virus into the UK, comparing a range of variations to the 20 day standstill rule to see which would provide best protection; and
 - an economic assessment of the implications of the 20 day standstill and variations to it. This will include the impact on livestock markets and the rural economy generally, as well as on the cattle and sheep sectors.
- 4.5.10. The outcome of the Government's cost-benefit study will be considered as part of the ongoing review of movement controls in operation in Northern Ireland.
- 4.5.11. On the development of an identification system for sheep there will be consultation on the proposed arrangements set out in the European Commission's recently published proposals requiring the individual identification of sheep. longer term, it is hoped that an electronic system of identification will be introduced.
- 4.4.12. Traceability of animals through the Department's computer-based Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS) was useful for forward and backward tracing of animals connected to outbreak farms. Recommendations contained in the 'Vision Report' concerning enhancements to the APHIS system are being taken forward and should, when complete, assist the process of tracing livestock in a disease outbreak situation.

4.6 Stakeholder Interaction

- 4.6.1. As referred to earlier, the degree of stakeholder involvement in the contingency planning arrangements for an outbreak of FMD was negligible. The need to engage with stakeholders at an early stage in policy development and to maintain an ongoing link is accepted. The revision of the contingency plan affords an opportunity to build in ways to ensure that farmers better understand the need to cull animals should they be faced with such a prospect in respect of their own livestock in the future. For the contingency plan to take full effect the livestock industry must participate, contribute and co-operate in full partnership with all statutory agencies.
- 4.6.2. The problems described by the PWC review team of farmers' feelings of isolation during the process of having to have their animals culled is a matter of regret to the Department.
- 4.6.3. The need for veterinarians to operate with haste and efficiency in the circumstances of a cull is imperative. It appears from information presented in the review that on occasion there was a lack of sensitivity on the part of veterinarians in their dealings with the farmers affected.
- 4.6.4. Training aimed at improving the communication skills of veterinarians will be incorporated into the revised contingency planning arrangements. However, it may be that in the event of a further outbreak of FMD the extent to which veterinary service staff will be able to assist farmers in the stressful circumstances of a cull will be to direct those affected to the appropriate professional services.
- 4.6.5. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development gave financial support to the Health Action Zone project to help address rural stress issues prior to the FMD outbreak and this support has been maintained. Without prejudice to future funding commitments, the Department is receptive to doing what it can to help alleviate stress associated with rural isolation and general difficulties being experienced by the farming community.
- 4.6.6. The instigation of stakeholder group meetings to provide situation reports to key industry representatives and report on progress in the fight against the disease outbreak is commented upon favourably in the PWC report. The nature of the relatively small and integrated agri-food industry in Northern Ireland made it possible to assemble, brief and discuss issues with the small number of known key players and stakeholders at short notice. The positive feedback from representatives of the different sectors of the agricultural industry regarding their good working relationship with the Department during the outbreak period is welcome. The importance of building and presenting a united front against the disease was understood during the course of Departmental/stakeholder discussions in 2001. It is hoped that this experience will be built upon for the future

- 4.6.7. The maintenance of a stakeholder register as part of the Department's contingency plan will assist the process of identifying appropriate contacts quickly in any future crisis.
- 4.6.8. With regard to general stakeholder interaction between the Department and its customers the development of a Rural Stakeholders' Forum since the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) should assist the general process of exchanging views and information with farmers, their representatives and all sectors of the agri-food industry. A Sub-Group of the Rural Stakeholders' Forum to deal with Animal Health and Welfare has been established. The group has been set up to look at a wide range of current animal health and welfare issues including:
- the work programme flowing from this response to the independent review of our handling of the 2001 FMD outbreak including contingency planning arrangements and proposals on sheep identification;
 - the development of a Northern Ireland Animal Health and Welfare Strategy;
 - the development of an All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy; and
 - the outcome of the Policy Reviews on Brucellosis and Tuberculosis.
- 4.6.9. The Sub-Group will include representatives from both producer and processor stakeholder interests

4.7 Communication and Media Aspects

- 4.7.1. During the 2001 outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) the media played a key role in disseminating information on the disease situation. Through their reporting of the crisis, they also helped to explain the nature of the disease and the rationale behind the developing disease control efforts. The degree of responsibility exercised by individual journalists in respecting control zones and taking precautions when travelling to and from outbreak areas was appreciated. Having a number of dedicated agricultural journalists in Northern Ireland reporting on the outbreak was invaluable.
- 4.7.2. As part of the in-house review of the FMD outbreak in 2001 undertaken by the then Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Press Officer a number of ways to improve the response to any similar crisis were identified. There were of course a number of notable successes in the communications process which have been highlighted in the PWC report including:
- the weekly reporting to the full Assembly and Assembly Agriculture and Rural Development Committee;
 - the development of a telephone helpdesk;
 - the special arrangements put in place to deal specifically with queries raised by elected representatives and;
 - the acknowledged professionalism of DARD Press Office staff.
- 4.7.3. The role of the Inter-Departmental Group on Foot and Mouth Disease, and their work to agree the content of key messages to different stakeholders through the placement of full-page advertisements in daily newspapers, has probably been understated in the review. The information campaign initiated was successful in providing easily understood advice to the public, based on expert veterinary opinion. In drawing that advice together the Inter-Departmental Group ensured that conflicting or inconsistent advice from Government was avoided.
- 4.7.4. The deficiencies in internal communication within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, highlighted by the review team, are acknowledged. The then Minister's commitment to putting new information on the outbreak into the public domain as soon as it was received (to avoid local rumours and misinformation spreading) was welcomed by elected representatives and the public at large. However, systems of disseminating this information throughout the Department were not as rapid or robust as they should have been. It is regrettable that frontline staff were, on occasion, hearing about decisions to change controls or latest disease updates from customers.

- 4.7.5. As part of the internal communications within DARD a single, complete, and widely accessible database, which will record all farm holdings in Northern Ireland for use in any future epizootic disease outbreak will be developed. The database will be used throughout the disease outbreak to record all relevant information on outbreaks and containment statistics. It is proposed that the database will be a compatible, networked, electronic animal epidemic information system.
- 4.7.6. Through the Executive Information Service a Communications Strategy will be developed to ensure that Government adopts the 'best practice' elements of the response to the 2001 outbreak. The strategy will develop a framework for disseminating information within Government Departments and will ensure that latest updates on any emergency situation are communicated promptly and accurately to the public.
- 4.7.7. The Strategy to deal with internal and external customers will be incorporated into revised contingency planning arrangements.

4.8 Animal Health Strategy and All-Island Animal Health Strategy

- 4.8.1. Prior to the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in 2001 the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in Agriculture Sectoral format had recognised the need and benefit of cross-border co-operation with regard to Animal Health issues on the Island.
- 4.8.2. Through the NSMC, Agriculture Ministers in Belfast and Dublin sought to develop an All-island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy to reflect a commitment to maintaining a high animal health status where that existed and to working more closely together to eradicate disease when it occurred.
- 4.8.3. Since epizootic disease does not recognise borders, the island is effectively an epidemiological unit for the purposes of disease control. The All-island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy being developed seeks to formalise co-operation on the island and maximise the effectiveness of disease control efforts to prevent disease from entering Ireland.
- 4.8.4. Ten Cross-border Working Groups have been established to examine a range of issues as follows:
- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Bovine TB/Brucellosis | TSEs |
| Veterinary Medicines | Other Zoonoses |
| Other Animal Diseases | Disease Surveillance |
| Animal Welfare | Import/Export of live animals and their Products |
| ID and Traceability | Cross-Border Aspects of Fraud. |
- 4.8.5. Work to develop a common chapter in the Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) contingency plans of both jurisdictions and to consider taking forward a benchmarking exercise to establish, by means of objective assessment, the current animal health status on the island is also underway.
- 4.8.6. Currently, both Departments are reviewing the principal animal health and welfare policy differences between the regimes operated in the north and the south, the possibility of convergence and the timetable for action to achieve convergence. This work will underpin the development of an All-Island Strategy. It is acknowledged that further progress on aligning policies and measures is fundamental to the development of an All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy.
- 4.8.7. As part of the process of moving towards an All-Island system, interim agreement has been reached with GB authorities on movement controls for animals and animal products moving between Great Britain and

Northern Ireland. Discussions are taking place on the necessary permanent arrangements. This is the first step towards the objective of achieving convergence on import policies and portal controls for the island of Ireland.

- 4.8.8. As part of the Government's response to the recommendations contained in Sir Don Curry's 'Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food' report and the two GB FMD inquiries, the process of drawing up a comprehensive GB Animal Health & Welfare Strategy has commenced.
- 4.8.9. In response to a recommendation contained in the independent review of the Government's handling of the FMD outbreak in 2001 it is acknowledged that a Northern Ireland Animal Health and Welfare Strategy, linking to the GB Strategy on issues being taken forward on a UK basis, will also be required. The NI strategy will, in turn, link to the All-Island Strategy. A public consultation paper on the development of the NI Strategy is expected to issue by the end of March 2003.
- 4.8.10. It is hoped that the development of the Northern Ireland Animal Health and Welfare Strategy and the All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy will progress in a similar timeframe and be complementary to the equivalent Strategy being developed for GB.
- 4.8.11. The recommendations of the PWC team about the need for a Northern Ireland Animal Health and Welfare Strategy alongside an All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy are consistent with work started prior to the outbreak of FMD and carried on since. The development of the GB Animal Health and Welfare Strategy affords the opportunity for sharing of best practice on actions to improve the health of farmed animals through the reduction and eradication of disease, better risk management strategies, greater involvement of stakeholders and improved veterinary surveillance. Actions outlined as part of the Northern Ireland Animal Health and Welfare Strategy will undoubtedly have at their core not only disease control but also the positive promotion of animal health and welfare.
- 4.8.12. Work in DARD on the Northern Ireland and All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategies is in line with the Department's wish to build on the experience of the FMD outbreak, and the various inquiries, reviews and conferences to which it gave rise, to develop an overall strategic approach to the promotion of animal health and welfare. The Department's understanding of the threats and costs of exotic diseases, the difficulties of dealing with them, the importance of effective contingency planning and the need to communicate and work with all interested parties will inform the development of both the Northern Ireland and All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategies.

- 4.8.13. The work of the Cross-Border Animal Health Working Groups examining opportunities for policy co-operation and convergence will be completed during 2003. It is hoped to draw up a draft outline of the All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy for consultation with all-island stakeholders by the end of April 2003.
- 4.8.14. On the question of organisational structures within DARD the review team highlighted the perceived existence of a 'silo mentality' between the various divisions within DARD which tended to limit the efficiency of the response to the FMD outbreak. The team advocated the establishment of an Animal Health Strategy Group as part of the Department's wider modernisation efforts.
- 4.8.15. Prior to publication of the PWC review, an Animal Health Strategy Group within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development was set up to strengthen the links between the animal health and welfare policy, veterinary service, agri-food development and science service teams in DARD. The group's role is to agree priorities and co-ordinate actions in the field of animal health across the Department.
- 4.8.16. In line with recommendations contained in the review, the Animal Health Strategy Group has overall responsibility for the work being taken forward on the development of a Northern Ireland and All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy. The group is also responsible for oversight of the work programme that has emerged as a result of implementing recommendations contained in the independent review of the 2001 FMD outbreak. This work includes preparation and testing of the revised contingency plan for epizootic disease and ongoing work into the most appropriate post-FMD animal movements regime.

4.9 Port and Airport Controls

- 4.9.1. Having examined the origin of the disease outbreak in Northern Ireland through the illegal importation of sheep the review highlighted the need to strengthen the controls at ports and airports compared with those that existed 'pre-FMD'.
- 4.9.2. The contention by the PWC team that additional resources at the ports enforcing controls and the effective restriction on the practice of diverting 'direct for slaughter' sheep could have resulted in preventing at least one of the FMD outbreaks is not accepted. Illegal activities were the sole cause of the FMD outbreak. Even if the consignment of sheep in question had been inspected it would have made little difference to the outcome of the virus entering Northern Ireland, given that the sheep were not exhibiting the external symptoms of the disease. That said, the need to improve control arrangements had been recognised and, as acknowledged in the PWC report, revised control arrangements have been put in place to help prevent the introduction of disease to Northern Ireland
- 4.9.3. The report also acknowledged that the investigation of import irregularities in the four month period prior to the outbreak played a key role in limiting the extent of illegal imports in the period prior to the first outbreak of FMD in Great Britain. It can only be assumed that this action and the changes to procedures implemented on foot of it, greatly reduced the potential for increased disease dissemination in Northern Ireland.
- 4.9.4. In the period since the outbreak, the NI Veterinary Service Portal Inspection Team has been strengthened to 52 staff members as opposed to 19 portal inspectors and administrative staff pre-FMD. There is now 24hr/7day inspection cover at Belfast & Larne ports. All FMD susceptible livestock imports are currently channeled through Larne port only. All sailings to Warrenpoint and scheduled flights to Belfast City & Belfast International airports and City of Derry are now covered by portal staff. There is also improved reconciliation of imported animals through to destination. 'Direct for Slaughter' imports are verified at slaughter plants.
- 4.9.5. Practical changes to procedures implemented by Portal Inspection Staff now mean that documentary (and welfare) checks are in place with a proportion of livestock, imported for breeding, unloaded at Larne and physical (species, breed) and identity checks undertaken. A computer database is now used to record all livestock imports, portal inspections and follow-up action at point of destination.
- 4.9.6. Portable vehicle cleansing and disinfection capacity at ports developed during the outbreak period has been retained. Large automatic machines will be stored and maintained for further deployment as required.

- 4.9.7. The review team recommended a review and strengthening at UK level of controls on both commercial and personal imports. This is an area that has been addressed by the Government in response to the FMD Inquiries carried out in Great Britain. Consideration is being given to the implications of the review for Northern Ireland.
- 4.9.8. Across the UK, the Government will continue to implement its 'Illegal Imports Action Plan', announced in March 2002. Improved intelligence gathering and sharing of information on illegal imports, now held on a central database, has been passed to enforcement officers. Under new EU rules, which came into force on 1 January 2003, personal imports of meat, meat products, milk and milk products are prohibited for travellers entering the UK from outside the European Union.
- 4.9.9. In Northern Ireland legislation has also been amended to provide enforcement officers with additional powers to search passengers' bags, through the Products of Animal Origin (Third Country Imports) Regulation (NI) 2002 which came into effect 6 December 2002.
- 4.9.10. The publicity campaign on illegal imports launched in August 2002 in Northern Ireland, will continue and will be stepped up in order to alert the travelling public to the new EU rules in force. New posters and leaflets have been put on display at ports and airports outlining what is and is not allowed to be imported, these will be revised. A booklet entitled 'Guide of Enforcement Roles and Responsibilities' has also been printed and issued to relevant stakeholders. Airline and ferry companies will also be reminded again of their responsibilities in relation to announcements to passengers on flights into Northern Ireland.
- 4.9.11. Whilst there are limited numbers of third country travellers coming directly to Northern Ireland there is still a need to take account of product coming in through personal baggage routed through GB or other EU Member States, which has not been subjected to detailed examination before its arrival in Northern Ireland.
- 4.9.12. The need for revised liaison arrangements between the various statutory bodies represented at ports and airports, as recommended by PWC, will be considered further in light of the Government's commitment to bring all activity directed at thwarting illegal imports under the control of HM Customs and Excise. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development staff and members of staff from Her Majesty's Custom and Excise have met to discuss operational areas for closer co-operation.
- 4.9.13. A summary of portal controls has been placed on the Department's website.

4.10 Legislation

- 4.10.1. It is noted by the review team that the legislative framework for dealing with an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease is largely based on European Community Law. The emergence of the European Commission's proposals for a revised Directive 85/11, dealing with FMD, is being informed by the Commission's own experiences of the 2001 outbreak and the recommendations of the various inquiries and reviews. The proposals were adopted by the European Commission in late December 2002 and as they are considered further by the Council of Agriculture Ministers and the European Parliament in the first half of 2003 an opportunity will be afforded to review the legislative base for dealing with future disease outbreaks.
- 4.10.2. The recently enacted Animal Health Act 2002 for England and Wales was developed as a response to the threat of a future outbreak of disease. The Act contains additional powers to enable the Government to employ pre-emptive culling strategies where appropriate, alongside clearer powers of entry for the purposes of testing, culling and vaccination. The Act also allows a contiguous cull even where it could be argued that animals on contiguous premises had not been exposed to the disease, and therefore furthers the clarity of the law, which the 'Lessons Learned' Inquiry in GB considered so important.
- 4.10.3. In response to the Lessons Learned inquiry in GB a more general review of Animal Health legislation involving rationalisation of existing regulation and covering issues such as encouraging better biosecurity, harmonising systems of compensation and risk sharing as between the industry and the taxpayer is planned. The scope and nature of future legislation is to be considered following publication of the GB Animal Health and Welfare Strategy.
- 4.10.4. The team recommended a review of existing legislative provision leading to consolidation within a new Animal Health Order and Animal Welfare Order. As noted elsewhere, the process of reviewing the legislative base following the 2001 outbreak of FMD has meant that some EU and local legislative changes have already been introduced.
- 4.10.5. The Animal Health Bill Team set up in Northern Ireland to review the current legislative provision will draw on the body of work already initiated elsewhere with a view to bringing forward specific Northern Ireland proposals to amend, update or enhance the legislative base in the field of animal health and welfare in Northern Ireland.
- 4.10.6. The PWC team reflected on the extensive powers afforded to the Department through the Foot and Mouth Disease Order (Northern Ireland) 1962 and encouraged procedures for ensuring that these powers are exercised correctly and in accordance with public or administrative law principles. These points will be addressed by means of a protocol for action in emergency circumstances to ensure that the

reason for decisions taken may be publicly ascertained. The points made in the Working Paper to the report reflecting on, amongst other things, the human rights implications of the actions taken in a disease outbreak situation will be examined as part of the review of current legislative provision.

4.11. Biosecurity

- 4.11.1. Picking up on the need to enhance biosecurity at farm level the PWC team endorsed a number of 'Vision Report' recommendations aimed at securing the adoption of practices that will improve biosecurity. The team encouraged the industry to operate 'fortress farming' as part of their ongoing routine and not just as a response to a disease outbreak. Clearly, this is in the interests of the whole agri-food industry but, as demonstrated by last year's outbreak, is also in the interests of the whole community.
- 4.11.2. The Department is conscious of the need to continue progress towards achieving higher standards of biosecurity, and to build on the foundations now in place. This will not only help to protect livestock against a new incursion of exotic disease but also help control endemic diseases such as brucellosis and TB. An all-encompassing NI biosecurity code is being developed which should help draw together advice on biosecurity measures and up-to-date information on how to prevent disease transmission.
- 4.11.3. The Department recognises that good biosecurity should form part of the education of livestock farmers and others associated with animals. A review of the effectiveness of training and education for farmers and other land managers is underway. Part of this process will involve assessing how biosecurity training is addressed at present.
- 4.11.4. In Northern Ireland, the Department has a unique role in education within the agri-food industry through the operation of the three agricultural colleges at Enniskillen, Greenmount and Loughry and will lead the effort, in consultation with the industry, to improve biosecurity across Northern Ireland. Within the colleges themselves a recently revised and updated Biosecurity Code of practice is in operation. The code highlights all measures to be followed by staff, students and visitors to minimise the risk of disease spread both to and from the colleges. The code also outlines the procedures to be followed when purchasing either plant material or livestock for the various College Development Centres.
- 4.11.5. The promotion of biosecurity measures is an integral part of many courses at the colleges. Typically, the National Certificate in Agriculture and National Diploma in Agriculture have specific units dealing with the issue. In other courses it is dealt with through units such as Animal Science, Agricultural Science and Enterprise Management.
- 4.11.6. At present, the Department is developing the concept of 'model' or 'focus' farms to demonstrate the practice and benefits of high herd / flock health and welfare status. All livestock-based focus farms will have biosecurity provisions as an integral feature and discussion point for visitors rather than be presented as farms with a single focus to demonstrate biosecurity. This reflects a whole-farm 'fortress farming'

mentality which must become ingrained in the culture of livestock farming in Northern Ireland. Other Departmental schemes such as the Countryside Management Scheme and Beef Quality Initiative which require farmers to visit other farm businesses as part of a programme of education and training require host farms to have fully integrated biosecurity provisions.

- 4.11.7. Progress with work underway, in partnership with the industry, on a unified Farm Quality Assured Scheme in response to recommendations contained in 'Vision for the Future of the Agri-Food Industry' Report will influence the way in which the PWC recommendation for a significant animal health and welfare component in such schemes is implemented.
- 4.11.8. DARD will work with industry representatives through the Rural Stakeholder Forum to establish the most appropriate way to promote best practice and will discuss ways to promote and ensure compliance with the industry's own codes of practice for issues such as the importation of cattle.
- 4.11.9. In their review the consultants have observed that the implementation of tighter controls at ports and airports will provide the necessary assurances to the agri-food industry of the importance of biosecurity to the island, which in turn should lead to greater adherence to best practice with regard to biosecurity at farm level. Clearly the industry, working with the Department, must lead the effort to improve biosecurity, in the interests of everyone.
- 4.11.10. In response to the PWC team's recommendation that similar legislative provision to the Republic of Ireland's livestock dealer registration scheme be introduced, this issue is being examined as part of ongoing discussion regarding the transposition of the EU Trade Directive.

ANNEX I

Response to Individual Recommendations of PWC Independent Review of Foot and Mouth Disease in Northern Ireland

A. Contingency Planning

A1 : The current contingency plan should be revised to include the development of a Resource Plan and Operational Manual

Response

Recommendation Accepted. The revision of the Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease (CPED) will be carried out in accordance with the detailed recommendations contained in the PWC report.

A2 : A Contingency Plan Director and Task Force should be appointed

Response

Recommendation Accepted. A Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease (CPED) Director has been appointed together with a CPED Task Force to assist the process of revising the Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease.

A3 : There should be full consultation with other Government Departments, DEFRA, DAFRD, stakeholders and the military in respect of their roles within the revised contingency plan.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. Full consultation with other Government Departments and key stakeholders is an integral part of the work of the CPED Director and CPED Task Force. DARD will publish the fully revised plan following consultation with stakeholders, through the Rural Stakeholder Forum.

A4: There should be training for all staff, the organisation of regular simulation exercises and independent audits of contingency plan.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. Following the development of a fully revised Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease the plan will be tested as part of a rolling programme of simulation exercises across the UK. The Northern Ireland plan will take account of the land border with the Republic of Ireland and will be examined in the context of an all-island response to FMD or similar epizootic disease. Staff required to implement the plan will be trained and involved in rehearsing the operation of the plan to ensure that it can be rolled out as effectively as possible in the case of emergency.

A5 : The Contingency Plan should be published and made widely available to all stakeholders

Response

Recommendation Accepted. The process of drawing up the contingency plan will involve a wide variety of stakeholders both inside and outside Government.

DARD will publish the fully revised plan following consultation with stakeholders, through the Rural Stakeholder Forum. Following endorsement of the plan it is envisaged that all stakeholders will be involved in the ongoing task of ensuring that the plan is as up-to-date as possible.

A6 : The Contingency Plan should be updated on a regular basis.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. The contingency plan will be subjected to regular review. The testing of the revised plan through the staging of a simulation exercise aimed at testing preparedness will form part of any such review. An interim Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease (CPED) has been placed on the Department's website to coincide with the publication of this response.

B. Containment and Eradication

B1: The capacity to undertake local screening of potential infected samples should be maintained.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. Practical capacity to undertake local screening and skills to conduct tests will be maintained within the Department, allied to monitoring of latest scientific developments in screening technology.

B2: The Veterinary Service Enforcement Unit should be strengthened.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. Plans to strengthen team agreed and being progressed.

C. Slaughter and Disposal

- C1: A team of vets should be specifically trained in weapons' use and slaughter techniques, with access to appropriate weapons and ammunition (we understand this process is under way).

Response

Recommendation Accepted. A team of 11 drawn from veterinary service staff has been selected and has undertaken training. Appropriate weapons have been procured.

- C2: Contracts should be established in the form of a 'short notice' procedure to provide frameworks for the procurement of supplies, materials and contractors.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. Call-off contracts to be established and maintained as part of revised Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease.

D. Valuation of Animals and Compensation

- D1: A reference-price schedule should be introduced to provide a range of valuations for types and categories of animals.

Response

Recommendation Noted. The issue will be subjected to further detailed analysis as part of an examination of the compensation arrangements for animal disease generally.

- D2: Consideration should be given to revising the basis of valuation so that values attributed on slaughter could be revised at the time when restocking is permitted.

Response

Recommendation Rejected. It is not considered appropriate to adjust the existing provision to allow farmers to receive top-up payments to compensate for movements in prices upwards from the time of slaughter to the time of restocking. The introduction of such provision would be bureaucratic to administer and would require examination of compensation levels in the circumstance when prices were lower at the time of restocking than at the time of slaughter.

- D3: Payment of valuation/compensation to the farmers should be linked to compliance with biosecurity measures.

Response

Recommendation to be considered further. The proposal to link the rate of animal compensation payments to compliance with biosecurity measures will need to be examined in light of discussions with the agri-food industry and other stakeholders towards the development of a Northern Ireland biosecurity code.

- D4 : The management structure within which DARD valuation officers operate should be reviewed.

Response

Recommendation Accepted in principle. Issue will be considered as part of wider examination of the compensation arrangements for animal disease generally.

E. Control of Animals, People and Vehicle Movements

- E1: Current animal movement standstill policies should be maintained

Response

Recommendation Accepted in principle. Movement controls maintained for internal movements in NI. The controls in place are subject to ongoing review and will be augmented by improvements in ID, traceability, and biosecurity.

- E2 : A uniform approach should be developed to individual animal identification in order to achieve full traceability.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. Unique Sheep ID is being introduced in Northern Ireland at present.

F. Stakeholder Interaction

- F1: Veterinary Service officials should be trained in dealing with farmers who are subject to distress and trauma.

Response

Recommendation Noted. Provision for communication training will be incorporated into revised contingency planning arrangements. However, the need for veterinary service staff to carry out their duties with expediency means that they will only be able to signpost support systems for farmers suffering distress and trauma.

- F2: Support should be provided to the various initiatives providing help to farmers suffering stress associated with farming.

Response

Recommendation Noted. Support given to support organisations prior to FMD outbreak has been maintained.

G. Communication and Media Aspects

- G1: A detailed communications strategy should be developed as part of the future Contingency Plan.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. The Executive Information Service will develop the Communications Strategy adopted during course of 2001 outbreak. A Strategy to deal with the full range of internal and external customers will be incorporated into revised contingency planning arrangements.

H. Animal Health Strategy

- H1: A formal Animal Health Strategy for Northern Ireland should be drawn up. This would involve an up-to-date objective assessment of Northern Ireland's animal health status.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. Work has commenced towards the development of a Northern Ireland Animal Health and Welfare Strategy. Benchmarking assessment of Northern Ireland animal health status to be developed as part of strategy.

- H2: A steering group (an Animal Health Strategy Group) should be established by DARD to oversee the development of the strategy.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. Strategy Group already established.

I. Port and Airport Controls

- I1: DARD should review import controls in relation to livestock and meat products in association with DEFRA and DAFRD.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. Interim trade conditions have been agreed for animal imports from GB to NI. Improvements in staffing of portal

inspection facilities has been agreed and implemented to seek to ensure compliance with import control arrangements.

- I2: There is a need to review and strengthen controls at UK level on both commercial and personal imports.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. Under new European Commission rules, effective 1 January 2003, personal imports of meat, meat products, milk and milk products will be prohibited for travellers entering the UK from outside the European Union. Across the UK, a study of the organisational arrangements for tackling illegal imports of animals and animal products has been undertaken alongside a risk assessment on the threat from illegal imports. Both measures are designed to review, with a view to strengthening, the import controls on personal and commercial imports.

- I3: A co-ordinated approach should be established between the various statutory bodies represented at ports and airports to enforce importation controls.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. Liaison arrangements in place to be considered further in light of Government's commitment to bring all activity in this area under the control of HM Customs and Excise.

- I4 : There is a need to increase general public awareness of controls at ports and airports and their responsibilities in this regard.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. Following the initial publicity campaign launched in the summer to alert the public, new posters and leaflets have been put on display at ports and airports outlining what is and is not allowed to be imported. These will be revised to take account of new EU rules. A booklet entitled 'Guide of Enforcement Roles and Responsibilities' has also been printed and issued to relevant stakeholders. Airline and ferry companies will also be reminded again of their responsibilities in relation to announcements to passengers on flights into Northern Ireland. Action to heighten public awareness of controls at ports and airports will be stepped up in the new year to publicise new EU limits on personal imports.

J. All-island Animal Health Strategy

- J1: An assessment of the animal health status of the island should be undertaken in parallel with the assessment in Northern Ireland proposed earlier.

Response

Recommendation to be considered further. Assessment of the animal health status on the island to be addressed as part of the work towards developing an All-Island Animal Health and Welfare Strategy. It is acknowledged that benchmarking data may prove difficult to collate as historical records are not always maintained in a similar manner or in a format that lends itself to comparison with information available in other Member States and regions.

- J2: The development of an all-island animal health strategy should be progressed.

Response

Recommendation Accepted.

- J3: There is a need to develop an operational plan formalising co-operation between DARD and DAFRD in any future emergency situation.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. Cross-border 'common chapter' will be agreed and incorporated into each jurisdiction's revised contingency plan.

- J4: A cross-border epizootic team should be established.

Response

Recommendation Noted. The scope for operation of all island team will be examined as part of work undertaken by All-Island Animal Health Working Groups and as part of the process towards developing an All-Island Animal Health Strategy.

K. Legislation

- K1: There is a need to consolidate existing legislation in a new Animal Health Order for Northern Ireland. This could be accompanied by a new Animal Welfare Order.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. The Animal Health Bill Team set up in Northern Ireland to review the current legislative provision will draw on the body of work already initiated elsewhere with a view to bringing forward specific Northern Ireland proposals to amend, update or enhance the legislative base in the field of animal health and welfare in Northern Ireland.

L. Biosecurity

- L1: All farm quality assurance schemes covering livestock should have significant animal health, welfare and farm biosecurity components.

Response

Recommendation Accepted in principle. Work on an all-encompassing NI biosecurity code has commenced. Progress with work underway, in partnership with the industry, on a unified Farm Quality Assured Scheme in response to recommendations contained in 'Vision for the Future of the Agri-Food Industry' Report will influence way in which PWC recommendation is implemented.

- L2: Model farms should be used to demonstrate the practice and benefits of high herd/flock health and welfare status.

Response

Recommendation Noted. Work progressing through implementation of recommendations contained in 'Vision for the Future of the Agri-Food Industry' Report.

- L3: The industry should do all it can to mitigate the risks of importing disease.

Response

Recommendation Noted. Work to mitigate the risk of importing disease to be taken forward in discussion with the industry through the Animal Health Sub-Group of the Rural Stakeholders' Forum (RSF).

- L4: DARD should initiate an update and relaunch of the industry codes of practice for importing livestock.

Response

Recommendation Noted. DARD will work with industry through the Rural Stakeholder Forum to establish most appropriate way to promote best practice.

- L5: In addition we consider that the Department and industry should heighten inspection procedures at livestock marts and consider implementation of a system of livestock dealer registration.

Response

Recommendation Accepted. In response to the PWC team's recommendation that similar legislative provision to the Republic of Ireland's livestock dealer registration scheme be introduced, this issue is being examined as part of ongoing discussion regarding the transposition of the EU Trade Directive. Work is progressing between DARD Agri-Food Development Service and mart owners on improving training of staff dealing with livestock at marts.

ANNEX II

Actions Required to Develop a New Northern Ireland Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease

Introduction

The main objective of contingency planning is 'to arrange in advance for an event that may or may not happen, especially an event that would cause problems if it did happen'. There is a clear need for a harmonised approach to FMD contingency plans within the European Community and the legislative base for the harmonised approach is given in Council Directive 90/423/EEC.

The Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease (CPED) for Northern Ireland was drawn up in 1991 and presented to the European Commission as part of the UK Plan. The Plan was approved by the European Commission on 23 July 1993 by Commission Decision 93/455/EEC. It is clear that the contingency plan drafted in 1991 was by and large unknown to the stakeholders outside DARD. In addition a number of other areas have been identified where the Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease (CPED) was considered inadequate to deal with the full scale of the events which took place including:

- the degree to which testing in the form of simulation had been undertaken in relation to the CPED;
- the usefulness of the work undertaken by the epidemiological team within the Veterinary Service (VS) regarding the maintenance of the Plan;
- the availability of personnel resources in relation to private veterinary practitioner (pvp) participation;
- the availability of operational plans and manuals to support the implementation of the Plan; and
- the degree of biosecurity and preparedness at farm level for an epizootic disease outbreak.

Structure of the Contingency Plan

The structure of the revised Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease set out below is designed to address the inherent weaknesses of the 1991 Plan and is based on best practice elsewhere in Europe. The plan will also have to be revised in light of best practice guidance for emergency planning as advised by the OFM/DFM Central Emergency Planning Unit.

The proposed Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease (CPED) will be based on:

- a Resource Plan; and
- an Operational Manual.

The purpose of the Resource Plan is to ensure that the Northern Ireland is in all ways prepared for an emergency, i.e. that NI has the resources available and the legal and administrative framework to put them into use immediately. The main components of the Resource Plan are the following:

- legal powers;
- financial provisions;
- chain of command;
- national and local disease control centres;
- expert teams;
- personnel resources;
- facilities and equipment;
- instructions/operational manual;
- diagnostic laboratory;
- plans for emergency vaccination;
- training; and
- publicity – disease awareness.

The chain of command in deploying personnel as part of the future use of the revised CP will, by necessity, be shorter to ensure decision-making without undue delay. The chain of command has to recognise the need to take decisions at various levels including, at the policy level (political level), the eradication strategy level (veterinary service) and the operational level (field level).

The purpose of the Operational Manual is to ensure that veterinary staff throughout Northern Ireland have a complete set of instructions that tell them what to do from the time they first suspect disease to when the epidemic is finally controlled. The Operational Manual or Action Plan will be an important tool for training staff and others who may be engaged in an emergency situation. The Operational Manual will deal with:

- the organisational arrangements;
- preliminary action when suspected disease is reported;
- collection and dispatch of diagnostic samples;
- action when FMD is confirmed;
- notification to OIE, the European Commission, Member States;
- notification to the police, local government, veterinary and agricultural organisations;
- the epidemiological enquiry;

- valuation, killing and carcass disposal;
- decontamination procedures;
- the imposition of control zones;
- national and local publicity;
- enforcement activities;
- surveillance;
- tracing of movements;
- animal welfare in restricted areas;
- restocking of depopulated holdings; and
- emergency vaccination.

Action Points to Develop New Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease (CPED)

The following steps, recommended by PWC, are considered appropriate for the development of a Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease (CPED) for Northern Ireland:

- Appoint a Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease (CPED) Director.
- Establish a CPED Task Force, including representatives of DARD and OFM/DFM's Central Emergency Planning Unit, to be chaired by the CPED Director.
- Take forward the revision of the CPED by the Task Force with regular reports being provided to the DARD Animal Health Strategy Group.
- Consult/negotiate with other Government Departments and local authorities as part of process to amend the CPED.
- Consult with DEFRA to ensure alignment of the CPED with the UK's CPED.
- Consult with DAFRD, under the auspices of the Animal Health Working Groups, to ensure alignment of the CPED with the CPED for Ireland, through the use of a 'common chapter'.
- Consult stakeholders through the Rural Stakeholder Forum on the proposed revision to the CPED.
- Consult with the PSNI and the military on their future role in any outbreak.

Following consultation, the CPED Director shall:

- Arrange for training of all staff who might be required to participate the operation of the revised contingency plan.
- Establish agreed protocols based on approved public sector recruitment practices for the recruitment of staff at short notice to address immediate needs.
- Arrange for regular updating of the CPED with assistance of the Rural Stakeholder Forum, every three to five years, subject to threat/risk assessment.
- Undertake annual simulation exercises to test the effectiveness and efficiency of the CPED; and
- Ensure independent audits of the CPED are undertaken, including assessment of the validity of financial agreements, availability of equipment, availability of laboratory capacities and the various operational elements.

As part of the roll out of the workplan required to revise the Northern Ireland Contingency Plan for Epizootic Disease the following specific actions, categorised under the various headings used by PWC, will be required to ensure its delivery:

Containment and Eradication

- Strengthen Epidemiology Team. Provide in-house training for new staff and offer external development opportunities through close co-operation with Pirbright Reference Laboratory and DEFRA.
- Strengthen the existing small Veterinary Service Enforcement Unit. Structured training of new staff members to take place within context of staff induction.
- Agree a protocol regarding the progression of investigations to bring forward cases to the Courts in a timely way, where sufficient evidence exists to do so.

Vaccination

- Update the CPED to include a section on the use of emergency vaccination in accordance with policy agreed in the context of the UK and an all-island approach to animal health.
- Maintain vaccine supplies and serological testing kits for emergency use.
- Develop protocol for use of vaccine.
- As part of the Resource Plan, develop skills of personnel to administer vaccine.

Slaughter and Disposal

- Train a team of vets in weapons' use and slaughter techniques and provide access to appropriate guns and ammunition.
- Arrange for supervision of slaughter teams by trained staff in instances where the volume of animals to be culled is such that additional assistance is required.
- Detail the role of private contractors to undertake specifically identified tasks such as clearance activities, set-up of the cull site, transport arrangements, and supplies of materials to ensure biosecurity, i.e. mats and disinfectant materials should be set out in the CPED.
- Develop call-off contracts in the form of a 'short notice' procedures designed to provide frameworks for the procurement of supplies, materials and contractors, based on approved public procurement practices as part of the CPED. Training in the relevant financial procedures and the operation of the procurement arrangements to be provided to staff.
- Arrange for the involvement of the army and police to be agreed as an integral component of the CP. As part of arrangements, agree trigger point at which PSNI and army liaison officers would be deployed within Department following a disease outbreak.
- Investigate capacity for disposal of animals by means of rendering and detail in the CP to minimise the need to use pyres for burning of slaughtered animals.
- Develop strategy options to assist the decision-making process when a culling policy has to be adopted.

Valuation and Compensation

- Consider value of establishing a reference-price schedule for the purposes of determining animal disease compensation levels as recommended by PWC review

Control of Movement

- Define and subject to ongoing review the measures in place at ports/border posts, for example, cleansing and disinfection arrangements during an outbreak period. 'Peacetime' measures to control import of animals and animal products to be included in CPED.
- Consult industry on the animal movement policies to be utilised during the course of an epizootic disease outbreak in advance of a disease outbreak. The policy should be sufficiently well detailed to set out the trigger points for 'ratcheting up' or relaxing the extent of the controls depending on the disease outbreak situation.
- Include within the revised CPED the prevailing requirements for animal identification and utilise the traceability which this affords as part of the process of regulating movement controls.

Stakeholder Interaction

- Develop protocols and channels of communication as part of the CPED to deal with internal and external communication within and beyond the public sector. Arrangements for convening an industry stakeholder forum in the event of a disease outbreak to be included. The lines of communication should be rooted in a formal command and control approach.
- Train Veterinary Service personnel to enable them to signpost assistance available to farmers subject to the distress and trauma. Guidance to vets to be included in revised CPED.

Communication and Media Aspects

- Develop a detailed communications strategy as part of the CP. The Strategy will establish protocols and channels of communication to be followed to deal with internal and external communication within and beyond the public sector (both centrally and locally). Arrangements for convening DARD Top Level Group, Inter-Departmental Group and Events Group following a disease outbreak to be included. The strategy will be the main reference tool to define media handling procedures to shape the Government's public relations effort. The lines of communication should be rooted in a

formal command and control approach.

- Develop a single, complete, and widely accessible database, which will record all farm holdings in Northern Ireland for use in any future epizootic disease outbreak. The database will be used throughout the disease outbreak to record all relevant information on outbreaks and containment statistics. The database should be a compatible, networked, electronic animal epidemic information system.
- As part of the Communications Strategy, detail the roles of the respective groups set up to manage the various aspects of the outbreak and set out the mechanisms for providing updates on the disease situation to the industry, media etc.
- As part of the process of agreeing the revised CPED, agree the Communications Strategy with the Minister, the Inter-Departmental Group (principally EIS), Senior Officials, representatives of the agri-food industry and the media to ensure that clearly defined roles, responsibilities and principles are accepted by all concerned.
- Commit to providing regular situation reports (sitreps) as part of the Communication Strategy
- Strengthen ability to place information on the intranet / internet as part of the development of a Communications Strategy

Animal Health Strategy

- The general provisions of the CPED and proposals to test its validity through simulation exercises should be incorporated in the proposed All-Island Animal Health Strategy.
- Develop a 'Protocol for Action in Emergency Circumstances' to ensure full respect for public law principles, the necessary co-ordination between Departments, and revised procedures for the disposal of carcasses are incorporated.
- Detail the legal basis for actions which may be required to be deployed during a disease outbreak (drawn from summary contained in the All-Island Animal Health Strategy).

Biosecurity

- Develop specific biosecurity measures to be implemented on foot of an epizootic disease outbreak. 'Peacetime' biosecurity measures to be built on in light of weaknesses at farm level highlighted during the 2001 outbreak - impetus for improving biosecurity to be driven by industry (Rural Stakeholder Forum). Incorporation of enhanced biosecurity provision through proposed changes to Farm Quality Assurance Schemes should be tracked and the standards agreed should be included in the CPED. Following consultation with industry,

develop a Northern Ireland Biosecurity Code.

Port and Airport controls

- Provide facilities for DARD inspectors at border posts.
- Liaise with passenger carriers to ensure that the risks of importing animal disease are highlighted and the legal limits for personal imports are understood. Landing cards and amnesty bins to be provided as appropriate.
- Introduce periodic publicity campaigns at airports and ports to highlight risk of importing animal disease.

General CP Logistical Arrangements

- Establish 'on-call' arrangements for Veterinary Service (VS) staff and Veterinary Sciences Division (VSD) staff during 'peacetime' to ensure that co-ordination of the response to a suspect epizootic disease case is swift. Veterinary Officer and Dangerous Goods Handler to be on-call as part of response arrangements.
- Arrange training of Animal Health and Welfare Inspectors and Veterinary Officers during 'peacetime' to heighten awareness of epizootic disease prevention and control measures.
- Produce revised booklet/internet guidance for VS staff and Private Veterinary Practitioners (PVPs) on epizootic diseases.
- Develop a human resource management strategy to support the effective implementation of the CPED. The plan should detail the roles and responsibilities of staff in HQ, regional and local centres and other organisations including the PSNI and military. For public sector staff and staff brought in to assist the disease control effort, personnel specifications outlining the necessary skills, qualifications and experience required for the various posts involved.
- Develop a training plan to support the human resource management strategy to ensure that staff required to assist the disease control effort have the necessary skills and competence to do so.
- Develop an easily accessible command and control structure to ensure that all staff know the command structure within which they operate and the roles and remits of the various positions within the established command and control hierarchy.
- Benchmark any command and control structure developed as part of the revised CPED with the army to ensure 'best practice'.
- Detail the role of dedicated communications officers within any command and control structure and link this to the overall Communications Strategy.

- Develop practical guidelines and easy to use checklists for all key tasks.
- Carry out health and safety risk assessments as appropriate and detail health and safety provision in all operational aspects of the CPED. Detail mechanisms for full compliance with Health and Safety regulations as they relate to staff, contractors and members of the public.
- As part of the wider legislative review of disease control powers specific guidance should be drawn up outlining the statutory responsibility, of DARD, for the reinstatement of infected premises.
- Develop guidance on procedures to be adopted by specific enterprises such as assembly centres, abattoirs and marts in response to an outbreak scenario. Examples may include: the identification of a suspect case; inclusion of such an enterprise in a surveillance zone, impact on such an enterprise of backward or forward tracing of diseased animals or meat through the premises.
- Revise forms for use when placing restrictions, valuation, cleansing and disinfection etc to make them generic (in any epizootic outbreak). During process of revision, forms should be updated, simplified and streamlined.
- Prepare laboratory, sampling & dispatch procedures and define VS and VSD roles.
- Prepare Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) to cover all areas of the implementation of the CP including: submission of samples to GB; culling; disposal; cleansing and disinfection and; reinstatement of premises.
- Develop arrangements for procuring resources for use by Field Staff such as transport media, sampling equipment and documentation to accompany samples. Arrangements to include centralised stock management and emergency provision to Disease Control Centres.
- Formalisation of arrangements to utilise Private Veterinary Practitioners during outbreak period. (Development of existing co-operation).

Policy Linkages

- Develop protocols to ensure good liaison arrangements exist between different DARD disciplines whose work may be impacted by a disease outbreak e.g. Colleagues working on counter-fraud strategy, grants and subsidies policy, Epidemiology and the Enforcement Team.
- Develop system to ensure that options for seeking regionalisation for Northern Ireland, or part thereof, are kept up-to-date as part of the

CPED. Other strategies that could be deployed including the extent of a serological testing programme or ring vaccination for slaughter policy should be reviewed regularly.

