



FAWC, Area 5a, 9 Millbank, c/o Nobel House
17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR
Tel: 020 7238 6340 Fax: 020 7238 3169

Farm Animal Welfare Council Response to the Consultation on the Draft Animal Health Bill 2010

FAWC has commented previously on the Government's proposals for responsibility and cost sharing (RCS) for animal health in England. This draft Bill now outlines the Government's proposed legislative framework and arrangements for RCS, notably the establishment of a new Non-Departmental Public Body, referred to as the 'Animal Health Organisation' (AHO). It is also noted that the RCS Advisory Group will be advising Government on the scope and operation of the new body.

Within the Introduction to the draft Bill, it is made clear that the proposal is for the new body to "take over from Defra responsibility for animal health policy and delivery in England, though not animal welfare which will remain with the department." It will be important to ensure effective coordination at a national level since most disease does not respect the geographical boundaries of the United Kingdom.

FAWC remains concerned about the potential dangers of separating aspects of animal health and animal welfare policy, given the almost inextricable links between them.

Some reassurance regarding this apparent separation of animal health and welfare is given in the Introduction to the draft Bill under Paragraph 21 which lists a number of "matters that the AHO must take into account in its work, including risks, costs and benefits, animal welfare and relevant research and advice". Presently, there is no mention of animal welfare under the 'core functions' of the AHO outlined in the draft Bill. Section 6 (Development of Policy)(1) of the draft Bill states that the AHO may develop a policy on any matter relating to any of its functions and later under Section 15 (Matters to be taken into account) mention is made of "any considerations relating to the welfare of animals that are relevant to the decision". There are also requirements in the draft Bill for consultation between the AHO and Secretary of State and Chief Veterinary Officers of England and the UK on matters relating to both animal health and animal welfare.

Notwithstanding these provisions, FAWC would like to see consideration of animal welfare strengthened and made more explicit within the Bill. The AHO should have an explicit obligation to take full account of animal welfare (both mental and physical aspects) when formulating and delivering animal health policy and a responsibility to aim to protect and promote the welfare of animals as a core part of its animal health activities. Moreover, there should be appropriate understanding and knowledge of, or

skills or experience in, animal welfare present within the membership of the new body.

There is considerable potential for the new AHO to be proactive in improving animal welfare as well as animal health and for helping to promote the importance of welfare with animal keepers and with animal industries. This could be a true partnership approach for working with Government in pursuit of its animal health and welfare objectives.

Subject to consideration of any resource implications, FAWC would be willing to advise the AHO on farm animal welfare; indeed the AHO would be considered an important 'customer' for its advice.

FAWC Secretariat
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