

**Minutes of the Meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Horse**  
**held in Committee Room 19, House of Commons, London SW1**  
**on Monday, 14th March 2011 at 5 p.m.**

**Present:**

Baroness Mallalieu (Chairman)  
Mrs Jeanette Allen (Horse Trust)  
Mrs Deidre Carson (BEVA)  
Lord Gardiner of Kimble  
Dr Harry Greenway (BHS)  
Brigadier Paul Jepson  
Daniel Kawczynski MP  
Baroness Masham of Ilton  
Lord Mancroft  
Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Damer

Mr Roly Owers (WHW)  
Lord Stoddart of Swindon  
Baroness Trumpington  
Dr Phil Wadey (BHS)  
Mr Mark Weston (BHS)

**Apologies:** (Shown on last page)

**In Attendance:**

Mrs Annemarie Westwood (Minutes)

The Chairman welcomed Mr Jim Paice MP, the Minister of State for Agriculture and Food, with responsibility for the Horse Industry, to the meeting stating that the industry was fortunate to have a Minister of the Horse Industry with such a long term relationship with the horse. The Minister was a previous Chairman of the All Party Racing Group.

The Minister was pleased to be invited to the meeting and said he took the view that there were some things the industry could do better by itself without the Government interfering, and at other times it was right for the Government to be involved.

**Defra's Cost Sharing Proposals**

Defra was well aware of the horse tax debate. The draft Bill fell at the General Election, and the Government was not proposing to resurrect it. However, the Minister said there was merit in the livestock sector being involved in developing disease management control and elimination strategies where necessary, and he could see that the Treasury was not going to give up on the idea of the livestock sector coming up with some of the money to fund this. Defra had waited for the results of the Radcliffe report, and they were now fairly close to announcing their final conclusions and how they planned to take forward the proposals made, namely

1. It should cover all animals whether farm animals, pets or equines.
2. The first and most important thing was to get the responsibility right - to get all the interested parties involved in developing the policy before developing any charging mechanisms.
3. Create a body, perhaps an "English Partnership Board", which would need to fit within the civil service and involve every sector.

It was clear it would be impossible to have every sector represented on the Board.

Brig Paul Jepson pointed out that the horse industry was worth £7 billion a year to the UK economy and employed 70,000 people. It was a big important industry. He recognised the difficulty in representing all groups, but pointed out that within Defra there were already Sector Councils which had eight delegates representing all groups. Sector Councils had achieved a broad spectrum of responsibilities encompassing all groups, and Brig Jepson recommended Defra looked at this as a model.

The Minister said the Group would need to encompass people with different specialisms such as veterinary and commercial knowledge of the farm livestock sector. People would be appointed for their expertise rather knowledge of a particular type of animal.

Mr Owers was very pleased the Government had dropped the proposed split of Health and Welfare and was keeping them together. He asked for an indication on timescale. Would there be additional consultation or would it be an implementation programme? The Minister said they would hope to see the new body up and running by the end of the year.

### **Exotic Diseases**

This Group had taken a close interest in exotic disease threats, particularly of African Horse Sickness and Equine Infectious Anaemia, and that was why Defra had developed a core group of experts to advise Government on the measures needed in the event of an outbreak. Defra was well aware of the strategic work which had been carried out to ensure the horse industry was well prepared in the event of an outbreak of disease.

As a control against the threat of disease, random testing of horses imported from the EU, and particularly originating from Romania, was taking place. Defra were also working with the Indian Government on the issue of Equine Metritis so horses could be exported to India. This would help breeders.

Dr Greenway asked what could be done with pre-import checks. The Minister said pre-import checks were already in place, but not everyone abided by the rules and therefore it was necessary to do random checks on arrival in this country.

### **Animal Welfare Act**

The Government reviewed the Act in 2010, and as part of that review had submitted a paper to Parliament with the comments of the consultative committee. The horse sector made a number of comments and the Minister would be following these up with the industry to make sure they were addressing whatever was possible.

The industry had asked for a regulatory system for livery yards when the Act went through Parliament. The new Government used regulation as a last resort, rather than first resort, and therefore they needed to look at another way of achieving the aim to improve the standard of welfare of horses in livery yards.

Mrs Allen said Local Authority Trading Standards Departments were the main statutory prosecutors, but were having to cut their budgets. With more and more abandoned horses, and with the Police largely without equine knowledge, members of the public were calling the RSPCA. The RSPCA was getting a backlash as people believed it had a statutory role, which it didn't. Often there was just one person in the Trading Standards Department for the whole council, and they had insufficient funds to remove any animals. In Northern Ireland, Brig Jepson reported that under the AWA responsibility for animal welfare was being transferred from the Police to the Local Authorities with money to do the work.

## **Passports**

The Minister was aware of the concern expressed when Defra announced that it would be reducing the number of Passport Issuing Organisations ("PIOs") from 84 to one. He apologised that the issue had not been thought through properly, and said the exercise had been stopped. However, there were issues of cost, consistency, timing and quality which needed to be addressed. Defra wanted to see how to improve the scheme and were currently going out to consultation on this with the PIOs. The contract with the National Equine Database was to be extended.

Countess Masham, declaring an interest as a Highland Pony Stud and small riding school, said the Highland Pony Society was worried about the idea of passports being taken over by one organisation. The breeding information was of paramount importance, and the breed societies ensured the quality was maintained at all times. The Minister agreed that this point would need to be considered and it was important to learn from best practice. The Chairman pointed out that many organisations saw passports as a useful source of income. Ordinary horse owners were paying out money for something that currently fulfilled no purpose and wasn't being followed through; owners of a number of horses often had to deal with multiple PIOs.

The Minister was concerned about the estimated 100k-200k horses without passports. Although passports had originally been introduced to meet EU requirements to protect humans from drugs introduced through the food chain, the major benefit was in disease control.

Mr Owers urged change, and change quickly, as a critical issue was the reputation and standing of horse passports. Most people saw them as a bureaucratic waste of time and there was a critical PR issue. They were set up for reasons of human health which didn't apply in this country.

The Conservative Party in opposition had opposed the introduction of passports, but they were here to stay. The Minister said they needed to make them as simple and accurate as possible.

Baroness Miller said the only relevance in disease control terms was if a vet stamped the passport and entered it on a database when drugs were administered.

Mrs Carson confirmed that vets were already required to ask to see passports when attending animals, but they didn't always do it. She also pointed out that the passports bore no relation to where the horse was kept, and it was necessary to have a system which recorded where horses were living at any one time. Mr Owers confirmed that the Belgians already had such a system in operation.

The Minister said the original objective was to ensure that horse meat entering the human food chain was clear of any pharmaceuticals. Now passports were linked up with microchips and the National Equine Database. There was an obvious role in disease control in being able to contact horse owners.

Mrs Allen urged the Minister to keep the ability to opt out of the food chain on passports. This was of paramount importance to horse welfare so vets could use the full range of drugs without restriction on horses not destined for the food chain.

## **Access to Forests**

The Government had announced it was going to set up an independent panel. Mr Weston asked how equestrian access interests would be represented on that panel. The Minister said

there would be an announcement on the constitution of the panel shortly. It had been difficult to ensure it was a workable size and that the predominant interest groups were represented. Over 60 organisations had written requesting representation. He said the people on the panel would have to ensure they linked in with all the interest groups.

The Chairman said that under the last Government there were two pieces of legislation, the CROW Act and the Marine and Coastal Access Bill, which improved access for walkers, but didn't do anything for equine access, and in reality did quite the contrary. Where ridden routes were lost due to coastal erosion, they were being redesignated footpaths. Horses were potentially going to lose access rather than gain it. She asked the Minister if Defra had any plans to get the increasing number of equines off the roads. Were there plans for a proper off-road network which could be used by cyclists as well? She said it was going to become an increasingly serious problem with busier roads and more and more road accidents involving horses.

The Minister said there were no plans to introduce any new legislation on access, and whilst he believed in increasing access it came back to cost. There were opportunities through agricultural policies to increase access for horses. He believed that farmers and landowners should work with horse riders to improve access.

Regarding Conservation Headlands, Lord Gardiner asked whether the rules could not be as tightly drawn, as greater flexibility would increase the chances of access for horses. The Minister said this was a valid point and he would look at the rules again.

Mr Weston stated that many linkages in the network had been provided through the various stewardship schemes, but when these schemes came to an end access would be lost. The Minister confirmed that there would be no funding for the continuation of these schemes when they expired, but that did not stop farmers continuing to allow access to riders.

The Minister assured the Group that although he had a very large portfolio, he would try to continue to take an interest in and look after the interests of the horse world. He then left the meeting.

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### **Minutes of the Last Meeting**

Page One, fourth paragraph. The value of the horse industry to the economy should have read £7 billion, not £7 million. With this one change, the minutes were signed as a true record.

### **Matters Arising**

#### **Forestry Commission Land**

At the direction of this Group, the Chairman had written to the Minister who was dealing with the Public Bodies Bill, Lord Taylor of Holbeach, and received a reply. However, since then the situation had changed greatly. The Minister had offered the opportunity for a meeting along with Lord Henley, and the Chairman proposed that this be taken up.

#### **Northern Ireland**

The industry had been urging the NI Government to sign up to the UK Animal Health and Welfare Strategy. Since the last meeting the Government had agreed to have their own strategy which would run parallel to the UK strategy and which would cover the whole of Ireland. Brig Jepson said this was a sensible move and a good step forward.

## **Animal Welfare Act**

The Chairman had written to Lord Justice Leveson, requesting that the Sentencing Council consider the potential for guidelines pertaining to the working of the Animal Welfare Act, and in particular the use of powers to disqualify those convicted from keeping animals in the future. The Sentencing Council had asked for evidence of the problems being encountered and the need for change. The Chairman asked that the RSPCA and other charities meet to put together a response. The letter would be circulated to all members of the Group.

**ACTION: ANNEMARIE WESTWOOD / ALL CHARITIES**

The Chairman of the Group, Baroness Mallalieu would write back to the Sentencing Council saying evidence was being gathered and a response would be sent in due course.

**ACTION: CHAIRMAN**

Brig Jepson had written to the Bar Council and Magistrates Clerks Council and had since provided them with a copy of the industry report on the AWA.

## **Access in our Forests**

Mr Weston expressed concern in respect of access riders enjoyed in many forests which was permissive. If the forests were sold, that access could be terminated. Before the previous proposal was withdrawn, Ministers had expressed a wish to see access preserved. The permissive access enjoyed by equestrians could easily be secured by the Forestry Commission dedicating access for equestrians under section 16 CROW Act. Mr Weston suggested sending a letter from this Group asking the Government to take this forward.

There needed to be an equestrian access voice on the independent panel looking at the forestry issue so equestrian interests were taken forward. The Chairman was happy to write to the Minister asking the Government to take measures to preserve all current access while the forests were still in its control. Mr Weston believed that individual sales would still take place. If tracts of forestry were sold, then rights of access needed to be preserved as often wildlife trusts were not friendly to riders. Mr Weston agreed to draft a letter for the Chairman.

**ACTION: MARK WESTON / CHAIRMAN**

Dr Wadey illustrated the point by stating that in the East of England there was unlimited riding in the forests but that this was permissive access which needed statutory protection.

## **Any Other Business**

### **HM The Queen's Diamond Jubilee Race**

Baroness Trumpington had had an idea to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee with the House of Commons and House of Lords running a race as a gift from Parliament. She had put this to two other committees, including the All Party Racing Group, and they had agreed. She had also gained permission from the Jockey Club to run a race at Epsom. The Baroness asked this Group to liaise with the other groups to get this idea off the ground and ensure it happened.

The Chairman agreed to contact the All Party Racing Group to see what progress they had made on this and to find out whether they needed any help from this Group. Baroness Trumpington asked to be kept informed.

**ACTION: CHAIRMAN**

## **Future Meetings**

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday, 11th July 2011, with the following meeting on Monday, 5th December 2011.

The Chairman said in future there might be issues that members of the Group would like aired, and proposed that there should be presentations from the various equine organisations as and when issues arose.

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## **Apologies**

Damian Collins MP  
Nick de Bois MP  
Michael Dugher MP  
Ian Liddell-Grainger MP  
Caroline Lucas MP  
Anne McIntosh MP  
Tim Morris - BHIC  
Jan Rogers - BEF  
Keith Taylor - BEF  
Claire Williams – BETA  
Nadhim Zahawi MP