

Minutes of the Meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Horse
held in Committee Room 13 in the House of Commons, London SW1
on Thursday, 31st January 2013 at 4.30 p.m.

Present:

Baroness Mallalieu (Chairman)
Mrs Claire Aldridge (The British Horse Society)
Mrs Jeanette Allen (The Horse Trust)
Mr David Bowles (RSPCA)
Mr Nic de Brauwere (NEWC)
Mr Andrew Finding (BEF)
Mr Steve Goody (Blue Cross)
Dr Harry Greenway
Mr Lee Hackett (The British Horse Society)
Brig Paul Jepson (British Equine Veterinary Assn)

Lord de Mauley (Minister with responsibility
for Animal Welfare)
Prof Tim Morris (Animal Health & Welfare Brd)
Mr Roly Owers (World Horse Welfare)
Mr Neil Parish MP
Ms Rebecca Redrup – PS to Lord de Mauley

Apologies: (Shown on last page)

In Attendance:

Mrs Annemarie Westwood (Minutes)

Lord de Mauley, the Defra Minister with specific responsibility for Animal Welfare, was welcomed to the meeting.

Introduction of CCTV into Abattoirs

Following the release of footage on Sky TV showing the treatment of horses in an abattoir in Cheshire, the equine charities were asking Government to consider placing CCTV in all slaughterhouses, as it was the simplest way to prevent this type of appalling treatment of animals happening again. The Food Standards Agency was responsible for enforcing the slaughter regulations, but it was very difficult for them to do so from a practical viewpoint. Cheshire was one of the two main abattoirs for horses in the country; the other abattoir in Somerset already had CCTV installed.

The installation of CCTV was not expensive, but would require a change in regulations and the industry was very aware of the current Government's view on regulations. Defra were consulted on this last year, and they didn't feel they had the evidence to support a change, however, the evidence was now clearly in place.

Mr Parish said that if slaughterhouses had nothing to hide, they should have no objection to the installation of cameras. He suggested asking abattoirs to install CCTV on a voluntary basis in the first instance, and then pursue regulation if necessary. The Chairman commented that prosecutions only tended to come up when an inspector had walked past and seen something happening. If she was sending her horses to an abattoir, she would always choose to send them to one with cameras.

Mr Bowles reported that after some footage in 2009, there was a concerted campaign to get voluntary CCTV in place. Since then virtually all retailers had installed cameras in their abattoirs. As this was a horse issue, there was no clear link between retailers and horse abattoirs and that was why there was a special issue at the moment.

Lord de Mauley said there was a requirement for monitoring either by human or through CCTV. Already there had been instances of poor treatment which CCTV had not picked up. One-way mirrors were another solution. He said he would talk to the FSA and ask them about Cheshire. He would also explore Mr Parish's idea to get abattoirs to fit cameras voluntarily.

6,000 Horses at Risk this Winter; is it time to Cull?

Following concern at the rapid increase in the number of horses having to be taken in, and the number of horses being abandoned, the equine organisations had formed a group in 2012 to address the issue. They reported in the Autumn that if the situation carried on, they would not be able to cope with another Winter. They had not yet had a large number of horses having to be signed over to them, but it might still happen. They had identified more than 6.5k horses in England and Wales at risk.

There were three key reasons why there was this problem:

- Overbreeding (people breeding in the mistaken belief that they would make money),
- Ownership (the inability to link owners with horses, as the passport system was not fit for purpose,
- Fly-grazing

A one-stop shop database was needed. People were misusing the passport system by having more than one passport and sometimes more than one microchip.

There were a number of pieces of law, such as the Animal Welfare Act, which were being used to get around the fact that when horses were abandoned, they didn't necessarily become the owner's problem; they often became the landowner's problem. The question of how to deal with people who abandon horses on someone else's land needed to be addressed. Removing the horses made even more difficult as there was no legislation saying that fly-grazing was illegal.

Unless the passport/microchip issue was dealt with and people understood that breeding was not a way to make money, the problem would continue to get worse. The animal welfare organisations could not cope with the number of horses involved and the horses would have to be euthanased. Education was a means of overcoming some of these issues and should not be overlooked. The industry was doing what it could by promoting best practice, but the real problem was there were too many horses. They would like to see a joined-up approach on how education should be approached before it became an even more serious issue. There was a role for the Government in terms of leading a resourced educational programme and co-ordinating a programme.

Baroness Mallalieu said it was essential it was dealt with as these horses had no value and it would cost people to have them put down. She asked if there was any way of giving some slaughter value to horses without passports; this would help alleviate the problems.

Lord de Mauley said horses would still be covered by the 40 day waiting period. Defra appreciated the amount of valuable work carried out by the equine charities and appreciated there were some very difficult issues. He was interested in the education idea. Part of the fly-grazing problem was people putting horses on other people's land. He asked whether land was being secured properly. Mr de Brauwere said most farmers tried to stop it, but there were some vicious and concerted efforts being made to break into fields, sometimes using diggers, and sometimes serious intimidation tactics were also used. In other instances people were leasing land and not paying for it. Whilst this Winter had been very mild, it had also been very wet and most of the problem would be carried into the Summer.

Mr de Brauwere said that York Council was looking at tethering issues, and there was a real need to deal with the travelling community. As a minority community, they needed to be

provided with somewhere to graze their horses, as well as park their caravans. Some of the passport initiatives had been designed to support them.

The Chairman said there was no one for the Local Authorities to turn to if there was a bunch of horses which needed to be dealt with. Local Authorities needed to be able to turn to Government to find some way of disposing of horses; otherwise who was to pay for putting them down. (Brigadier Jepson said there was a revolution going on in the animal by-products industry and it was becoming a profitable business as they could now turn fallen stock into fertiliser. It could become cost neutral in the future.)

Lord de Mauley said Defra had started to think about providing Local Authorities with clarification in these instances. He was aware of the issue of fly-grazing. These ideas were useful and he would see what could be done. Mr Owers pointed out that the Welsh Government was ahead of the game and had recently designated £150k for tackling fly-grazing. Professor Morris said the new sector council had met with David Heath's officials to discuss fly-grazing and passports. A partnership approach on the ground was needed, and the industry needed to be more specific and tell Defra what areas it could not deal with and where it needed help from the Government.

Sector Structures

The Equine Health & Welfare Strategy, which had been going for six years had historically included the welfare organisations, enforcement agencies and the Local Authorities Association. A steering group started to review the health and welfare strategy 18 months ago and the points coming out of that review were about to be sent out for final consultation before being published. At the same time, the Animal Health & Welfare Board were looking to work with the sector councils. BHIC had discussed taking it further to a broader sector.

A very prioritised strategy would come out. They were looking at targeting the welfare organisations' limited resources on the priorities and stopping organisations doubling up their efforts on the same cases. The aim was to be able to come to Defra with a sector view and with them being the first point of contact for consultations. They had been very supportive of Defra's work on passporting, but identified that with 70 passport issuing organisations, this number needed to be reduced and the standards needed to be raised.

The Chairman said there were so many bodies involved on the different aspects of animal welfare, if Government could speak to one body on the major issues, it would make it easier.

Tripartite Agreement ("TPA")

Since 2005 there have been free horse movements between the UK, France and Ireland. The industry believed the agreement needed to be changed without affecting its original intention to have free movement of competition horses. The three Governments were now talking about it in the light of disease controls. Horses were being moved from Belgium with diseases into France, and the UK and Ireland needed to be recognised as one country in this regard. Defra were consulting. The industry believed it was very important to defend and protect British horses from exotic diseases and an amendment was essential.

National Equine Database ("NED")

Britain had staged the best ever Olympic Games in 2012, and the industry was worth £7B to the national economy. The BEF had worked with Defra to put in place a NED as it was important to underpin the Government's passport legislation for the protection of human health, and for the management of disease surveillance in horses. There was strong economic growth in the effective breeding of British performance horses and the NED had helped this by providing the essential data.



Defra had ceased funding the NED in September 2012. The BEF took the view that an equine database was even more important now. There had been a lot of negativism when the NED was introduced, but people were now recognising its importance. Organisations were working together better as an industry than ever before, and they were determined to put in place a central equine data information system; one that would do the job better than NED and would fill in the gaps and problems that NED created. A proposal was being pulled together for Defra setting out what the industry wanted to do and how to do it, as it would need some support and leadership from Defra.

They were in the process of approaching a number of academic institutions to get help to define what the industry needed out of the database. People would fund it if they wanted it. The BEF had written to the Secretary of State in November seeking his support. The BEF wanted to work with him in a positive manner to make the scheme work.

Mr Parish said that on one side you have top quality horses – racing and competition horses and at the other end the poor quality animals which would end up in the food chain even if they were not supposed to. Identification of horses needed to be addressed. Individual ID was required for cattle and sheep, but not for horses. He found it surprising that horses could travel freely between England and France, whilst farm animals could not. There was a large difference between what the racing world wanted and what others on the fringes of the horse world wanted.

Mr Finding said that sport and race horses travelled around the world regularly and that was very different to farm animals. The lack of a database allowed duplication of passports and microchips. It was even easier now to do this as there is no one to check whether a passport already existed. Trading Standards had been putting in requests for information held on the old database that Defra held and there was a 7 week wait for information. It was impossible to ask people to enforce passport regulations if they could not get the information. The current system could not work without one port of call.

Lord de Mauley said Defra was working with the industry and that was important. Brigadier Jepson said the database was of all equines for disease control reasons. A recent example was the incursion of EIA where they failed to trace four of the contacts which was a reflection on the inadequacy of the current system. Whatever happened to the database, the Government would have to support it with a local framework. South Wales were dealing with the fly-grazing issue, but passports were needed for there to be successful prosecutions. The cost of enforcement needed to be budgeted for the first two years.

Hot Branding

Professor Morris said it was a seemingly intractable issue of applying hot irons to horses and the need to identify semi-feral ponies. To start with there was lots of noise and it pushed Ministers and officials into corners and put people on the defensive. A radically different approach was then taken by getting people on the margins to engage. The result was that a working group had been formed including a Defra vet to build relationships and sort out the issues by taking a different approach.

The Group had identified that:

- there was not a need to brand sport horses, but there was a need at the moment to brand certain feral ponies.
- the numbers should be reduced. If ponies were not going on the moor, they didn't need branding, and where branding was necessary it should be restricted to one brand.
- the way ponies were being caught and handled needed to be addressed.

The first meeting with Defra was taking place the following week where a draft Code of Practice would be discussed. They would like the Minister to support it and provide a foreword. The Group felt this was the best way forward rather than through legislation.

Mr de Brauwere was against hot branding as he believed it was possible to microchip as easily. He thought the tradition should be stopped and how it was stopped and how quickly was in the Minister's hands. Branding didn't work over a period of time, as later on in life the brands were not legible and some owners took advantage of this as they could not be identified. He believed branding should be phased out. Many of the semi-feral ponies would end up in the food chain in any event. He said they would be taken somewhere across Europe, irrespective of what medicines they had been treated with, and would end up being eaten. Hot branding was a serious issue, and not just an equine welfare issue. In the 21st century horses should not be hot branded.

The Chairman said it was still not possible to read microchips from a distance. In October a number of the breeders had said they would only brand the stallions and colts which were going up on the moor. She was pleased there was movement even amongst the people who were most entrenched.

Lord de Mauley said he had a lot of sympathy. The work which was being done was very good and he was optimistic about it. It was the right approach. Branding wouldn't disappear overnight, but it was good to see not only a Code of Practice, but also the engagement with all those concerned about alternatives.

ASBOs

The Chairman said the feeling was that there were not sufficient remedies available for what was for some people a very serious nuisance of fly-grazing. ASBOs were a suggestion which had been made by another groups. Mr Owers said it was a very good idea, if the owner could be identified.

Grand National

Professor Morris said the British Horseracing Association and Aintree issued a set of incremental changes to fit in with a strategy of reducing the risk where it could be reduced and still preserve the essential character of the race. These would incorporate fence design, levelling the landing side, irrigation and pulling in riderless horses.

One of the main changes was rejigging the start. Historically fatalities at Beechers Brook the first time round were the same as at the first fence. Speed was a big issue and they were looking at getting the start right to the first fence. Aintree were replacing the centres of fences with synthetic material which was more forgiving.

Mr Parish had visited Aintree with some members of the Animal Welfare Group and was particularly impressed with the new type of fence which was softer and should not cause as much damage. Irrigation was going to be used, as if you made the ground softer, it would automatically slow down the horses. Jockeys obviously wanted to win and whatever was done to the course they would try to find a way of winning. Therefore the course had to be built in a way which would help with the welfare requirements of the horse. Mr Parish felt there had been some genuine improvements made. Aintree had really tried to make improvements and it would be interesting to see the effects on this year's race.

Lord de Mauley said this was the way forward. It was acknowledged that some steps needed to be taken, and he agreed about the start. If progress was slowed into the first fence that

would help. The biggest challenge was a behaviour change. The Chairman said she still had reservations over the number of runners.

The Chairman thanked the Minister for joining the meeting and looked forward to seeing progress in a number of the areas covered. The Minister left the meeting.

Minutes of the Last Meeting

These were signed as a true record of the meeting with no amendments.

Matters Arising

Flu Vaccinations

A meeting had taken place with the pharmaceutical companies who were receptive to the fact that their vaccines needed to include current strains.

Visit to London Riding Centres

There had been difficulty in finding a date for visiting Ebony Horse Club and Vauxhall City Farm. The date had now been arranged for Thursday, 25th April* at 3 pm at Vauxhall City Farm with a possible trip to Ebony following. If anyone would like to attend this visit, please email Annemarie Westwood at a.westwood@bhs.org.uk. When the number of visitors was known, transport arrangements would be made. Dr Greenway said it was very important for as many people as possible to attend to see the work being carried out in London. [*NOTE: the visit will take place on another date to be confirmed shortly.]

Dates of 2013 Meetings

Tuesday, 16th April 2013 at 4 pm [Altered to Tuesday, 14th May 2013 at 3 pm]

Tuesday, 9th July 2013 at 4 pm

Tuesday, 3rd December 2013 at 4 pm

The Chairman said the Minister was a horseman and had been very sympathetic to the subjects raised during the meeting. She felt he was listening and knew he would do as much as he could for the horse world.

Membership of the Horse Group

The Chairman said that the Group had been approached by a number of people who wanted to attend meetings from other groups, and many who had attended had played an important part. There was no formal constitution laying down membership of the Group, and she thought it would be a major mistake if one of the smaller organisations was allowed to attend which would then upset others. She asked for input on how it should be decided who was represented on this body. She believed there was also some duplication. Some thought was needed on membership of the group whilst keeping the numbers down, and how to get more politicians to attend. The Chairman said a number of politicians had noticed the meetings and had approached her with questions on the points on the agenda and had read the minutes.

* * *

The meeting ended at 5.20 pm.

Apologies

Lord Freeman
Mr James Gray MP
Lord Higgins
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger MP
Baroness Masham of Ilton
Mrs Caroline Nokes MP
Mr Simon Reeve MP

Lord Stoddart of Swindon
Mr Keith Taylor (BEF)
Mr Oliver Thomas
Miss Claire Williams (BETA)
Mr Roger Williams MP
Mr James Yeates (RSPCA)



Secretariat provided by
The British Horse Society

M. J. I.
9.7.13