European Legislation

There are a number of pieces of legislation in place regarding equine movements within the EU and regarding the control of equine notifiable diseases. Several aspects of equine health are agreed at Community level. This article aims to highlight the legislation that is most relevant to equine veterinary practitioners and to outline the equine diseases that are currently notifiable in the UK and EU.

Council Directive 90/426/EEC (and associated Commission Decisions) details the health conditions applicable for equine trade and movement within the EU and the health conditions applicable for the import of equines from third countries. Under this Directive, equines may only move between Member States if they come from premises which have not been restricted on account of a number of specified diseases. Import of equines into the EU is only permitted from countries that are free of African horse sickness and which do not permit vaccination against this disease.

Commission Decision 93/623/EEC lays down rules on passports for equines. This Decision is currently under discussion in Brussels and will be updated to introduce the concept of electronic identification.

Council Directive 82/894/EEC specifies a number of equine diseases that are notifiable to the Commission, these diseases include:
African horse sickness (AHS)
Dourine (causative agent *Trypanosoma equiperdum*)
Equine Infectious Anaemia (EIA)
Equine encephalomyelitis (EE) (of all types, including Venezuelan equine encephalitis, Eastern equine encephalitis, Western equine encephalitis, Japanese encephalitis, West Nile Virus)
Glanders or Farcy (causative agent *Burkholderia* (formerly *Pseudomonas*) *mallei*)
Vesicular Stomatitis

Once a disease has been notified, the action taken depends on the disease involved and the circumstances of the individual outbreak. The action taken is monitored by the Standing Committee on Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFCAH). In the event of serious disease problems, measures to restrict the movement of equines from any Member State can be introduced.

**Council Directive 90/426/EEC** specifies the restrictions to be placed on a premises affected by an outbreak of a notifiable disease. Following any outbreak of notifiable disease, restrictions would remain in place on affected holdings until the premises were declared disease free.

**Council Directive 92/35/EEC** outlines control rules and measures to combat African horse sickness. This is the only specific EU Directive for a single equine disease. African horse sickness is covered by a specific directive due to the devastating potential for AHS to be rapidly spread by insect vectors and to cause serious equine mortality in a naïve equine population such as the equine population of the EU.

**UK Legislation**
UK legislation to control notifiable equine disease in England is currently laid down in the following statutes:
- Infectious Diseases of Horses Order 1987
- Movement of Animals Restrictions Order 2002
- The Specified Diseases (Notification and Slaughter) Order 1992
- The Specified Diseases (Notification) Order 1996
- The Specified Diseases (Notification and Slaughter) Order 2006
- The Infectious Anaemia (Compensation) (England) Order 2006

Similar orders apply for Scotland and Wales.

All diseases notifiable in the EU are also notifiable in the UK. In addition, the following are notifiable in the UK:
- Epizootic Lymphangitis (causative agent *Histoplasma farciminosum*)
- Equine Viral Arteritis (EVA)
- Contagious Equine Metritis Organism (CEMO) (causative agent *Taylorella equigenitalis*)

Although notifiable, EVA and CEMO have no human health implications and once notified are controlled voluntarily by the equine industry using guidelines drawn up by the Horse Race Betting Levy Board (HBLB). Of the other diseases listed as notifiable, many have never been recorded in the UK (e.g. equine encephalomyelitis (all types), Dourine), or were eradicated many years ago (e.g. Glanders). EIA has been recorded in the UK (GB 1976 and N. Ireland 2006) but was successfully eliminated in both cases.
Notifiable disease of concern in the UK

The notifiable diseases of real concern are the encephalitides and AHS. None of these diseases have been recorded in the UK. These diseases are vector borne, the encephalitides via mosquitoes and AHS by midges of the Culicoides genera (which are also the vectors of the recent Bluetongue outbreak in Eastern England). The outbreak of Bluetongue in the UK has led to concern at the possibility of these new exotic diseases spreading to northern Europe in the wake of climate change. AHS is of concern due to the devastating effect of this disease on the equine population with high mortality recorded when a disease outbreak occurs in a naïve population. The encephalitis viruses also have the potential to be of serious concern due to their potential to cause human disease as well as equine disease. Because of the serious public health implications, control of any encephalitides outbreak would probably have to be led by the Department of Health acting in partnership with Defra.

The current UK legislation cited in this article provides the necessary power for DEFRA (Animal Health) to issue essential orders to try to control any disease outbreak and limit disease spread. However, it has been recognised that a new updated version of the Infectious Diseases of Horses Order 1987 (IDHO) is needed to reflect new information and lessons learnt from the control of Bluetongue. This vector borne disease is seen as a model of how other insect borne disease might spread in the EU. Updated measures would allow more efficient controls to be enacted should an outbreak of exotic disease occur in the UK equine population. A revised draft of the Infectious Diseases of Horses Order was extensively discussed within Defra in the early part of 2007 but the three outbreaks of notifiable disease in England this year (Foot and Mouth Disease, Blue Tongue Virus, Avian Influenza) have temporarily diverted resources away from this area. With the end of the current outbreaks now in sight, it is hoped that work on completing the update of the equine legislation can resume as soon as is practicable.

Contingency planning

In August 2005, DEFRA published the STEED contingency plan (Specified Type Equine Exotic Diseases). This document was a comprehensive emergency response plan for equine diseases. The plan has now been overtaken by DEFRA’s contingency planning for all exotic animal diseases. These contingency plans are updated annually. The most recent plan was put out to public consultation in July and covers some equine diseases, such as equine encephalitis. Policy aspects of control of notifiable diseases are not included in this plan to allow DEFRA to be more flexible and respond more rapidly to changing disease situations and changing EU legislation.