

Dear Stakeholder

We would like to take this opportunity to update you on the work we have been doing with Defra since our last stakeholder meeting at the end of March. We have been working hard to put plans in place for potential incursions this year of BTV8 and been keeping a close eye of the developing situation in the continent and on the progress of authorisations for BTV1 vaccines. We have also been starting to look ahead and start planning our winter surveillance programme.

### **Situation update**

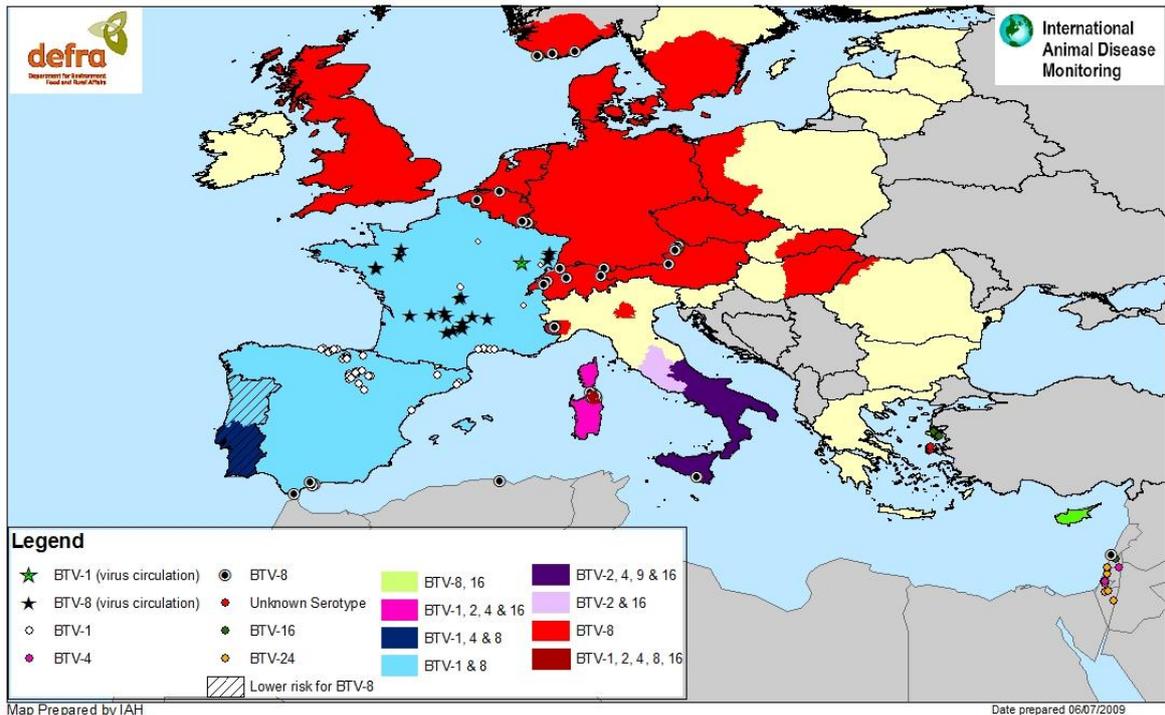
#### **BTV8 in the UK**

The situation in the UK has remained static since the last confirmed premise for BTV-8 (an imported case) was detected on 14 November 2008. In summary:

- 149 confirmed premises affected by BTV-8 in England and Wales to date, since the first case of BTV-8 was confirmed in September 2007.
- During 2008 we received 10 confirmed BTV8 positive consignments in England arising from imported cattle or sheep from mainland Europe, these were detected through post-import testing for all serotypes. These animals were moved to UK legally.
- During 2009 over 3700 animals have been imported from Europe, predominately from Germany and the Netherlands, since 1 April these have been double post-import tested, with no confirmed positive results so far. No further domestic cases of BTV8 have been detected
- The whole of GB remains in a Protection Zone for BTV8 which means that moves are permitted from confluent BTV8 zones, and that a domestic BTV8 positive animal found here would be allowed to live and to move freely across GB.

#### **European situation**

- Defra continue to work closely with the European Commission and other Member States to keep abreast of the current situation on the continent. Evidence suggests that there have been a handful of BTV8 and BTV1 cases so far during 2009. However it is still early in the season and we could see further cases later in the year.



BTV Restriction Zones, current BTV-1, BTV-8, BTV-16 & BTV-24 outbreaks in Europe for 2009 (as of 06 July) and outbreaks in neighbouring countries

Absolute Scale 1:22,500,000

0 212.5 425 850 1,275 1,700 Kilometers

## BTv1 planning

- At present, the threat of BTV-1 incursions from Europe remains low, although there is great uncertainty about the disease situation.
- The Core Group have been considering with Defra what the preferred options would be should BTV1 arrive, and whether any preventative action would be feasible and justifiable.
- Defra have conducted economic cost / benefit analysis, underpinned by epidemiological modelling, which has supported a clear conclusion that the costs of putting in place a pre-emptive lower risk zone to allow vaccination for BTV1 before disease arrives would far outweigh the benefits in terms of disease reduction at present. The UK will therefore not be putting in place a 'Blue Zone' for BTV1 for now.
- Any incursion of BTV1 found during 2009 would be dealt with proportionately, following guidance in our [control strategy](#) (which includes implementation of zones, movement controls and a vaccination programme). However, the core group will work closely with Defra and other experts to ensure that the time of year, location of incursion as well as economic impacts of any control measures on the industry are taken into account to minimise impacts on industry.
- We continue in our discussions with vaccine manufacturers and the VMD regarding authorisations of BTV1 vaccines so that we are prepared should BTV1 arrive in the UK.
- Vaccination is only allowed within a protection zone for that serotype. Vaccination for BTV1 is currently illegal in the UK (except in Jersey and the bailiwick of Guernsey as these Channel Islands have already declared themselves in a Protection Zone for BTV1 due to their proximity to France)

## **Actions to be taken**

### **BTV 8 Vaccination**

- Vaccination played a role in keeping us free from circulating disease last year, and it is vital that livestock keepers continue to vaccinate to protect their stock against BTV8.
- We remain at risk of disease from Continental Europe, or re-emergence of disease in the UK, and if adequate vaccination levels are not reached this year disease will spread through midges to unvaccinated animals if it is present.
- Sales data from the supply chain suggests 5.46 million doses Government underwritten vaccine have been sold this year. Stocks of Government BTV8 vaccine (Merial 100ml bottles) will be available at their reduced rate until the end of August when the last batches reach their expiry dates. No further Government vaccine will be available after this time. You can order vaccine via your veterinarian, from any of the three manufacturers licensed to supply (Fort Dodge, Intervet and Merial)

### **Imports**

- It remains our policy, as outlined in our Control Strategy, to take proportionate action against animals infected with serotypes of bluetongue. Any new cases will be considered on a case by case basis, taking into account factors such as time of year, levels of infection in the animals and evidence from epidemiological investigations.
- Defra continues to post-import test all bluetongue susceptible animals arriving in the UK. As from the 1 April 2009 these animals will be tested twice. The first test will take place between 1-3 days and the second test will take place 7 days after the first test. This enables us to detect infection as soon as an animal is imported and then 7 days later when infection that may not have been apparent on import is starting to show.
- With the threat of possible infection from other imported serotypes, double testing ensures that we have a robust post import risk management policy that assures us that we are able to detect BTV positive imports as quickly as practicable.
- We urge industry to consider the risks and check the health and vaccination status of animals when sourcing susceptible animals from abroad.

### **Vigilance**

- There has been a drop in the number of suspect cases being reported compared to this time last year. We are approaching the peak of the midge season and farmers should not become complacent about the risk of bluetongue.
- We strongly encourage all livestock farmers to remain vigilant and report any clinical signs of disease. Even those who have already vaccinated against BTV8 need to remain vigilant: BTV is on the move in Europe, and we need to be on our guard against both BTV8 but also new serotypes.
- There is a legal requirement for livestock holders to report all cases of bluetongue infection on their premises. This reporting requirement is crucial to enable Defra to detect disease and any new midge-transmission from the continent or re-emergence of disease.
- If you suspect signs of any notifiable disease, you must immediately notify your local animal health office.

### **Forward look**

- Later in the year, once the midge season is over, Defra and the Devolved Administrations intend to carry out GB wide cross-sectional surveillance for all BTV serotypes. This will enable us to get a clearer picture of the BTV8 disease situation, and enable us to detect any potential incursion of new serotypes.
- Defra will also be working with the European Commission in the later part of this year to ensure that the legislation remains appropriate and proportionate. This will help to inform our bluetongue policy for 2010 and beyond.

We hope that you found this update useful, please feel free to share this information with your members as appropriate. We will continue to work alongside Defra to ensure industry views are taken into account in policy development and delivery, and keep industry fully aware of future developments on Bluetongue to make sure that we are prepared for any future outbreaks and scenarios.

Farmers are reminded to remain vigilant over the summer months and report any suspicion of disease to their local Animal Health Office. It's also vital we protect our industry from this disease, so the message remains very clear – don't hesitate, vaccinate.

**Your sincerely**

**The Bluetongue Core Group**