

Return to [warmwell.com](http://www.warmwell.com)    [About vaccination against foot and mouth](#)

---

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm071017/debtext/71017-0006.htm#07101749000001>

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 845**

## **Opposition Day**

[20th Allotted Day—First Part]

### **Foot and Mouth/Bluetongue**

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal):** We now come to the main business: the Opposition day. Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

**1.36 pm**

**Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire) (Con):** I beg to move,

That this House notes the swift action taken by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to impose movement controls when foot and mouth was first confirmed on 3rd August, in contrast to the Government's failures in 2001; is alarmed that the outbreak originated from a laboratory site financed, licensed and inspected by the Government; notes that warnings about the inadequacies of the facilities at Pirbright were ignored; condemns this negligent approach to biosecurity; urges the Government to accept its responsibility for the situation facing farmers caused by the subsequent controls which for many has been compounded by the outbreak of bluetongue disease; and demands that the regulatory body for facilities using dangerous pathogens should be fully independent of the facilities' major customers.

I remind the House of my interest declared in the register.

For those of us who were involved in the catastrophe of 2001, the news on 3 August of another foot and mouth outbreak was a body blow. To be fair to the Secretary of State, he was open and helpful to my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), myself and affected colleagues. He gave us access to his vets, and he and the Minister for the South East kept us informed. We are genuinely grateful for that collaboration.

One should also point out that much of what happened predated the Secretary of State's appointment, but as is so often the case on such occasions, he was the unfortunate person left holding the parcel when the music stopped. I also acknowledge the swift action that was taken to clamp down on the disease by banning animal movements—a welcome contrast to the costly delays of 2001.

Early on Saturday 4 August, a farmer telephoned me and pointed out that the outbreak was near Pirbright. My immediate reaction was, "So what? That's just a coincidence." How wrong I was. Nobody realised then that this had been a disaster waiting to happen for five years and that the trail of incompetence led all the way to Downing street. As far back as 2002, an Institute for Animal Health review, commissioned by its owners the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, stated:

"Some of the laboratories are not close to the standard that would be expected in a modern biomedical facility."

We also know from the Spratt report that from 2003 there had been concern

"that pipes were old and needed replacing, but after much discussion between the Institute, Merial and DEFRA, money had not been made available."

The report also contains a letter from Merial dated 20 July 2004 setting out specifications for improvements to the drainage and referring to an unspecified quote

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 846**

for the work. The reply from DEFRA simply stated that the proposals would appear to meet DEFRA standards for the safe transfer of the waste. That letter was dated 2 August 2004. Yet last week the Secretary of State told the House that

"until the state of the drains was drawn to our attention, and everybody else's, as a result of the HSE investigation, nobody thought that they were in such a condition. That happens to be the truth."—[ *Official Report*, 8 October 2007; Vol. 464, c. 44.]

As there is now incontrovertible evidence that DEFRA knew about the state of the drains as far back as 2004, will the Secretary of State explain how he can claim that it did not know until September 2007?

In Spratt's final remarks, he says:

"There was evidence of a lack of urgency and ownership of risk at all levels, resulting in the failure to take appropriate decisions on the funding for essential improvements in safety critical infrastructure. This was particularly documented in the series of letters and reports from the biological safety officer of the Institute in his attempts over four years to get agreement on funding for the replacement of the effluent pipes."

Spratt also made it clear that DEFRA inspectors had confirmed that the drainage system was part of the category 4 containment system. He said that the pipes were old and appeared not to have been subject to regular, thorough inspection. Even during the past 18 months, there had been two incidents—both reported to DEFRA—where virus was released into the public sewer. So we have a catalogue of reports, recommendations and pleas for help regarding the drainage system. The Secretary of State cannot claim that DEFRA did not know. Some people certainly did, and the House should be told who they are.

However, it does not stop there. We find that in the years following 2002—with just one exception—DEFRA cut funding to the institute. As Spratt said, money had not been available. In January this year, the director of the institute told Radio 4:

“We are trying to deliver a Rolls-Royce service for surveillance in the UK but really we’re being funded more and more at the level of a Ford Cortina. Essentially, we are flying by the seat of our pants.”

Last week, the Secretary of State claimed that the vehicles were on the site

“Because work is under way to spend the money on renewing the facilities at Pirbright. Some £31 million of that money has already been spent”.—[ *Official Report*, 8 October 2007; Vol. 464, c. 44.]

Yes, £31 million, out of a Pirbright redevelopment scheme fund totalling £121 million, is indeed a lot of money, but it is not actually relevant. In a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey, the Minister for Science and Innovation said:

“Tenders for the drainage scheme of around £220,000 were received in October 2006.”—[ *Official Report*, 1 October 2007; Vol. 463, c. 2346W.]

That work was approved in March and commenced in July. On 5 September, inspectors confirmed that the work had been completed. I quote:

“The institute has already completed relining of the effluent pipes with a polyester lining, blocked off disused drains and sealed the manholes.”

So for £220,000 and six weeks’ work, the disaster to the British farming industry could have been avoided.

### **17 Oct 2007 : Column 847**

However, DEFRA has another role. Under the specified animal pathogens order, it has

to license such facilities. That includes meeting its own containment requirements, which the health and safety report clearly states were not met. Yet in December 2006, DEFRA inspected Pirbright, and according to Spratt,

“some issues relating to bio security were identified”.

I remind the Secretary of State of Spratt’s statement that the pipes did not appear to have been subject to regular, thorough inspection.

So why will the Government not publish that report? Is it because it is clear that the licence should not have been renewed? It seems odd that, despite the drains having been repaired, the licence is now suspended. Talk about closing the stable door after the cow has been shot! Are we really facing a foot and mouth outbreak for the second time in seven years because a facility had been licensed by DEFRA that should not have been? What is really hypocritical is that, if this had been a dairy farm or a shop selling food, it would have been prevented immediately from continuing in business until the problems were put right.

We know that DEFRA knew about the state of the drains four or five years ago. We know that it failed to fund the improvements—indeed, it cut the funding. Despite that, it went ahead and continued to license facilities that were rotten. It has cost the taxpayer well over £20 million, and rising. It has cost the English farming industry at least £100 million, and rising, and for Scottish and Welsh farmers the situation is just as serious. The potential damage, especially to our uplands, could be devastating.

What farmers need to know is, who is going to pay the price? When will somebody in DEFRA be accountable for this latest fiasco? Who will ultimately carry the can? Will it be the Prime Minister who, as Chancellor, cut the funding? Will it be the various Secretaries of State who ignored the warnings? Will it be the institute, or some inspector? No, Madam Deputy Speaker, we know that, as always with this Government, it will never be their fault. It is never their responsibility. Never resign, blame somebody else—that is the culture. The can, of course, is being carried—by the poor farmers up and down the country who cannot sell their stock, buy new stock, pay their bills or see a positive future. Already, farmers are deciding to quit the industry. They can take the weather; they can take decoupling; they can even take the vagaries of the market place, but they cannot—and nor should they—take the negligence of an incompetent Government.

**Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op):** We all know that this is a dreadful situation—as, indeed, a number of other animal disease outbreaks have been. However, will the hon. Gentleman, to be fair, acknowledge that this Government have spent a great deal of money on research into vaccination? Let us consider the example of tuberculosis, into which we had a number of inquiries. [ *Interruption.* ] The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but is he aware that the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee is looking into the money that this Government are spending internationally on this issue? Of course the Tories do not want to know—they do not spend any money.

## 17 Oct 2007 : Column 848

**Mr. Paice:** I am very willing to engage the hon. Gentleman and anybody else on the subject of the incompetent way in which this Government have handled the tuberculosis business, as well, but that is not the issue facing us today.

**Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD):** Perhaps I might return the hon. Gentleman to foot and mouth, which is the worry for most of my farmers. Does he share my concern and that of many people in Somerset that infected carcasses are being taken from the area of the foot and mouth outbreak and into my constituency—into the heart of dairying country—for disposal? Does he agree with me that that is an unnecessary and avoidable risk?

**Mr. Paice:** Any risk is worrying, and I can well understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, which has been expressed by many others. I hope that the Secretary of State will address that issue when he responds.

**Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con):** I listened to the Secretary of State address the House last Monday on the issue of the pipes in Pirbright. I remember that he said categorically that, although it was possible that pipes were faulty, it could not be guaranteed that that was the cause. Given the evidence that my hon. Friend has presented to the House today, does he agree that the Secretary of State must acknowledge that fact today, for the record?

**Mr. Drew:** Read the reports.

**Mr. Paice:** Anybody who has read the Spratt and the Health and Safety Executive reports will have come to the conclusion that my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) has reached. It is stated clearly that that is by far the most likely cause; no other substantive alternative cause of infection is ventured. I can well understand why the Secretary of State does not want to admit that. I am sure that thousands of lawyers are on his shoulder, pressing him not to do or say anything that could be construed as accepting responsibility. However, I do not think that there is any doubt about how the situation was caused.

**Mr. Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con):** As a dairy farmer close to the exclusion zone, I must refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests. The Institute for Animal Health, at Compton, is in my constituency, so a lot of scientists—past and present—live there. There is great anger among them at the fact that the Government are ignoring the way in which they go about their business, which is world renowned. They believe that the Government just want to dip in and out of the science and get a quick-fix solution. The actual solution is to look at the whole biology of these pathogens, but the scientists are prevented from doing so by the manner of their funding.

**Mr. Paice:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that. As I pointed out earlier, the director of the institute said that he is funded to run a Ford Cortina, when in fact, he is trying to run a Rolls-Royce service. That entirely sums up and fits with what my hon. Friend has just said.

### 17 Oct 2007 : Column 849

So far, I have addressed the causes of this outbreak; let me turn now to the handling of it. The initial decisions were right, but there have been a number of problems in the detail. There was a desperate lack of communication. Farmers near the initial outbreak were wondering what was happening for days and days before they were contacted.

**Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend agree that one problem that DEFRA has, and which Whitehall has more generally, is assuming that everybody is connected to the internet? We may have to be, but a lot of my farming friends are not and are simply left in the dark.

**Mr. Paice:** My next sentence was going to be, and will be, that DEFRA appeared to assume that every farmer spent their whole time studying the internet; I have obviously known my hon. Friend too long, or he has known me too long.

There was also confusion about footpath closures: whether to close them, and whether or not they were closed. There was no contingency plan to deal with casualty and dead animals at the hottest time of the year. Later, during the second cluster, we heard of different policies in different places: cattle killed on one farm, but not the sheep; goats being missed between adjoining slaughtered flocks; and, worst of all, the shooting of cattle from helicopters because they had broken out of a pen in the evening.

That raises the issue of why the country was declared free of foot and mouth only for further outbreaks to occur just days later. Last week, the Secretary of State said that infected premises 5 had had the disease for

“three or possibly four weeks”.—[ *Official Report*, 8 October 2007; Vol. 464, c. 48.]

However, he said that he was not pointing the finger at anyone. Is that because of statements by the owner of premises 5 that DEFRA inspectors had been on the farm and missed the disease? Is it because by 20 September it was clear that this was linked to outbreak one and that it should have been followed up, but was not?

The Secretary of State cannot say that DEFRA emerges with credit from the handling of this outbreak. There is no getting away from the fact that it was handled better than last time, but it would have taken a superhuman effort to have done worse. The Prime Minister says that the public will judge him on what he did on foot and mouth disease. He is right that he will be judged, but it will not happen in the way that he imagines.

**Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con):** My hon. Friend has been generous in taking interventions. On Saturday, I had a meeting with farmers in east Berkshire who have been affected by foot and mouth, some of whom have had their cattle slaughtered. My hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) has also met them. In addition to the issues of lack of communication and lack of consistency, they raised a biosecurity issue to do with DEFRA's Pirbright establishment: that topsoil was being removed from around the broken drain, which was the source of the first outbreak, but DEFRA apparently has no records of where that topsoil was taken.

### **17 Oct 2007 : Column 850**

**Mr. Paice:** As my right hon. Friend knows, I am aware of that meeting and those allegations. Many more exist, and I suspect that other colleagues will make them during this debate. To be fair, the Secretary of State has set up the Anderson committee to examine the matter. It is essential that all those issues are considered by that Committee, and that Dr. Anderson is rightly given the information to make a proper examination to see whether there was even more incompetence than we imagined.

**Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle) (Lab):** I have two questions for the hon. Gentleman. Would the Opposition have vaccinated in this situation? Why is the handling of bluetongue mentioned in the motion, because the Government have done nothing wrong in that instance?

**Mr. Paice:** I am coming to bluetongue. On vaccination, we would have taken more notice of the scientist who told us that the pipes were damaged in the first place. We have made it clear that in the circumstances that have arisen, we would not have vaccinated, but that option would have been in the locker had the disease got further out of control.

Even though the export ban has been lifted, at least notionally, and markets and movements have resumed in much of the country, the crisis in British farming is horrendous. The Secretary of State has said that returning to normal is the best solution—nobody would dissent from that—but does he believe that that is what has happened? Merely switching on exports or movement does not solve the problem. The market overhang from weeks of movement restrictions is dire. Millions of animals should have gone by now—hundreds of thousands of sheep in our hills that are eating precious forage reserved for the winter, cull ewes, light lambs and fat pigs—and all that means a calamitous fall in prices. With no live exports, bull calves are again being shot at birth. Lamb prices are up to 50 per cent. lower and those of finished pigs are also well down, while massive rises in the price of feed are having to be contended with.

I point out to the Secretary of State that the bulk of the UK pig industry is within the zone that cannot yet export. Probably 40,000 cull sows are now on farms. They are blocking

up pens, costing money and are effectively worthless. Even if they could be exported, it would take many weeks to clear the backlog. The welfare disposal scheme via the fallen stock scheme that he announced last week, should be extended to cover sows within the whole zone from which exports are banned. That could be done, and I suggest using £1 million of the £2 million that he has allocated for promoting meat consumption. Important as that is, it is no use promoting something that is wasting away.

**Mr. Heath:** On pigs, has the hon. Gentleman noticed something that was brought to my attention by a small farmer from Muchelney in my constituency: the limited movement orders for pigs were available only to those producers who were in established pyramid schemes? That means that small farmers, who perhaps bought from weaner stocks in order to fatten and sell on their premises, were not able to move their pigs. Why should there be that distinction between small producers and large producers?

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 851**

**Mr. Paice:** As the hon. Gentleman probably realises, I am not in a position to give the answer to that question. I suspect that it might have something to do with traceability. I hope that the Secretary of State will tell us about that.

Will the Secretary of State also tell us what discussions he is having about relaxing the export controls? The huge area of the country from which exports are banned includes the abattoir that slaughters 70 per cent. of cull sows in this country. What is he doing about the 21-day rule? It is tying up farms, which, at this time of the year, are selling finished stock and normally buying new stock. That measure is in addition to the separate 20-day rule about general movements.

Will the Secretary of State speak to the Commission about one other aspect of foot and mouth control? Will he draw the contrast between the strict rules that it has imposed in this regard and its far more lackadaisical attitude to imports from Brazil? Both measures are designed to prevent the spread of foot and mouth, yet, despite a damning report from the Irish Farmers Association about the lack of traceability, the lack of vaccines and the non-use of ear tags, the Commission equivocates about Brazilian imports. In short, the regime, be it for Britain or Brazil, should be equally tough against foot and mouth.

**Paddy Tipping (Sherwood) (Lab):** I always listen carefully to the hon. Gentleman, because he commands great respect in the House on farming issues. He has talked about the Government paying the price and about the compensation that they have announced. In fairness, he has suggested that it should be used in alternative ways. Is he suggesting that there should be a greater compensation scheme, and, if so, to what amount and paid to whom?

**Mr. Paice:** If the hon. Gentleman holds fire, I shall come to that.

I turn to bluetongue, which hit us in September. Again, the initial actions taken were correct, but it rapidly became obvious that the consequences were going to be



horrendous. We were told that stock could be moved to slaughter in the control and protection zones, yet nobody in DEFRA seemed to have realised that there were not enough slaughter places to slaughter the stock. I was told by a senior civil servant, in front of Lord Rooker, that licences would not be issued to allow stock from the control zone to go to the abattoirs because of European rules, yet that is now what is happening. Countless pedigree stock—cattle and sheep for which this is the peak sale time—cannot be moved, yet in France, a combination of an insecticidal regime and blood testing is being used to allow that to happen.

I know that bluetongue is a changing picture and that as new cases occur, problems of movement controls perversely become less of an issue. Bluetongue could be even more devastating economically to our livestock industry than foot and mouth. That is why vaccines are so crucial. Will the Secretary of State tell us what discussions he has had with the developers of vaccines about future supplies? Why has Merial been stopped from further development, despite the drains at Pirbright having been repaired? If he is to have any

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 852**

chance of preventing the spread of bluetongue across central and southern England and Wales next summer, he must ensure that enough vaccine doses are available as soon as possible. If stock is not protected before next year's midge season, there is no chance of containing this disease.

Finally, let me turn to the issue of support for the industry. Last week, the Secretary of State announced a 30 per cent. supplement for the hill farm allowance. We had already said the previous week that we would have made it 50 per cent., but the gesture is right. He spent £4 million on other measures. He then announced, as if to a fanfare, the lifting of regulatory burdens. He wanted to increase the public procurement of British meat. We agree, but by my reckoning he is at least the fourth Secretary of State to say so and still only 3 per cent. of the lamb sold to our armed forces is British.

The Secretary of State announced a four-month delay in the requirement for hauliers to have a certificate of competence. It is a ludicrous requirement anyway and should be abolished. He announced a derogation for the amount of nitrogen to be spread on nitrate-vulnerable zones, but the crisis is now and no amount of nitrogen will make grass grow in the winter.

Finally—and I can hardly believe this one—the Secretary of State announced a one-month extension to a consultation. I can hear the sighs of relief as the red tape burden is lifted from farmers' shoulders—I think not. That last cynical point is at the heart of the matter. For all its sins, the old Ministry of Agriculture knew that its role was to support and promote British farming. DEFRA's role is to control and regulate. There is no natural empathy with or understanding of the farming industry, and no knowledge of the structures of the industry that realises that a restriction here has a knock-on consequence there. Where are the men and women who understood those things and who realised that animals keep growing; that grass is finite; and that if one cannot export pig shoulders, the price of the whole pig collapses?

Most importantly, where are the people who know that disease will wait for no man? It will not wait for a committee. It will not wait for the resolution of a turf war. Four years was too long to fix a drain. How many more times must this once proud and valued industry be ripped apart by an incompetent Government?

**2.1 pm**

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Hilary Benn):** I beg to move, To leave out from “House” to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

“expresses great sympathy with farmers and the farming industry and acknowledges the difficulties they are facing as a result of the outbreaks of foot and mouth disease and bluetongue; recognises the work that has already been done by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Animal Health, farmers and their representative bodies and others in containing foot and mouth; agrees that the priority for the Government must be to work with the farming industry and others to support the resumption of market activity as quickly as possible; and notes the steps the Government has taken to deal with what happened at the Pirbright laboratory site.”

I welcome this opportunity for the House to debate foot and mouth and bluetongue, further to the statement that I made on Monday last week. I recognise the very

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 853**

real interest and concern on the part of many right hon. and hon. Members. We know that this could not have happened at a worse time of the year for the livestock industry. All livestock farmers have been affected and for many, things are very hard. I have met farmers and their representatives and they have left me in no doubt about the difficulties that the industry is facing. That is why, in responding to what the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) said, I want to set out before the House the action that we have taken to try to deal with the two outbreaks and to assist the farmers who have been so badly affected.

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) (PC):** Why is it that the Secretary of State’s speech on Friday 5 October contained details of compensation for Scotland and Wales, but on the following Monday there was no mention of compensation for anyone other than English farmers?

**Hilary Benn:** Well, I heard someone mutter the words “the election”, but I take this opportunity to put it on the record in the House, as I have outside, that there is not a shred of truth in the allegation that any possible election had anything to do with any decisions relating to funding for foot and mouth. Colleagues have discussions and options are considered, and in the end the Government decided as I told the House in my statement on 8 October. I will return to that issue if the hon. Gentleman will bear with

me.

I wish to begin by addressing the comments that have been made about the Pirbright site, because that is where the foot and mouth outbreak began. As I have said before, it should not have happened, I am sorry about the great effect that it has had, and I am determined that it does not happen again.

Following the initial confirmed case on 3 August, it became apparent—

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey) (Con):** Before the Secretary of State moves on to the causes, could he return to the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) on the response to my question about the drains after the statement last week? The Secretary of State said that

“nobody thought that they were in such a condition. That happens to be the truth.”—[Official Report, 8 October 2007; Vol. 464, c. 44.]

I am struggling with that definition of the truth. We know that Merial wrote to DEFRA about the drains in 2004. We know that the then Department of Trade and Industry had commissioned tenders to repair the drains a year before. How can the Secretary of State honestly maintain that the truth is that nobody knew?

**Hilary Benn:** I will respond directly to that point, if the hon. Gentleman will bear with me.

It became apparent the day after 3 August that the Pirbright site was the potential source of the outbreak because of the type of virus identified—01-BFS-67. That is why we commissioned the Health and Safety Executive and Professor Spratt to lead a team of experts in reviewing biosecurity. We also took steps as

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 854**

the regulator to require the Institute for Animal Health and Merial to take action as concerns were raised with us by the HSE during the course of its inspection, including remedial action on the drainage system. I published both of those reports on 7 September.

However, as the HSE report, the Spratt report and the DEFRA epidemiology reports made clear, we may never be absolutely certain as to exactly how the foot and mouth virus escaped from the Pirbright site. But the drains, the flooding and the construction work—ironically, there was construction work on the site precisely because the Government are investing a considerable amount of money in improving the facilities at Pirbright—do seem to be the most probable chain of events, and I have been clear on that from the beginning.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** The Secretary of State is a decent man, but I fear that he is avoiding answering the question that I asked—

**Hilary Benn:** I haven't got to it yet.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** In that case, when he answers he might like also to deal with the point that DEFRA inspected the site in November 2003, August 2004, September 2005 and December 2006, after the work on the drains had been commissioned, and found—according to the Minister involved—no major biosecurity issues. What does that say about the competence of DEFRA's inspections?

**Hilary Benn:** In the Government's response to all of these reports, I accepted the recommendations that were made. They are being implemented and an improvement is planned. Since 7 September, the HSE and DEFRA have carried out further joint inspections. All of the essential work will need to be completed before IAH and Merial can resume full operations.

I shall return to the issue of bluetongue and a potential vaccine from Merial a little later.

We are now requiring of Merial that all the virus that it produces should be inactivated before it reaches even the first part of the drainage system. That will require a heat treatment facility and it needs to put that in place —*[Interruption.]* Well, that is a factual description of what is happening in response to the question about when Merial will be in a position to resume work to try to find a virus to deal with bluetongue. We need to be satisfied that that has been done before it can resume its full operations.

I shall deal directly with the charge by the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) that warnings about conditions at the facility had been ignored. The first point that I want to make is that the IAH has been inspected, as part of its Specified Animal Pathogens Order—SAPO—licence, on a regular basis under the arrangements that were set up in the early 1990s. The institute was required to take action as a result of those inspections and submit reports on progress. However, at no point was it the view of the inspectors that the IAH was unsafe in its operations.

On the issue of the drains, DEFRA—as the regulator—was indeed consulted about plans for their replacement, but we were not aware that they were

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 855**

leaking. That is a very important point. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, was anyone else. No scientist that I know of has said that the drains were damaged. If the hon. Gentleman can draw my attention to any scientist who did say that, I would be very interested, because that is what he claimed. As soon as we became aware of the damage—in August, as a result of the HSE's work—action was taken.

It is not the case that live virus was released into the public drainage system, as the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire suggested in his remarks. There is no evidence of that at all. So that the House understands, let me say that the Pirbright site has a two-stage process to ensure that all virus is completely inactivated before it goes into the public drainage system. The IAH and Merial had their own separate arrangements,

which then fed into a shared pipe, and a second-stage belt-and-braces treatment process took place to deal with any effluent before it went into the public drainage system.

Why had a discussion taken place about the replacement of the drains? It had occurred because they were old, and because of concern about their capacity and about surface water potentially coming into the system, but not because of concern that the drains were leaking. As Professor Spratt makes clear in his report, safety depends not on the age of the facility but on the procedures carried out.

As regulator, DEFRA was consulted about the specification for the replacement of the drains; we were not asked for funding to replace the drains, and nor would we have been. As I said to the House last week, one would not ask the regulator for money to improve or replace one's facilities, any more than a factory that was inspected and found not to be up to scratch would ask the HSE to give it some money to improve its facilities.

The Government accepted the findings of the reports of Professor Gull in 2002 and Dr. Cawthorne in 2003 about the need to upgrade the facilities at Pirbright. Following the development of a costed proposal, the Government decided in 2005 to invest £121 million in new facilities at Pirbright, which, it should be acknowledged, is fundamentally important to our fight against animal diseases throughout the United Kingdom—in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Of that money, £31 million has already been spent on the site. With respect, therefore, nobody can credibly argue that a lack of funding to be spent in Pirbright was the problem.

Had the drains been thought to be the overwhelming priority for action on the site, no doubt some of that £31 million would have been used to replace them, but that was not the case. I accept that that raises a question about prioritisation: if people felt that that was the priority, why was that not a factor in decisions about the £31 million expenditure? I agree that the issue needs to be examined. That is the reason why the second review that I have set up—I shall come to the other one in a moment—which the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council will carry out into IAH, will look at funding, governance and risk management.

**Daniel Kawczynski:** The Secretary of State is putting a robust case, but is he telling the House that there will be no resignations at all in his Department as a result

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 856**

of this fiasco, which could have cost our country billions of pounds? *[Interruption.]* It is a shame that the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) is shouting across the Chamber. This has been a disaster for our country, and the Opposition expect some resignations over the matter.

**Hilary Benn:** I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. There have been no resignations, and there will be none. I will tell him who takes responsibility: I take responsibility. As the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire said, I happen to be the current Secretary

of State. As I have done throughout, I am trying to set out for the House the steps that I have taken, accepting that responsibility, to put right what has gone wrong. I am sure that the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski), who is a reasonable man, will accept that the whole system of regulation for protecting against risk—whatever we are discussing—has evolved over time, and that one of the most important factors in determining how systems are changed and improved is learning from mistakes. Things did not go right, and I am determined that we learn from the mistake.

**Mr. Drew:** Unfortunately, some of us have acquired a lot of expertise in drains over the past couple of months. Following the episodes in the summer, does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to consider new arrangements at a range of different sites, including establishments such as Berkeley in my constituency—a former nuclear station—given the likely threat of floods hitting us again in future? Will he assure me that not only biosecurity but structural measures will be increased to ensure that such episodes do not threaten us time after time?

**Hilary Benn:** I am happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance. In accepting the recommendations of the HSE and Spratt reports, we have issued an advice note to all the institutions handling both animal and human category 3 and 4 pathogens, which will be followed up by a series of inspections. In relation to flooding, a lessons-learned review is being undertaken by Sir Michael Pitt. When such things happen, what do most people want? I accept that some people want a head on a stick, but the most useful and important response is to learn the lessons, make sure that there is not a recurrence and put a better system in place. I am determined to do that.

**Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con):** In the light of the Secretary of State's comments, will he take a serious look at the arrangements in this country for meat composting, which open up a risk of not only foot and mouth but swine fever, avian flu and a range of diseases? Will he consider in particular the fact that the process is allowed on livestock premises, because farmers in my constituency are asking that it be confined only to industrial premises?

**Hilary Benn:** I am happy to consider the issue raised by the hon. Lady. If I may, I shall respond directly to her, if that would be helpful.

**David Maclean (Penrith and The Border) (Con):** The right hon. Gentleman is an honourable and decent man and comes to the problem with fresh hands as a new  
**17 Oct 2007 : Column 857**

Secretary of State. Hypothetically, if he had been Secretary of State presiding over such matters for the past five years, would he have resigned?

**Hilary Benn:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for putting that hypothetical question to me. All that I can say is that I was otherwise engaged during those five years, as I am now engaged in the task that has fallen to me. I shall exercise my

responsibilities to the best of my ability.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Hilary Benn:** I shall give way to the hon. Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Jones) and then to the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire, and then I would like to make progress, as I know that many Members wish to speak.

**Mr. David Jones (Clwyd, West) (Con):** The Secretary of State has dealt at length with the question of the degree of knowledge or otherwise of those managing and regulating the Pirbright establishment of the defects in the drains. But does he not accept that, irrespective of the degree of knowledge, those who manage and regulate any establishment that is built to contain, and does contain, a substance that is inherently dangerous—and that will cause great damage if it is allowed to escape into the environment—must per se be liable for whatever damage is caused?

**Hilary Benn:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman that those who regulate and license, and those who have the responsibility, in this case the IAH, of ensuring that the terms of the licence are adhered to—that is an important distinction, and together those provide the appropriate safeguard—have a responsibility. But I have seen no evidence that anybody acted negligently, and that is why I responded to the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire as I did previously. It is clear, however, that things did not go right, and that is why we have taken steps to put them right. I shall deal with another part of that action in a moment.

**Mr. Paice:** The Secretary of State has repeatedly said that, despite what I have stated, there is no evidence that DEFRA knew that the drains were in such a bad state of repair. Contrary to what he said, I am sure that I did not use the word “damaged”, and never meant to suggest that —*[Interruption.]* Actually, if one reads the full Spratt report, the drains were damaged by tree roots. But given that the Spratt and HSE reports both indicate the dire state of those drains and prior flooding incidents, does not the Secretary of State find it odd, as an objective and sensible man, that at no stage during all the exchanges of correspondence—taking into account Spratt’s comment that the drains did not look as if they had been thoroughly inspected—did anybody in DEFRA ask what the drains were like, why there was a desire to replace them, whether it was urgent, whether it should be done quickly or why an inspector had not opened a manhole and stuck his head down? It defies belief that that could have gone on without anyone asking those fundamental questions.

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 858**

**Hilary Benn:** We will both be able to check *Hansard* to find out whether the hon. Gentleman used the word “damage”. However, the point is important because the description of what went on that I am putting before the House rests importantly on the

fact that, because of the combination of events that had taken place, nobody knew that the drains were in the condition that it turned out they were in by the time the HSE investigated them in April. *[Interruption.]* The letter from 2004 was about replacing the drains because people recognised that they were old. However, the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will not find in that correspondence people saying, “And by the way, we think the drains are leaking.”

The hon. Gentleman raises a fair point, which I want to come to, about the nature of the inspection regime. I grant him his point about what kind of inspection of category 3 and 4 containment systems should take place. The steps that we have now taken, and the requirement that we are putting on Merial to ensure that all the virus that it puts into the system is inactivated before it gets to that bit of now-lined drainage, raise the question of what the arrangements for inspecting category 3 and 4 pathogen handling laboratories should be.

For that reason, there is an issue about the respective roles of the regulator, the funder and the customer; Professor Spratt made a recommendation on that. That is why on 7 September I announced that Sir Bill Callaghan was to carry out a review of the regulatory framework governing the handling of category 3 and category 4 animal pathogens. He has now started, and he will report before the end of the year.

DEFRA is both the regulator for the 1998 order and a customer for the important services, including diagnostics and research on foot and mouth and bluetongue, provided by the Institute for Animal Health at Pirbright. As I have already said, with hindsight my view is that that arrangement is not satisfactory. The Callaghan review will consider what the right arrangement to replace it should be. That is another instance of the Government’s determination to learn from what has happened.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex) (Con)** *rose—*

**Hilary Benn:** I shall give way, but then I shall make some further progress.

**Mr. Jenkin:** I feel that I must take the Secretary of State back. The House is entitled to an answer to the question of whose responsibility it was to know the condition of those drains. In all honesty, it is not good enough for the House to be effectively told that it was an accident and that nobody was responsible for knowing their condition.

**Hilary Benn:** Under the 1998 order, the responsibility is for the licensor and regulator to specify the outcome that has to be met; that is the purpose of licensing and regulation. It is the responsibility of the licence holder to ensure that those requirements are met.

All the people involved in the work—and the people at the IAH and the inspectors who work for DEFRA are conscious and dutiful—did what they thought was right in the circumstances. Nobody thought, and this is

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 859**



the point, that the drains were leaking in that way. There was a confluence of events—a not-completely-inactivated virus coming into the system, heavy rainfall, a rising water table, a bringing to the surface and traffic because of the building work. The HSE review and the Spratt report say that that is the most credible explanation. The point that I am making to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) is that we learn from such experiences. It is fair to ask whether we should have a system in which pipework that is part of a critical system gets inspected. I accept that point.

I turn to the handling of the outbreak. I thank the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire for his comments on the swift and effective action that DEFRA, the animal health authorities and partners in the industry have taken in trying to control the problem. Our contingency plan recognised the lessons of 2001. I hope that the House will feel that how we have responded to the outbreak this time around shows how we have applied that knowledge. Our priority, of course, has been to contain and then eradicate foot and mouth. That is why the national movement ban was brought in straight away on the evening of 3 August, a decision also taken at the same time by the devolved Administrations. We have carried out extensive surveillance, which, in the second phase of the outbreak, has gone beyond the European requirements by inspecting and testing animals. We are now 75 days into this outbreak. We have had only eight cases, all in Surrey. We want to keep it that way so that we can control and eradicate the disease.

**Mrs. May:** It may seem a small point, but the Government have consistently said that the second outbreak has been only in Surrey. That is not the case. Farmers in Berkshire have also had foot and mouth outbreaks and cattle stock there has been culled as a result. Will the Government please say “Surrey and Berkshire”?

**Hilary Benn:** I am duly chided by the right hon. Lady.

**Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con):** The Secretary of State has been extremely generous in giving way.

One matter is troubling me. He says that the institute is not liable for the costs of the damage because nobody was negligent. However, as I understand it, the general proposition is that if a landowner has potentially dangerous material on site and it escapes, the landowner is responsible for the consequences. One obvious example of that is in respect of domestic animals. The Secretary of State knows well that if a horse escapes from a site, the relevant landowner will be responsible even in the absence of negligence. Indeed, the Secretary of State’s own Department is considering changing the law to address that point. I do not understand how liability can be avoided, given that the virus escaped from a Government institution.

**Hilary Benn:** I said that I had seen no evidence of negligence, but I did not advance an argument about what liabilities might arise from what has happened. I am not a lawyer; others are much better qualified to follow the right hon. and learned Gentleman’s

argument and take a decision about whether they want to use that remedy.

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 860**

**Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, South-West) (Lab/Co-op)** rose—

**Hilary Benn:** No; I shall make progress now, as I have been generous in giving way.

I shall come to bluetongue in a moment. On vaccination for foot and mouth disease, in both phases of the outbreak we had organised and were ready to vaccinate if necessary. In the event, we decided that it was not—a view shared by the chief veterinary officer and independent scientific advice. We have worked with colleagues in the devolved Administrations to take decisions about disease control, when possible on a co-ordinated basis. After all, the industry is inter-dependent in its activities in different parts of Great Britain, although we recognise that animal health is a devolved matter. We have worked with representatives of the industry to circulate information about the controls, through information packs, text message alerts and information on the DEFRA website. I acknowledge that not all farmers have access to the internet, but a lot of effort has been put into getting information to farmers. We have worked with the National Farmers Union to do so, and to try to identify and reduce the very real economic and welfare pressures faced by farmers. That is why we have taken a risk-based approach to lifting movement restrictions.

Clearly, the emergence of the third case on 12 September—more than a month and a bit after the previous reported case—made things much more difficult. We now know that that was the result of unreported infection in one premises. *[Interruption.]* Yes, they were visited, but as the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire will know because of his expert knowledge, it is difficult to detect old disease. It was picked up because of blood sampling of sheep, and that reinforces the point that farmers are the first line of defence in defeating the disease.

As a result of the case, controls had to be reimposed. Farm-to-farm movement resumed on 23 September. Markets reopened at the beginning of this month, and last Friday meat product exports from Scotland, Wales and the low-risk area of England were able to resume. That is an important step forward. We are also working with the European Commission to try to decrease the restrictions on exports, and to increase the areas of the country from which exports can be made. The next meeting of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health will be on Friday.

The 20-day rule relates to domestic controls on animal standstills. As of today, that is now six days for areas outside the FMD risk area. The 21-day rule is an EU export rule, and means that animals cannot be moved onto a premises in the preceding 21 days. To change that, we would need to persuade Europe to do things differently.

**Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford) (Con):** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Mr. Angus MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Hilary Benn:** I will give way to both hon. Members.

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 861**

**Mr. Burns:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. Bluetongue was discovered in my constituency on Monday, and I am very grateful to members of his Department for the way that they notified me of that and for their subsequent handling of my queries about the matter. In respect of controls for FMD and bluetongue, is the Secretary of State prepared to look again at how his Department is sorting out boundaries, given the knock-on effects for other farmers in the areas concerned?

**Hilary Benn:** I am indeed. The hon. Gentleman raises an important point and I shall respond directly to it when I turn to dealing with bluetongue, which I am anxious to do in a moment.

**Mr. MacNeil:** The Secretary of State has said that FMD has not escaped beyond the confines of Surrey and Berkshire, but the UK is divided into two epidemiological zones—Great Britain, and Northern Ireland. Given the pattern of the spread of the disease this time, does he think that other epidemiological zones should be established within Great Britain? That is the arrangement in the continent of Europe's land mass.

**Hilary Benn:** There is always a case for using the light of experience to reconsider whether decisions about such zones should be changed. In this outbreak, we have created areas of high and low risk, with the result that we have helped to pave the way to persuading the EU to allow a resumption of meat product exports. I have listened to many representations on this matter, and my judgment was that that was one of the most important things that could be done to assist the industry at this very difficult time.

As of today, the removal of all restrictions outside the FMD risk area means that animal movements can take place freely. That coincides with the protection zone being folded into the surveillance zone, it being 15 days since the completion of preliminary cleansing and disinfection on the last infected premises. The size of the FMD risk area remains under review.

I recognise that serious difficulties remain for the farming and food industries. In my statement last Monday, I set out the details of what we are doing to assist farmers in England. The Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly are introducing their own welfare disposal schemes under the devolved arrangements—

**Several hon. Members** *rose* —

**Hilary Benn:** I think that I can anticipate some of the questions that certain hon. Members want to ask. We are covering the cost of that assistance from our own budgets, although we do not yet know what the full cost will be. As I said last week, it is open to the devolved Administrations to approach the Treasury if they wish to do so. However, the best help that we can give is to help the industry to recover.

**Mr. Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD):** Does the Secretary of State realise that hill farmers in Northumberland have not yet received any welfare payments, even though they see that a welfare slaughter scheme is in operation for farmers on the Scottish side  
**17 Oct 2007 : Column 862**

of the hill. For farmers on the English side, however, not even the payments to which he has referred have come through.

**Hilary Benn:** I accept that and, as I said to the House last week, we will seek to make payments to those in receipt of hill farm allowance as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Llwyd:** The Secretary of State has been in discussions with the farming Minister in Wales, but his suggestion that the devolved Administrations need only approach the Treasury is not very helpful. He could sanction the £6.5 million promised in the first statement, and he should do so now.

**Hilary Benn:** I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but my Department, the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Executive each fund the schemes to support farmers in our respective areas at this difficult time. We are using our existing budgets to meet the costs thus incurred but, as I told the House last week, it is open for each of us to open discussions with the Treasury if we feel that we cannot manage with what we have. That is the sensible place to turn to first.

**Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD):** May I place on record my gratitude to the Secretary of State for making time available last night to meet me and other Scottish colleagues, as well representatives of NFU Scotland? He will recall that it was put to him that the Treasury had funded the animal welfare and economic loss compensation schemes for farmers in Scotland and other parts of the UK in 2001, and that he was asked why the arrangements should be different this time. Will he allow the House to have the benefit of knowing the Government's opinion and tell us what is the difference between now and 2001?

**Hilary Benn:** It is true that the Treasury reserve met the costs in 2001, because the sheer scale of the outbreak and the costs incurred meant that no other budget—that is, of the former Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or of the devolved Administrations—could possibly have coped with paying for the measures that it was decided needed to put in place at that time. That is the fundamental difference.

**Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute) (LD):** I draw the Secretary of State's attention to the concordat between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Scottish Executive in respect of the state veterinary service and animal disease compensation. Paragraph 4 states:

“Compensation payments for notifiable diseases will be made by MAFF”.

MAFF, of course, is now DEFRA, but the concordat makes it clear that the obligation to pay compensation lies with the UK Government. Why, then, are the UK Government not paying the animal disease compensation as they did in 2001?

**Hilary Benn:** Under the concordat, DEFRA has agreed to fund compulsory slaughter for disease control purposes. That applies to most diseases, including FMD, but the concordat does not cover meeting the costs of welfare disposal or economic support schemes.

**7 Oct 2007 : Column 863**

**Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD):** The Secretary of State will know that the Welsh Assembly does not have the contingency funds to deliver the meaningful welfare scheme that many of us want. Is he aware of any discussions that have taken place between the Welsh Assembly and the Treasury? In addition, we still need an answer to the question from the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd): what happened, between draft and delivery, to the £6.5 million promised by the right hon. Gentleman in his statement last week?

**Hilary Benn:** I have answered the second question already. Drafts are prepared, options are looked at, colleagues have discussions, and I do not propose to get into a conversation about that— [ *Interruption.* ] The central charge that has been made—

**Mr. Llwyd:** Not by me!

**Hilary Benn:** The hon. Gentleman should not be so sensitive, as I was referring to the Liberal Democrat Benches in general and not directly at him. I was about to say that there is not a shred of truth to the central charge that has been made. As for the first point made by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mark Williams), I am not aware of any specific discussions that Elin Jones may have had, but no doubt she will enlighten us.

**Paddy Tipping:** In his remarks at the start of the debate, the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) was, at best, rather dismissive of the £12.5 million package and the other measures that have been put in place. He implied that the Opposition would offer more in the way of compensation, but he was silent when I asked him directly who they intended would pay for it, and how much would be involved. In the longer term, does my right hon. Friend accept that we must move to a risk-based sharing of such costs, and look at insurance as a way of going forward?

**Hilary Benn:** In the end, it is about making choices and trying to give help in the most effective way. I listened to the representations made to me by the industry in England when I announced the package last week. I shall respond directly to the very good point made by my hon. Friend when I reach the end of my speech. I am very anxious to do that, as I have been very generous about giving way.

**Mr. Davidson:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Hilary Benn:** No, I have been generous in giving way and I want to turn to bluetongue. As the House recognises—[Hon. Members: “Give way.”]. As I am being encouraged to do so from the Opposition Benches I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, South-West (Mr. Davidson).

**Mr. Davidson:** I am very grateful indeed to the Secretary of State. When I and a number of other Members met representatives of the National Farmers Union Scotland this morning, we had to ask more than 20 times before they eventually confessed that they have not actually asked the Scottish Executive for any money. In those circumstances, is not it either astonishingly naive or

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 864**

deliberately mischievous for some Opposition Members to say that it is all Westminster's responsibility when in fact the Scottish Executive have recently been given more than £1 billion of unspent money from previous years?

**Hilary Benn:** It is the responsibility of all of us. From the Scottish Executive's budget this year of about £26 billion, there are choices to be made about how the money is spent. I asked the same question last night when I met the delegation that included the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael). No doubt the delegation will put the same points to the Scottish Executive as they put to me.

**Mr. Carmichael** *rose*—

**Hon. Members:** Give Way.

**Hilary Benn:** No. I shall now conclude my remarks as many Members want to speak.

**Mr. Carmichael:** Frit.

**Hilary Benn:** Anything but.

**Mr. Carmichael** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal):** Order.

**Hilary Benn:** I have been generous in giving way, including to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland.

The whole industry, the veterinary profession and farmers had been anticipating that bluetongue would arrive at some point. We know that, which is why we had a bluetongue strategy drawn up, why there was a lot of coverage in the media, why it was part of the DEFRA livestock market roadshow and why Opposition Front-Bench Members were briefed in July. It seems that the wind carried midges over from Europe and the first case was detected on 22 September.

I realise that many Members have great concerns about the disease. The impact of bluetongue is considerable, as we have seen in northern Europe. That is exactly why we worked with industry leaders to identify the most appropriate boundaries and disease control measures when the disease was confirmed on 28 September. Bluetongue is a very different disease from foot and mouth; it is spread by midges and not by livestock, and rapid action will not mean rapid eradication, nor will culling animals. It presents a serious, long-term challenge, so it is vital that we work with the industry to decide what is best to do, which is reflected in the revised disease control strategy that we developed and published in August.

**Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford) (Con):** On a positive note, I can tell the Secretary of State that the farmer in my constituency who suffered from a bluetongue outbreak told me on Sunday that his cattle are recovering well. That illustrates the different nature of the disease. However, does the Secretary of State accept that the movement controls put in place to deal with bluetongue have equally as damaging an effect on the industry as the

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 865**

movement controls relating to foot and mouth disease? When might farmers expect some lifting of the movement controls relating to bluetongue?

**Hilary Benn:** I am coming to that point directly. Before doing so, I have to inform the House that as a result of reporting by two farmers in Peterborough and Ashford, Kent, following tests, we are today confirming two new cases of bluetongue in those locations. As a result, two new control zones are being introduced and the protection zone is being extended. Details will be available on the DEFRA website later today.

**Damian Green (Ashford) (Con)** *rose—*

**Hilary Benn:** I know that the hon. Gentleman is affected. I give way.

**Damian Green:** I am grateful to the Secretary of State for the advance notice his office gave me of that distressing news not just for livestock farmers in my constituency but also for the many farmers throughout Kent, Sussex and the wider south-east who use Ashford market. I hope that in the remainder of his speech the Secretary of State can give some certainty about time scales—how long the effects and the movement

restrictions are likely to last. If possible, can he offer some practical reassurance to the many, many farmers who will be newly affected by this terrible outbreak?

**Hilary Benn:** I shall certainly try to do so and I shall come to that point in a moment.

**Mr. Jenkin:** I echo the thanks of my hon. Friends who have been so well supported by the Secretary of State's Department during the outbreak. Another case was confirmed in my constituency only this week.

Is not the answer—to which the industry does not seem to be averse—to extend the bluetongue zone substantially so that there can be movement to slaughterhouses and movement of fattening stock across the country to enable the industry to survive? Bluetongue is not a crippling disease, like foot and mouth; it is a disease that we will have to accept and deal with, eventually by vaccination.

**Hilary Benn:** I accept the point the hon. Gentleman makes. We have talked carefully to the industry and the consensus at present is that we need to try to contain the disease in the east of England if possible and then plan for what we need to do over the coming months. We all hope for a cold winter, although nobody can promise one. But the issue is at what point we should face up to the question the hon. Gentleman puts—declaring the whole of England a bluetongue control zone and accepting that we have to live with the disease. As I told the House last week, this is a real dilemma for the industry, because it, above all, has the greatest interest in making the right decision. That is why we shall be holding further discussions with the industry group in light of today's development. As soon as we can make the arrangements, we shall organise a briefing on bluetongue for all interested Members, to advise them about what can be done and answer detailed questions about movement controls.

## **17 Oct 2007 : Column 866**

We are all anxious to have a vaccine as quickly as possible. I hope one will be available next year, subject to its being shown to be safe and effective. We are discussing with the industry the approach we should take to vaccination once a vaccine is available and we are talking to companies that are trying to develop one. There are three—Merial, Fort Dodge and Intervet.

**Mr. Martlew:** During the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak, the decision was taken not to vaccinate because the industry—supermarkets and others—would not take the meat of vaccinated animals. Does my right hon. Friend believe they will take it from an animal that has been vaccinated against bluetongue?

**Hilary Benn:** We do not have a vaccine at present, but consumers regularly eat other meat from vaccinated animals, including poultry, so I am not sure that there would be a difficulty.



Concerns have been raised about access to slaughterhouses. From yesterday, it is possible for animals to be moved to slaughterhouses outside the bluetongue control and protection zones in England, and I hope that that will respond to the most urgent representations and make a big difference.

**Daniel Kawczynski:** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Hilary Benn:** If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I shall conclude. Many Members want to speak and I do not want to take up any more time.

This has been and remains a difficult time for the livestock industry at the very moment that prospects look brighter for the arable industry. I thank farmers and their representatives for their assistance and support, because they are our first line of defence. I thank all DEFRA animal health and other staff, including staff at Pirbright, who have done all the testing in relation to both diseases, for their professionalism and hard work over the past two months.

Today is one opportunity for the House to reflect on the lessons; Dr. Anderson's review will be another. I shall conclude with one more lesson on which I have greatly reflected. As has been said, the two outbreaks throw into sharp relief for the House how best to take decisions about disease control. There is a strong case for the industry to be at the heart of decision making in the future, in both taking responsibility and sharing the costs. It is a difficult balance to strike, but the people best placed to take the decisions are those who are most affected by them and the Government remain determined to do all they can to contain and deal with the two outbreaks. I look forward to continuing to work with Members on both sides of the House and with the farming community in doing so.

**2.49 pm**

**Chris Huhne (Eastleigh) (LD):** This year has been a disaster for our farmers. Farmers are always at the mercy of the weather and other forces beyond their control, and that is illustrated by the bluetongue-carrying midge being blown across the channel, bringing farming in eastern England to a standstill. We very much regret the announcement that the Secretary of State has made today about the spread to Kent.

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 867**

However, this summer's outbreak of foot and mouth disease was not an act of nature or random misfortune. A Government facility, Pirbright, which was designed to protect British farming has, in the words of the official DEFRA report, "beyond reasonable doubt" been the cause of the outbreak. In other words, the cause of the incident is so certain that it meets the standards of evidence required for a conviction in a criminal court. The knock-on effects of that disaster have crippled exports and the livestock market at the very worst time of year.

How could DEFRA, which has statutory responsibility for licensing, monitoring and

funding Pirbright, have licensed a facility with an

“old, poorly maintained and defective effluent system”,

with no fixed procedures for the maintenance of the drains? We are not talking about someone’s home; we are talking about a category 4 biosecure facility. As the motion—we will support it—points out, DEFRA not only inspected safety arrangements but approved spending at the plant. There could not be a more clear conflict of interest.

The key point, which the Secretary of State has not answered today, is that what seems to have happened at Pirbright is that the systems—not only the drains, but clearly the drains—have been run down to a point where there was no maintenance unless there was failure. That may be acceptable when running the Secretary of State’s boiler at home, but clearly in such an important facility there must be proper, scheduled preventive maintenance. We know from whistleblowers—for example, Steven Kendrew—who were contractors at the site, that there was no adequate schedule of preventive maintenance. Cameras should have been sent down those drains to check what had happened and to see whether there was damage. One need not be a Thames Water customer to know that old drains leak, so it beggars belief that DEFRA did not deal with the problem by sending down cameras to find out the state of the drains, even though it was considering the matter.

Ministers have said in the past that there was no awareness that there might be risks from the drains. Are they saying that it was not understood that the foot and mouth virus is able to survive in water and soil, and that a leaking pipe system could therefore prove to be a most grave hazard? That is exactly the sort of issue that a public inquiry could and should examine, along with the conflicts of interest.

I am frankly appalled that the Secretary of State appears to show so little interest in what exactly went wrong. He is an honourable man, and he comes here and says that he takes responsibility, but he was not there when the key points of failure occurred. If the most senior civil servants who knew about the pipework problems are not disciplined, what sort of signal will that send to other people in his Department? What incentive will there be to pay proper attention to detail and due diligence with other risks? There has been an abject failure of responsibility, and those responsible should go. They have palpably failed to do their job, which was to assist and protect British farming. After the rural payments scheme fiasco, there is a risk of a growing culture of impunity in DEFRA, where any sloppiness will be condoned simply because no one is likely to be found out, and if they are found out they will not face the consequences.

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 868**

As we look to the future, it would be good to know whether the Minister is satisfied that no further risk is posed to British farming by the Pirbright facility. But what about the

implications of this health and safety debacle for the other Government facilities? For example, has anyone yet put a camera down the drains at Compton—Pirbright's sister site—to see whether its effluent systems are in a similar state of disrepair? Can the Secretary of State also confirm that the development of a vaccine for bluetongue has been held up by this debacle? If so, for how long?

Of course, one of the unanswered questions continues to be whether the Secretary of State has yet made a proper assessment of the costs to British farming arising from the outbreak. My hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) asked for such an assessment on 8 October, as did I during DEFRA questions, but we have yet to receive an answer.

The losses are very serious—I hope that the Secretary of State will also deal with this issue—because in the final two weeks of September, lamb prices were down by an average of 21 per cent. per kilo live weight compared with the same period last year. During the first week of October, the average shop price of a leg of lamb was up by 19p a kilogram, or a 2.7 per cent. increase, on the same time last year. The disparity between farm-gate and checkout prices has long been an issue, and in the light of the Office of Fair Trading's findings regarding the fixing of milk prices, I hope that Ministers will take this problem extremely seriously and give it proper attention—if necessary, by bringing in the appropriate competition authorities to check.

The National Farmers Union estimates that the cost to British farming is in excess of £100 million, but we must have a clear estimate from the Department. In Builth Wells, last Friday, a farmer sold her blue face Leicester rams for an average of just £200 per head, whereas in 2006 they averaged £700 per head. The insecurity and the depressed prices are compounding the difficulties that farmers face, despite the very welcome limited resumption of exports. Many farmers make about 80 per cent. of their income for the year at this time, and they are facing acute cash-flow problems. The entire farming calendar has been stalled, and the disruption to breeding now will have consequences next spring.

**Mr. Beith:** Does my hon. Friend not find it surprising, given that every hill farmer is known to and registered with the Department and is already subject to the payments system, that they cannot have received a payment by now?

**Chris Huhne:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that intervention, because the truth is that we were discussing and debating earlier today who will ultimately pay in Scotland and Wales. Many English farmers would like to be paid at all, without the debate about who or which budget will ultimately bear the burden, to ensure that they have some relief for the very substantial distress that their businesses are facing.

**Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD):** Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that, although the additional top-up payments to the hill farm allowance are worth,  
**17 Oct 2007 : Column 869**

on average, about £800 per hill farm, the average losses to hill farmers, certainly in my constituency, are between £10,000 and £20,000? That is scant compensation.

**Chris Huhne:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. He is absolutely right: the amount of compensation bears no relationship to the losses that many people are suffering. The reality is that those losses are being suffered, as the Secretary of State must know, in many cases by the most vulnerable and the smallest members of the farming community. We might not get the big guns and the NFU asking for special schemes of support, but I hope that he is listening, for example, to the Tenant Farmers Association, which is pressing for exactly that.

**Mr. Reid:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the Secretary of State should have announced both a light lamb and an older ewe welfare disposal scheme for the whole UK, so that farmers in England, Scotland and Wales could all benefit?

**Chris Huhne:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is clear that we need a welfare scheme. It is not enough merely to talk about compensation after the event; it is important to ensure that the impact on the market for farmers is dealt with. As he points out, not just farmers with light lambs but others in the sheep sector are struggling.

It is estimated that 40,000 sows are awaiting culling and that the number is growing by 4,000 a week. There is virtually no market for sow meat in the UK; 99 per cent. of it is usually exported. However, the abattoir in Essex that usually handles 70 per cent. of sows for export is currently within the control zone and not taking any animals. With no market for these animals, their numbers are building up on farms; that causes animal welfare issues, with overcrowding creating all the usual problems. Indeed, increasing feed costs mean that it can now cost £20 a month to feed a sow. The situation will only get worse as the number of unsellable animals increases. Will the Government listen to farmers and intervene now in instances where the suspension of exports in particular has created a surplus of animals across the UK?

DEFRA's animal health budget is not devolved, because England, Scotland and Wales are one epidemiological area. Will the Minister assure us that his Department will foot the Bill for animal welfare and market support measures in Scotland and Wales?

**Mr. MacNeil:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for pointing out the non-devolved aspect of the budget and I draw attention to the commendable argument made by the National Farmers Union in Scotland, which has asked for a mere £15 per head welfare compensation scheme. That is a low price; it is not top dollar by any means. It is a sensible request for bottoming out, to which the Secretary of State has unfortunately not yet listened.

**Chris Huhne:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I merely add to the arguments that we did not hear earlier from the Secretary of State.

## 17 Oct 2007 : Column 870

There is one enormous difference between the 2001 outbreak and the outbreak today that the Secretary of State did not point out. The outbreak today was ultimately caused by a facility that was inspected and regulated and licensed by his Department. There is therefore a clear responsibility that must cover Scotland and Wales as well as England.

**David Maclean:** The hon. Gentleman seems to be arguing for payments to be made for an economic cull in Scotland, England and Wales, as opposed to the so-called welfare cull that Scotland has claimed all along is the purpose of exterminating 250,000 lambs.

**Chris Huhne:** As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the degree of damage to hill farmers across the UK associated with the Government's responsibility for the facility in Pirbright means that this is a special case. The Government have to consider their own responsibility and address that.

I was interested to hear from the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), who has much greater legal knowledge than I have. It is clear that DEFRA has a moral, and probably a legal, obligation to get British farming back on its feet. Furthermore, it has an obligation to ensure that what happened at Pirbright never happens again. That a Government facility through institutional negligence has been the source of the outbreak is a national disgrace and the people responsible must be held to account.

**Several hon. Members** *rose* —

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has placed an eight-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches. That applies from now onwards.

**3.3 pm**

**Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole) (Lab):** Having broken out of the Whips Office, I wish to use my re-established ability to address the House to talk about the effect that foot and mouth has had in my constituency of Brigg and Goole. In particular, I want to talk about the pig industry and the severe problems that have been caused, even though my constituency is some way from Pirbright and all that happened there.

First, let me add to the comment made by those in the farming industry, other commentators and, in fairness, in the Opposition's motion that swift and decisive action by DEFRA when the outbreak was first notified reduced its potential to spread. As the British Veterinary Association says in its briefing for the debate, the overall approach was highly successful in that regard. However, that does not mean that there have been no problems, or that there is nothing more that the Government could do to help.

I also want to speak a little about animal welfare. Having chaired the associate parliamentary group for animal welfare, I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, his officials in DEFRA and other agencies take a strong interest in animal welfare and try to do the right thing, even if they do not always do everything that I tell them they should do. It was therefore unfortunate that the shadow Secretary of

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 871**

State accused DEFRA and its agencies of a disregard for the welfare of animals that arose out of either callousness or stupidity. I notice that the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) did not repeat that remark in his opening speech, and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will accept that many of us in the House would not accuse his officials of that.

In the past few days, I have visited Stuart Teanby, a pig farmer in Winterton where I live. Stuart has a small operation—run by just himself and one other—with a weaner unit producing pigs that are reared and then moved on to other farms for fattening. I also met John Godfrey, who is not my constituent but farms so much in my area that I sometimes feel that he owns most of it. From John, I heard how the outbreak has hit someone right at the other end of farming—a huge organisation with large numbers of pigs to be dealt with. However, both are suffering from the consequences of movement restrictions and both feel there are things that DEFRA could do to assist.

I have spoken before in the House about the need to support our pig industry, which is unsubsidised. The industry has high animal welfare standards, particularly when compared with other methods of production in other countries, but that brings additional costs; in addition, increases in feed prices this year had already added another burden on to the sector. When movements stop, weaners are still coming into the production chain at a rate of about 66,000 a month and, between the ages of 12 to 22 weeks, they grow at a rate of 900 g a day—or 2 lb as I prefer to call it. A unit such as Stuart's is rapidly filled, the pigs continue to grow, the welfare conditions deteriorate and, as I know from my days in the Whips Office, fighting and bullying can break out. Anyone who knows anything about pigs will know that they can cause a lot of damage.

The partial lifting of the movement ban helped only to a certain extent. The day before I visited Stuart's farm, he had finally been able to sell on 880 pigs. He still had too many, but it was a start. However, the price had collapsed and he had to sell each pig at about £14 less than his production cost. That is a loss of more than £12,000, which he, as a small farmer, can ill afford. In the past, the Government have helped the pig industry with storage schemes to allow the throughput to continue and to keep a decent price. It will be some time before the market naturally balances out again and I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will consider implementing such a scheme again.

The other issue for both Stuart and John is the culling of sows, which the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire mentioned. The market was stable and lucrative before the outbreak; now, there are major problems both financially and in animal welfare terms. About 200,000 sows are slaughtered each year in the UK. There is virtually no

domestic market for this meat; 99 per cent. of the meat is exported, most of it to Germany, and EU restrictions effectively stop the trade. As the hon. Gentleman said, the flow is largely handled by one abattoir in Essex, which cannot export at the moment. The result is not only that we have the 40,000 extra sows that he mentioned, but that the figure is growing by about 4,000 every week.

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 872**

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Jonathan Shaw):** My hon. Friend has asked about Cheale's abattoir in Essex—I think that the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Chris Huhne) also referred to it. In answer to their points, may I point out that we are in discussions with the European Union about allowing animals to be slaughtered at the abattoir and then exported? We do understand the pressures and we are involved in discussions.

**Mr. Cawsey:** I am grateful for the Minister's remarks. I will await developments with great interest, although an awful lot of sows will still come on to the market very quickly. We know what the result of that will be.

I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) said about risk sharing and our need to develop systems to deal with such issues in the future. However, they are not in place now and, in the circumstances, I believe that a national sow disposal scheme should be put in place. I fear for the welfare implications if nothing is done. The British Pig Executive tells me that there are abattoirs that would be willing to slaughter sows—the Minister may be interested to learn that—and that rendering capacity exists. Obviously it would be for the Department to calculate the figure, but we estimate that the 40,000 backlog could be disposed of for £3 million. The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire told Ministers where £2 million of that £3 million could come from, so perhaps the Department will look at that. When one considers the problems for farmers and animal welfare, £3 million is not an awfully large amount.

These are difficult days, even in places that are well away from the affected area. I know that there are many issues relating to other sectors, but we have limited time and many other eminent Members are better qualified than I to talk about them. I will curtail my comments in the hope that the deep concerns of the pig sectors are understood by Ministers and that they will take urgent action to address them.

**3.10 pm**

**David Maclean (Penrith and The Border) (Con):** I am grateful for the chance to participate in the debate. The Opposition have accused the Government of incompetence over their handling of foot and mouth. In the few minutes available to me, I would like to read out the indictment. I respect the Secretary of State greatly. He comes to this with clean, fresh hands, and I hope that he will purge some of DEFRA's policy

delusions. The policy delusions from 2001 are largely responsible for the present state of affairs. My criticisms might be rather harsh, but the Secretary of State is exempt from many of them, perhaps until we reach the compensation package.

The first charge against the Government is that they have refused to admit what caused the 2001 catastrophe. DEFRA is still obsessed with markets and farmers moving animals about. Of course, once foot and mouth started, because dirty food came into the country and there was a failure to spot foot and mouth at a pig farm, animal movements exacerbated the situation, but they did not cause foot and mouth—dirty food coming into the country caused it.

### **17 Oct 2007 : Column 873**

**Mr. Martlew:** The right hon. Gentleman, like me, was deeply involved in the 2001 situation. Surely the farmer living at Heddon-on-the-Wall who did not boil pig swill or examine his animals was the cause of the 2001 outbreak.

**David Maclean:** The hon. Gentleman has got that quite wrong. Where did that filthy food come from in the first place? Foot and mouth did not suddenly spring up at Heddon-on-the-Wall or Catterick Army base. It had to come into this country from a foreign source. This is my second point: the Government did nothing to protect our borders and then failed to detect foot and mouth at Heddon-on-the-Wall—the farm had been inspected. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—later DEFRA—was obsessed by controlling farmers and markets and covered up the fact that it had not taken the necessary preventive action to stop foot and mouth in this country. Of course, DEFRA is still obsessed by controls on markets and farmers.

Thirdly, based on these self-delusions, repairing Pirbright was not a priority. After the discovery that the drains were clapped out, clearly part of the thought process was, “Well, that’s not too important because it doesn’t really cause foot and mouth. Foot and mouth is caused by farmers moving animals around the country.” The Secretary of State says that no one actually said that the drains were leaking, but surely it stands to reason that if one gets a report saying that drains are ancient and clapped out, one automatically thinks that they are probably leaking as well. The Government cannot escape from their responsibility by saying that no one told them about the leaking drains. The guilty man is not the Secretary of State, but the former Chancellor of the Exchequer who did not put up the necessary funds to fix those drains. That man is now the Prime Minister.

My fourth charge against the Government is that once foot and mouth started, they initially made frantic efforts to blame Merial and to try to exempt the Institute for Animal Health from responsibility. DEFRA’s attempt to blame someone else when its laboratory was at fault was despicable. DEFRA was the guilty party and it remains as such. At the end of the day, it will probably have to pay in court.



The Government's fifth mistake was moving slaughtered animals around the country. They were horrified by the spectre of more burning pyres, although why they did not go for animal burial I do not know. They added to the risk. Of course, they say that the lorries were sealed and that vets drove behind them looking for any blood and guts dripping out, but the very fact that dead foot and mouth animals were being moved from infected premises to incineration plants along highways in clear zones added unnecessary risk. I assume that that happened because, for purposes of media handling, it looked better on the telly than burning cows.

A sixth charge of incompetence against the Government is that farmers outside the protection and surveillance zones—perhaps inside as well, but certainly outside, in Cumbria—were left utterly in the dark about what to do. No one told them anything. If farmers had been watching the telly or listening to the radio, they would have discovered that animal movements had been banned, but many were not doing so. They also were not linked,

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 874**

like computer geeks, to the DEFRA website every minute of the day. However, the only information for farmers was on that website. The Government must consider how they communicate with farmers outside the zone during a catastrophe such as foot and mouth. They should not assume that everything can be done through the website. It is expensive to send letters by post, but that is probably the only way in which farmers can be given adequate warning.

The seventh charge is that the Government did not seem to have carried out forward planning on the licensing of animal movements. It took DEFRA days and days to issue licences and guidance on whether farmers could move their cows across the road for milking and on casualty animals going to slaughter or abattoirs. That should not have happened. Surely, after 2001, a manual was sitting on a shelf that said, "If foot and mouth happens again, this is what we do on the licensing regime." All the local and county council inspectorates should have had that manual so that those responsible for issuing licences could have turned to the relevant page and processed the licences on the morning after the outbreak occurred. Instead, they seemed to be making things up as they went along.

The eighth mistake was the false all clear. The Government said, "We've eradicated foot and mouth from Surrey. It won't happen again chaps. Carry on!" However, that was negligent and should not have happened.

The ninth mistake was the failure to start markets expeditiously outside the protection and surveillance zones when it became clear that foot and mouth was being contained in Surrey and Berkshire. Yes, the markets were started eventually, but it probably would have been utterly safe to start them 10 days earlier and that would have saved an awful lot of the desperate costs that have been faced in Cumbria, the north of England, Scotland and Wales.

The 10th charge is that the 20-day standstill period negated the point of starting the markets. The Government said, "Well, we've got the markets started," but then imposed a 20-day standstill period. What on earth was the point? Yes, the standstill is now down to six days, so a farmer who was operating under a 20-day standstill and is on the fifth day has only one more day to go. For all new farmers the period is only six days. However, again, this is part of DEFRA thinking, "Farmers cause foot and mouth and farmers moving animals are the guilty party, not us, gov."

The 11th charge is that the compensation package announced by Ministers is grossly insulting, given that farmers are losing £10 million a day through no fault of their own. If farmers had caused this through dirty farm practices or bad welfare standards, there would be a certain culpability, but farmers are utterly innocent and have a grossly inadequate compensation package.

My 12th charge against the Government, although I congratulate the Secretary of State on standing firm, relates to the Scottish cull. Let hon. Members from north of the border come clean. This is not a welfare cull in Scotland, but an economic cull. There might be merits in an economic cull to compensate farmers, but if there are merits in such a cull in Scotland, there could be merits in an economic cull in England.

**Mr. MacNeil:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 875**

**David Maclean:** No. The hon. Gentleman will be glad to hear that I am running out of time.

I am glad that the Government are not paying money to the Scottish Executive for participation in an economic cull. The welfare considerations are utterly different this time. In 2001, millions of animals were starving to death or trapped in fields with water up to their ankles. Animals were suffering. However, while animals are not suffering at the moment, farmers are suffering economically. The answer is to get the markets started as soon as possible. We could do with a better compensation package, but that should apply to the whole country. Scotland should not be separately funded on economic grounds.

My 13th charge relates to the confusion over access controls. DEFRA rightly banned hunting and all hunts complied, but people could ride hundreds of galloping horses over the fields, or walk over the fields, provided that they were not hunting. DEFRA let its prejudices rise to the surface.

I summarise by saying that the Government are guilty of negligence because they still delude themselves about what causes foot and mouth. They did not issue guidance manuals in advance, they failed to repair their own laboratory and they failed to

communicate with their customers—the farmers. They failed to deal with market consequences and they were prepared to operate double standards throughout the United Kingdom. They failed in their prime duty of preventing this contagious disease from spreading.

**3.19 pm**

**Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Lab):** I welcome this opportunity to contribute to the debate. I will be brief, as I know that many other Members wish to speak. First, I am pleased that it appears highly unlikely at this stage that the foot and mouth virus has spread outside Surrey, although I accept that fragments of land in Berkshire are affected. However, the outbreak should never have occurred, and we need a full investigation into the biosecurity arrangements at Pirbright. Such a thing must never happen again.

I remember only too well the heartache suffered by farmers in my constituency during the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak. I remember farmers in tears, the smell of burning animals, and the impact on tourism and other related businesses. I am therefore grateful to the Secretary of State, because his swift and effective action to control the outbreak appears to have worked, and we seem to have contained the disease.

It has once again been a terrible year for British farmers, particularly hill farmers. Hill farmers in the Lune valley in my constituency have been hit very hard. Between 70 and 80 per cent. of a hill farmer's income is generated at this time of year. It was the worst possible time in which to have movement restrictions in place, and the lamb market has collapsed. Prices are down from £1 a kilogram to 60p. Not surprisingly, hill farmers have been very distressed. It is welcome news that exports have resumed; that is important for farmers.

What else can the Government do? The aid package to hill farmers is certainly welcome, but the money must reach those farmers quickly; that is important given the cash-flow problems. The marketing and

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 876**

promotion of British meat and dairy produce is essential for our domestic and export markets. We produce the best meat and dairy products in the world. We comply with the highest standards of hygiene and animal welfare, and we need to tell people that. We need promotion of British meat. The drive for cheap food and the power of the supermarkets has been at the root of many farming and rural problems over the past decade. We must have fair farm-gate prices. Milk prices have improved, but small family farms are still disadvantaged, because prices are often volume-related.

James Birkett was Lancashire county chairman for the National Farmers Union over the past few years, but he recently stood down. He has written to me, and I will read his letter because it is very important:

“As you know many of your constituents are farmers, and the recent F&M outbreak in Surrey, plus the new Blue Tongue cases in East Anglia have caused extensive movement restrictions throughout the whole Country.

This has come at the worst possible time for the livestock farmers in this area as it is the time of year when all the breeding sheep sales and the beef store sales take place. As you can appreciate, there is now a major cash-flow problem in many farming households.

The annual payment for the 2007 SFP”—

that is, the single farm payment—

“is due on 1st December 2007 and that money would be particularly welcome this year. We, many of our local colleagues and probably thousands of other farms, especially in the livestock sector, have had our maps verified; had no change in land use; no change in stocking ratios and accumulated no more land. In fact, nothing has changed since the SFP was set up.

Why is it not possible for these holdings to be paid out immediately, on December 1st? This would leave more time available for the less straightforward cases and also, alleviate a great deal of hardship.”

That is a simple request, and I have a lot of sympathy for Mr. Birkett’s argument. I should be grateful for a response from the Secretary of State, or from the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) when he winds up the debate. Will they let us know whether the payments can be made quickly, particularly the straightforward single farm payments?

It is essential that the nation produces its own food, rather than rely on imports. Often, those imports are inferior. As I say, British farming complies with the highest standards on animal welfare and hygiene—indeed, on everything. We have lots of regulations. Farmers often feel that there is an unfair playing field, because they are competing with food from abroad that has not been produced to the same standard as food from this country, and I agree with them.

**Dr. William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP):** Surely the Secretary of State should do something about the issue. Cannot he encourage his European partners to stop Brazilian beef imports from challenging British beef? British beef is produced to the best possible standards, and even Brazilian beef is not produced in a foot-and-mouth-free zone.

**Geraldine Smith:** Those issues should definitely be taken up. We owe our farmers a great deal for what they do, and for managing the countryside. I was out

### **17 Oct 2007 : Column 877**

walking in the Lake district this summer, and I walked across beautiful fields. The countryside is preserved by farmers; we sometimes forget that, and we take them for granted. Of course, they also provide our food, and it is important that we produce our own food. The Government must therefore make every effort to help farmers through these difficult and distressing times. It is important that we must make sure that our farmers are not forgotten.

**3.26 pm**

**Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking) (Con):** The outbreak of foot and mouth in the village of Normandy in my constituency of Woking was confirmed on Friday 3 August. Shortly afterwards, the focus of attention shifted to the village of Pirbright, thought to be the source of the outbreak. Pirbright, also in my constituency, is the home of the Institute for Animal Health and the company Merial, which share a site.

Our first thoughts today should be for those in the Woking area, and throughout Surrey and beyond, who have suffered the most, emotionally and financially—local farmers and smallholders who had livestock killed. They and their families went through stressful and tragic times. They and others who suffered as a result of movement restrictions and surveillance zones handled the situation with calm and patience, and we must all commend them on their fortitude.

Next I would like to express my thanks to some individuals. Mike Nevins—he is the mayor of Guildford—and Diana Lockyer-Nibbs of Normandy are both councillors from the Woking area. They reacted and behaved exactly as councillors should, providing support and guidance to people in Normandy, Pirbright and the surrounding areas in the difficult days following the outbreak. I also thank the Secretary of State and his Ministers for their help during those times. I particularly thank my hon. Friends the Members for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) and for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) for their helpful advice to, and contact with, so many people in the Woking area in the days after the dreadful outbreak.

The Institute for Animal Health is an internationally respected and admired organisation which has existed happily in the village of Pirbright for many years. Indeed, quite a number of local people work there. The institute has been noted throughout for the excellence of its work, the commitment of its staff and its huge emphasis on safety. Professor Martin Shirley, the director, leads an outstanding work force. It is vital that the Government remain committed to the Pirbright site and to the planned final phase of the site redevelopment which is to go ahead in the coming years. Will the Government please confirm that today? It is a crucially important site.

Merial, the company on the same site, is a world-leading innovation-driven animal health organisation providing a comprehensive range of products to enhance the health and well-being of a wide range of animals. It is a key player in worldwide biosecurity and the

world leader in foot and mouth disease vaccine production. Merial has been producing

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 878**

at the Pirbright site for about 15 years and employs about 80 people there, mostly from the local area, in vaccine production. It provides emergency vaccine capability for 20 countries and international organisations and is a leading global company committed, like the institute, to the highest standards of product quality and safety. Like the institute, Merial has responded positively to the Spratt report recommendations and has put them into effect.

We may never know exactly how the outbreak occurred, but we can make a judgment today as to where much of the blame lies. If we were the jury considering a verdict, we would ask ourselves certain questions. In relation to the institute's site at Pirbright, whose duty is it to license? The Government. Whose duty is it to regulate? The Government. Whose duty is it to inspect? The Government. Whose duty is it to provide the funding? The Government. Who, therefore, is the guilty party in this case? The Government.

The Government may have learned lessons from 2001. I congratulate them on reacting more quickly and efficiently this time, but one immediate problem in the Normandy area was the failure to close footpaths in the locality immediately. I called for this, as did the National Farmers Union, but I have to report, sadly, that people were able to walk across the protection zone as late as five days after confirmation of the first case.

There was a shortage of information, especially for local people and local farmers and smallholders. Not all of them are on e-mail. I had constituents ringing me about whether they could ride their horses in the protection zone, and few were updated. In a stressful situation, keeping people fully informed is essential in controlling the situation and their anxieties.

There are many in the Woking area who have not been informed very carefully about compensation, which is another important issue. Specifically, can the Minister write and tell me how many people in my constituency are to be compensated, when they will be compensated, the extent to which they will be compensated and the precise procedure for obtaining compensation? This is an area of great difficulty and complexity for a number of my constituents.

**Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD):** The question of compensation goes back to the last foot and mouth outbreak and we have had many problems with it in the past. For example, some of the farmers with farms on either side of the English-Welsh border still have resentments and problems from that time. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that such problems cannot be allowed to arise in the case in his constituency?

**Mr. Malins:** I recognise the hon. Gentleman's deep interest in these matters and accept his point entirely. I hope we will get it right this time.

**Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend recognise that there are many people in my constituency, and no doubt in the constituencies of many of my hon. Friends and of Members in other parts of the House, who are not directly in farming but who are, for example, hauliers whose business has been totally destroyed, and that no compensation is currently forthcoming?

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 879**

**Mr. Malins:** My right hon. Friend is right. He refers to problems in his constituency, and there are other people—I shall not use the phrase “on the fringes” because in a sense they are directly connected—who suffer greatly and who are confused as to their position. The Government should look carefully at the whole issue of compensation and make it plain to everybody who wants to know who is entitled and how they will receive it.

The Government’s position is damaged by the Spratt report. Its main focus is on the old, poorly maintained and defective effluent system that is shared by the two facilities at Pirbright. There is reference to the poor state of the effluent pipes, indicating that adequate funding has not been available to ensure the highest standards of safety for the work on foot and mouth disease virus carried out “at this ageing facility”. The report goes on to state that there has been concern for several years that the effluent pipes were old and needed replacing, but after much discussion between the institute, Merial and DEFRA, money was not made available. That is the crucial point. I am driven to the conclusion that inadequate funding and possibly inadequate inspection are major causes of the problems that we have faced in Surrey. I have had many conversations with the local Pirbright parish council—an excellent organisation, which has been concerned for many years about the lack of funding.

Let me repeat the critical point that DEFRA is responsible for the inspection and licensing of both sites. The geographical set-up of the relevant pipe would have been approved by DEFRA years ago and should have been inspected by DEFRA. I am troubled by the possibility that the Government are trying to imply that this is a “nothing to do with me, Guv” issue, implying that in criminal terms their hands are clean. “Let us look at Pirbright and find out who is at fault there” seems to be the Government’s attitude. The true answer to “It’s not me, Guv” is, I am afraid, “It’s a fair cop”, but we are not going to get that acknowledgment from the Government.

We all want answers to some pretty direct and basic questions. First, do we know for certain what was the cause of the Normandy outbreak? Secondly, is DEFRA 100 per cent. satisfied with the quality and frequency of its inspections and its licensing procedure? Thirdly, are the Government 100 per cent. satisfied with the level of funding provided over the last 10 years? Fourthly, to what extent, if any, do the Government accept that lack of funding was a contributory factor? Next, what specifically did the institute ask for in respect of funding, what was given, what was refused and where have there been delays? Finally, what exactly has been done to improve the drainage system at Pirbright since the problems were first identified some three or four years ago? Those

are specific questions requiring specific answers. The Government have a duty to tell the House their answers, just as they have an absolute duty to ensure that this sort of outbreak does not happen again in Normandy, in the rest of Surrey or in the rest of the country.

**3.36 pm**

**Mr. David Jones (Clwyd, West) (Con):** I am pleased to contribute to this debate, particularly since I represent one of the foremost lamb-producing areas of the country. The Vale of Clwyd and the surrounding

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 880**

hills are renowned for the quality of produce and the very brand “Welsh lamb” is a byword for excellence. Farmers know their business; they know their animals; they know the land they work on. As the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) pointed out, it is they who are largely responsible for the landscape that we see today.

My constituents were devastated by the foot and mouth outbreak of 2001 and it has taken a long time for their fortunes to improve. One can only imagine the devastation that the events of 3 August and what followed have wrought on them. It could not have come at a worse time. Most of the trade in Welsh lamb is conducted during August to December, which is the livestock farmer’s harvest period. The export trade this year and possibly for next has been destroyed, with the consequent glut causing lamb prices to collapse. Indeed, at Ruthin market two weeks ago, one of my constituents obtained, after costs, 36p a head for his ewes.

The devastating effect on the industry can scarcely be overstated. I believe that everyone recognises that the fault lies in incompetent supervision of the Pirbright facility. There can be no question but that any facility whose sole function is to contain a dangerous virus that allows that virus to escape into the environment must necessarily be viewed as negligent—or even worse. Perhaps, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) suggested, there is strict liability under the principle of *Rylands v. Fletcher*. The Secretary of State’s assertion that pure economic loss cannot be addressed could well be wrong.

The fact is that this Government, to their shame, regarded the outbreak of foot and mouth disease as a suitable vehicle for establishing themselves with a reputation for competence in the run-up to the election that they believed was fast approaching. *[Interruption.]* That is perfectly obvious, despite the pained expressions emanating from the Secretary of State. It is perfectly obvious that that was the Government’s *modus operandi* from the moment that the disease became apparent.

**Hilary Benn** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Jones:** The Prime Minister broke off his holiday, halfway through his scone, to



hotfoot it back to London in order to take charge of the Cobra team. We subsequently witnessed the spectacle of the Secretary of State for Wales being quoted in *The Western Mail* as saying, remarkably enough, that the Government's handling of the foot and mouth crisis had established for them a "reputation for competence". If that constitutes a reputation for competence, heaven knows what would constitute a reputation for incompetence.

When the Prime Minister finally decided to chicken out of the election, he said that he could have gone to the country on the basis of the "reputation for competence" that the Government's handling of the foot and mouth crisis had established for them. That was a cynical exercise all along. In fact, it is more than competence: it is a cynical manipulation of the processes in this country.

I want to press the Secretary of State on something that he mentioned earlier. In his statement to the House on 8 October he made it clear, as he has today, that the devolved Administrations would have financial

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 881**

responsibility for the support schemes in Wales and Scotland. We know that excised from his original speech were the following words:

"I have also agreed with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury that Scotland should receive £8.1 million and Wales £6.5 million to assist them in countering the impacts of foot and mouth on their livestock farmers."

The Secretary of State has told the House—and I am sure the House accepts it—that the words were not originally inserted with an eye to the election. What I should like to know, and what I am sure other Members would like to know, is why, in that case, they were excised. It is a simple question, and I think that the House is entitled to an answer to it.

**Lembit Öpik:** Furthermore, without such an explanation would it not be reasonable for the farmers of Wales and Scotland—including those in my constituency—to feel disrespected once again? It seems that a form of words offering a fairly small amount—even that small gesture—was removed by someone who did not think it important enough to inform the Welsh and Scottish farmers of the support that they could expect.

**Mr. Jones:** That is a fair point. I do feel that the Government have shown a certain lack of respect to farmers in Wales and Scotland.

It is clear from what the Secretary of State said earlier today, and on 8 October when he made his initial statement, that the Government intend to resist any claim for consequential economic loss. He will be aware that both NFU Cymru and the Farmers Union of Wales are taking legal advice on the prospects of recovery. Would it be too much for the Government to indicate that they will deal with those claims in a positive, proactive and co-operative manner and will not expect the farming industry to go to the

wire in court—and particularly that, if they should indeed be liable according to the principle of *Rylands v. Fletcher*, they will meet whatever obligations they have to the industry to the full extent of their legal liability?

Finally, there is the question of accountability. What has happened over the past two months has been the most appalling episode for the British farming industry. It cannot be right for such a massive infliction of damage on the industry to go without a single individual being disciplined, and without a single resignation. Resignations must be called for. I hope that the Secretary of State will consider that aspect of the matter, and will ask those whom he considers responsible to resign.

This whole episode has highlighted a Government who are incapable of dealing with any emergency on any basis other than with an eye to publicity and the way in which they present themselves to the electorate. It is high time that they were straight in their dealings with the agricultural community. I can tell the Secretary of State that the British agricultural industry has sustained enormous damage, and that it will be a long time before it recovers and an even longer time before it forgets.

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 882**

**3.44 pm**

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) (PC):** I follow the hon. Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Jones), whose constituency borders mine, and I agree with much of what he said.

Wales is quite far from the site of the foot and mouth outbreak, but as the hon. Gentleman said, it has brought the livestock industry in Wales to a standstill. From 3 August to 10 October, nothing has been able to be moved or sold and it has hit Wales particularly badly. Abattoirs such as Welsh Country Foods are saying that they do not intend to send meat for export as the conditions imposed are so onerous. As the hon. Gentleman said, 80 per cent. of Welsh ewes are classed as hill and upland breeds. Of course, they produce lighter animals. Those are normally for export and not for consumption in the UK; they are normally about 2 km lighter than the average weight in England and Scotland. Therefore, there is little domestic demand for those light lambs. It is a crucial time: exports should be going on apace and we should be reaping the harvest, as it were.

In 2006, 1.1 million lambs were exported from Wales, with a £30 million value. That is 35 per cent. of the total Welsh lamb production. NFU Cymru has written a memorandum saying that it is essential that, following the meeting of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health,

“government both in London and Cardiff maintains the pressure on the European Commission to allow the UK to resume exports as soon as possible.”

There was some good news in what the Secretary of State said about the six-day standstills. That is welcome, but some 200,000 store sheep are traded in Wales annually, with almost 70 per cent. of that trade occurring between August and December. In that period, 900,000 sheep, including breeding ewes, are also normally traded.

The Welsh Assembly Government have tried to put in place a light lamb scheme to go some way towards alleviating those huge problems, and they are welfare problems, regardless of what the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (David Maclean) said earlier. They are genuine welfare problems in the uplands of Wales and in Scotland—there is no getting away from it—and they are getting worse by the minute.

With regard to bluetongue, we are aware that the BTV8 vaccine is available and ready to go. I urge the Secretary of State to look at that situation because we can all see that bluetongue disease will not go away overnight. It might be stalled during a cold winter. I need not say that there is a great fear that it will be back with us in the spring. The last thing we want is to be unprepared for it. I hope that contingency plans will be put in place to deal with that. It is bound to come back.

Before I deal with the question of compensation, I make this other general point. In 2001, the previous Prime Minister, Mr. Blair, told the supermarkets that he wanted them to support the meat industry in the UK. It is now 2007. Precious little support is being offered. This is an opportunity for them to get involved properly in supporting this most important of industries. Although the Government cannot force their hand, they undoubtedly have a role in persuading

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 883**

them gently, and not so gently if necessary, to come into this void and to start to help out at what is the most important time in recent history for the agriculture industry in Wales and throughout the UK.

The agriculture industry has seen a lot of troubles in the past 10 years. I am sure that we will come through this eventually, but times are very hard and we need support. I ask the Secretary of State again to look at the question of compensation. I do not want to dwell on the statements that we have had, but it is interesting that in both statements the Secretary of State has said that the outbreak has arisen from an unusual set of circumstances and that, to reflect that, the Chief Secretary has made funds available. I take it that the unusual set of circumstances means that there could be culpability on the part of Government in due course. I happen to agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) and the hon. Member for Clwyd, West. The case has been made. We have talked in legalistic terms. It must be a strict liability issue. If someone undertakes a dangerous occupation on their land and any toxin or other danger emanates out to the public, they are liable under *Rylands v. Fletcher* and the rule of strict liability.

I do not condemn the Government, but I ask them to think carefully. The Secretary of State said that he has lawyers who will advise him. There are lawyers in this House as

well, and the opinion has been made. *[Interruption.]* Is the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) laughing? Perhaps this is a laughing matter to him, but some of us care passionately about it. I respectfully advise the Secretary of State that this is a strict liability issue, and that it is therefore now time for the Government to apply pressure for compensation—on the Treasury, if that is where the money is to come from.

I spoke yesterday and the day before with the Minister in the National Assembly for Wales who has responsibility for agriculture. It is not acceptable for us in Wales to have to look for contingency funds for something that occurred due to a strict liability issue over the border. We are far away from the seat of this infection, but we are suffering as much as anybody else—perhaps more so. In the area I represent, there are many communities of hill farmers so we are suffering greatly. Diversification is not a relevant term there; it is not possible to diversify in high upland areas. We are utterly dependent on the trade in question, which has been brought to a standstill.

I ask the Secretary of State to liaise further with his opposite number in Cardiff, Elin Jones AM, Minister for Rural Affairs, and to use his good offices to try to ensure that the Treasury is receptive to an application for reasonable compensation at this stage. There are clear welfare and economic issues; there are huge issues for all of rural Wales that could, in part, be addressed.

I do not accuse the Secretary of State of cynicism; I have been careful not to do so. I believe him to be an honourable man, and I urge him to assist us in this most important of matters for both Wales and Scotland.

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 884**

**3.32 pm**

**Anne Milton (Guildford) (Con):** I wish to raise two main issues—why this happened and who is responsible, and the individual concerns of my farmers—but I shall start by paying tribute to Government Ministers. When the news broke on that Friday, they went to some lengths to be in touch with me. My hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) received the same treatment, as did many other Surrey MPs. Ministers were vigilant about keeping in touch with all of us throughout that weekend, the following week and when the second outbreak occurred.

I also wish to state that it was a pleasure to welcome the Secretary of State to Guildford to meet some of the staff working at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs site in my constituency. I have no doubt that the Government learned a great deal from the 2001 outbreak, and their swift action on animal movements certainly had a significant impact on this outbreak.

However, I am sorry to have to say that most of my praise ends there. There has been a lot of comment about why the outbreak occurred. I wish to highlight a few remarks made in both the Health and Safety Executive report and the Spratt report. First, let me quote from the HSE report:

“However, such was the condition in which we found the site drainage system that we conclude that the requirements for Containment Level 4 were not met...Our conclusion is supported by the evidence we found of long-term damage and leakage, included cracked pipes, unsealed manholes and tree root ingress.”

It is astounding that the Secretary of State cannot accept that there had been long-term leakage.

What that report goes on to say is even more shattering:

“we are aware of a difference of opinion between IAH and Merial over responsibility for maintenance of a key section of pipe”.

That is astonishing. It sounds a bit like a council arguing about a piece of land and who should cut the grass, with the housing department saying it is highways land and the highways department saying it is housing land. It is incredible that, in a facility that was dealing with such a dangerous virus, people were squabbling madly over who was responsible for a pipe.

**Mr. Letwin:** Does my hon. Friend agree that another troubling aspect of this is the suspicion, at the very least, that the reason why the two organisations were under such financial pressure was that DEFRA was very short of cash because it had been fined by the Commission as a result of the Rural Payments Agency episode?

**Anne Milton:** My right hon. Friend makes a very good point. It has emerged during today’s debate—I welcome it for that reason—that this was crisis management and catch-up management that, in the end, had disastrous consequences. In fact, it was a failure of management.

The Spratt report refers to an

“old, poorly maintained and defective effluent system that is shared by the two... different types of facility...The poor state of the IAH laboratories, and the effluent pipes, indicates that adequate funding has not been available to ensure the highest standards of safety for the work on FMDV”—

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 885**

the foot and mouth disease virus—

“carried out at this ageing facility.”

It continues:

“There had been concern for several years that the effluent pipes were old and needed replacing but, after much discussion between IAH, Merial and Defra, money had not been made available.”

The reports are damning, and it is disingenuous of the Secretary of State to deny that this problem was known, and to deny that there was a failure to take action to do anything about it.

I turn to some of the points that individual farmers have raised with me. Although farmers in my constituency felt that they were dealt with quite well by DEFRA, certainly at the beginning, latterly, communication did falter. They talk about an issue of trust between DEFRA and vets and farmers, and express concern that DEFRA would not allow movement for welfare purposes unless it was backed up by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. DEFRA asked them for statistics that they had already supplied. There is a feeling that nobody is listening to them, and they get very irritated at having to supply all those statistics anyway, only to be asked for them again when the outbreak happened. They also talk about the compensation—some £12.5 million to help farmers affected by foot and mouth disease, yet the cost to the industry is estimated at £100 million.

A farmer in my constituency who deals in specialist breeds talks about the problems that such farmers face. Their cattle take much longer to fatten—they are taken right up to the 30-month mark prior to slaughter. However, foot and mouth has prevented them from slaughtering their cattle at the 30-month mark, as they are over the limit that abattoirs will take. As a result, the farmers do not get the market rate and are left out of pocket.

There is an even more damning indictment, from a farmer who has written directly to the Secretary of State. At the end of his letter, he says:

“The way in which I have been treated and the working practices of your staff”—

DEFRA staff—

“have left me with no trust in the professional competence of Animal Health and I question its fitness for purpose and ability to cope with the current outbreak of foot and mouth.”

He describes a catalogue of concerns, including poor blood-taking techniques, distress

to his cattle, the inability to communicate well with DEFRA, blood test delays and, in particular, the huge delays that he encountered in getting answers on milk movements.

Although DEFRA staff—including the staff whom I and the Secretary of State met—were clearly working very hard, they were not necessarily working with the farmers or understanding their very real concerns. My farmers' frustration at the lack of information, the poor information provided, and the sense that nobody understood their problems or was working with them, is profound. There are many lessons that need to be learned, but as has been pointed out, there needs to be further work, particularly on the airborne transmission of foot and mouth disease.

### **17 Oct 2007 : Column 886**

Another issue to raise, which has not been touched on this afternoon, is the huge loss to charities in and around Surrey. Charities rely on a lot of this land for the holding of events to raise funds, thus they have lost a huge income over the summer.

The Secretary of State is well known to many of us in this House as a man of integrity and honour, and I am extremely grateful to him for staying in the Chamber for the duration of this debate. However, he does not realise that foot and mouth affected both Surrey and Berkshire, and his comments during his opening remarks are unbecoming of his reputation. He sounds just like a typical Minister wriggling on a hook. I am sorry to say it in these terms, but it disappoints me that he did not show more integrity during his opening remarks. I hope that he will specifically answer some of the questions that have been raised. The farmers and the many businesses associated with farming, which we must never forget, will pay a very high price for this situation. The very least that they deserve is for the Secretary of State to admit the failings of his Department.

**4.1 pm**

**Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD):** We are clearly discussing a matter of enormous concern to rural Britain, but it should also be of enormous concern to the whole country. Those of us who lived in the parts of the country that were so badly hit by the 2001 outbreak will recall the graphic and visible scenes that have been described—the burning pyres, the piles of dead bodies, the pictures of Prime Ministers in their biological suits and the closed footpaths. Thank God, we are not seeing those again. The problem is that, whereas in 2001 the highly visible nature of the outbreak meant that urban Britain—the 95 per cent. of the population that does not live in the countryside—was aware that there was a crisis, which resulted in sympathy, political support and pressure on the Government, in 2007 the consequences of foot and mouth are less than highly visible to most of the country.

All of us know that that second phase of outbreaks in September came about at the worst possible time. It was on the eve of both the Westmorland show, which is obviously

highly important to us in Westmorland and Lonsdale, and the back-end sales. One farmer put it to me that one way of getting urban folks to understand the nature of the problem and the extent of the crisis is by saying that what happened to the livestock markets is the equivalent of a virus breaking out in the high streets of Britain in the last week of November and the retail sector being put out of business for six weeks over Christmas and new year. That is the gravity of the situation. I make no party political point, but merely observe that the overwhelming majority of Government Members of Parliament do not represent rural areas and thus are not being pestered by their constituents because this is not a visible problem to them. As a consequence, Ministers are perhaps quick to take visible action to deal with the outbreak of foot and mouth, but are not so quick to deal with the economic realities.

Last Monday, the Secretary of State made a statement in the House on the compensation package. In the end, the package, containing an £8.5 million uplift in hill farming allowance and an extra £4 million in additional support, was staggeringly inadequate.

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 887**

Given that many of my hill farmers have lost well in excess of £10,000 each and that, in export sales alone, the farming industry is losing £2 million a day, that compensation, although welcome in so far as it goes, is massively inadequate.

**Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD):** The important message for those not in a rural area is that this is not just about the jobs on the farms or about seeing the farms through one season. It is about getting the industry through the crisis and back on a sustainable footing for the whole food manufacturing industry that depends on its existence throughout the year.

**Tim Farron:** I thank my hon. Friend for his observation, and I agree with him. I shall give one graphic illustration of the problem. This morning, I talked to a farmer in Longsleddale in my constituency. He had been to market this morning, and for a finished fat lamb he received £28. Earlier in the year, he would have expected to have received £42, and even that would have been an inadequate sum. Prices are now at early-1980s levels, yet this is 2007.

**Mr. Alan Reid:** Does my hon. Friend agree that throughout the whole of Britain we need a welfare disposal scheme for light lambs and older ewes and for dairy bull calves, all with compensation? We also need a headage payment for breeding ewes to compensate for the market losses, as well as additional funding for farmers and crofters in hill farming areas.

**Tim Farron:** I agree with my hon. Friend that the Government should be pursuing all those measures. It would be a small price to pay, given the benefits that farming delivers for this country.

I referred to the ridiculously low prices that farmers are being offered as a consequence



of the dreadful situation they are in, but we all will have observed that prices remain the same on the shelves in the supermarkets. The problem is an excess of supply over demand, and therefore disproportionate power in the hands of the buyers, who know that they have farmers in a vice. I want to take this opportunity to condemn—I hope on behalf of the whole House—the role played by many buyers and supermarkets in deliberately exploiting the weaknesses of farmers in the markets. That is a demonstration that the free market does not work. There is no invisible hand in the marketplace making things fair. We need to demonstrate our visible hand to ensure fair trade for farmers. If I may be forgiven the plug, it is a clear demonstration of the need for a market regulator in that area.

Most of the farmers in my constituency are tenants and they have tiny incomes. Only two weeks ago, I talked to a hill farmer who reminded me that he had not made a profit in the past decade and he is living off what little he has. Over that period, many of the farmers in my area have lived off historical profits and, as tenants, they have no property to fall back on.

Few people are coming to farming from fresh, without a farming background. The farming lifestyle is very attractive in many ways and the work done is so valuable, but increasingly few of those who are from

#### **17 Oct 2007 : Column 888**

farming backgrounds are taking the risk of following their parents into farming. One consequence is the reduction in the number of working farms. One valley in my constituency had 26 farms 25 years ago, but now has only seven—the same amount of land is managed by a much smaller number of people. The consequences are clear. First, we run a huge risk with the security of food supply. The Government are vexed about energy supply, but they are seemingly not that bothered about the food supply; they should take the issue on board.

Secondly, there is the landscape. People may think that farming is heavily subsidised and we give folks in agriculture money for nothing, but they should remember that the countryside that we value so highly and on which tourism completely depends does not occur naturally. It exists because it is farmed. It is estimated that some £400 million a year is spent by farmers on maintaining the countryside, and they get none of that back. The footpaths are maintained by farmers. Fields are not boggy and flooded, thanks to farmers. Natural England should be reminded that if it wants partners to help to deliver its biodiversity programme, it needs farmers farming.

Keeping Britain farming is an investment, and I am afraid that the Government are not making that investment. If we are to invest money in the industry—the Government owes it to farmers to provide more than the pittance that has been offered so far. The most obvious approach to take is price support, as many other hon. Members have pointed out. If a third of sheep were to go to export and now will not do so, the answer is to buy them and create a floor price so that farmers get a fair return for the work that they have done. After all, as we have established, the problem is the Government's fault.

Let us be clear: foot and mouth disease is an animal welfare problem, but principally it is a farm economics problem. That is why it is so important that the Government get the balance right. In killing off foot and mouth, we must not kill off farming.

**4.9 pm**

**Mr. Brooks Newmark (Braintree) (Con):** I have often said that Mystic Meg would have done a better job of economic forecasting than the Prime Minister managed when he was in the Treasury, but his ascension as pharaoh this summer was met in short order by, if not quite the full spectrum of biblical plagues, at least a fair proportion of them. The rivers did not exactly turn to blood, but they certainly burst their banks, and our farmers have had to endure more than their fair share of pestilence and death. But sadly, across swathes of the country, there has been no exodus of animals going to market. The only frantic escape this summer has been the number of savers fleeing in the face of the Government's inept handling of the Northern Rock debacle.

The Prime Minister was keen to assure the country that he took personal control of the latest foot and mouth crisis. With typical hubris, he told the press in September that,

“it is only because we learnt lessons from what happened in 2001 on foot and mouth that we were able to act as instantly as we did to prevent the spread of that disease.”

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 889**

Only a week later, the Government had their own attack of foot in mouth, when they were forced to revoke the all-clear in the face of a new outbreak.

The 2001 general election was delayed because of the seriousness of the foot and mouth outbreak, but this year the Prime Minister was far more concerned with his own case of election fever than with the plight of thousands of farmers. Although he is quite safe from bluetongue, when it came to quashing election speculation, he proved that he was suffering from a good dose of forked tongue. Indeed, he decided against taking his case to the country only when he realised that he had become,

“a tainted wether of the flock,

Meetest for death”

at the polls.

**Mr. MacNeil:** Given what the hon. Gentleman said about the Prime Minister's hubris, does he agree that the Prime Minister and his Government should not be allowed to get

away without paying the compensation due to farmers and crofters in Scotland?

**Mr. Newmark:** The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point—the same point made by all Opposition Members. I completely agree with what he says as it applies not only to Scotland, but to England and Wales.

My constituency lies within the present bluetongue control area. I can only say that over the summer local farmers were more interested in getting accurate information from DEFRA than they were in election speculation. As the livestock manager for a large farm in my constituency says,

“DEFRA guidance has not been particularly clear”,

and the

“situation is changing so fast that nobody seems in control.”

As a dairy farmer, he has not been too badly affected, because milk sales have continued and the price of milk has actually risen. However, although some livestock sales have now resumed, he has had to cull bull calves from his herd because they could not be sold and he has lost £40 or £50 per head as a result. His vets are being very strict, which he admits is quite right, but vets and farmers alike are finding it hard to get access to accurate and up-to-date information from DEFRA.

Farmers are not irresponsible people and they are not unreasonable. They appreciate that it is hard for the Government to keep up with a rapidly evolving situation such as the bluetongue outbreak.

**Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con):** I share my hon. Friend's view that farmers do the best that they can but that it is often DEFRA's operating procedures that cause the trouble. Is he aware, for example, that in the Windsor constituency in Berkshire, which was affected by the outbreak, cattle were seen falling off the back of a DEFRA lorry on a roundabout?

**Mr. Newmark:** My hon. Friend makes a good point, but I need to move on.

## **17 Oct 2007 : Column 890**

As I said, farmers are not irresponsible. They appreciate that it is hard for the Government to keep up with what is going on, but they should not have to fight to get accurate information and to get the necessary authorisations when they are only trying to obey the law. They should not be feeling that the Government have lost control.

Like much of East Anglia, Essex has been caught once again, now in a double whammy

from foot and mouth and bluetongue. Forty years ago almost to the day, the first cases of foot and mouth were confirmed in Oswestry, marking the beginning of the 1967 outbreak. The culprit for the August outbreak was quickly established as the strain of virus from the 1967 outbreak, which was stored at Pirbright and released through broken drains. It seems that short-sightedness is not the only guilty bequest that the Government have inherited from the era of Harold Wilson.

Responding to the inquiry into the 2001 epidemic, the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Margaret Beckett) said:

“The House will want to know what else would be different in any future outbreak of foot and mouth disease.”—[ *Official Report*, 6 November 2002; Vol. 392, c. 286.]

Well, although farmers have again been left to pick up the pieces, the difference is that the Government caused this outbreak directly. Why do I say that? As the Secretary of State himself announced last Monday, no money had been invested in the drains because they were not believed to be problematic. He was adamant about the sincerity of that belief, but how far was it reasonable and who is to be held accountable for it, given that it proved so disastrously incorrect? The Secretary of State told the House that

“nobody thought that they were in such a condition.”—[ *Official Report*, 8 October 2007; Vol. 464, c. 39.]

But did anybody think to check—and if not, why not?

If, in similar circumstances, there had been an outbreak of a disease that was infectious to people, resignations would have followed and, presumably, charges would have been brought against those responsible.

**Mr. Martlew:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Newmark:** I have not got the time, so I am not giving way.

The latest foot and mouth outbreak has indirectly affected thousands through the loss of livestock and livelihoods. Someone still has to step up and take responsibility for that outbreak and its consequences for farmers.

**4.15 pm**

**Bill Wiggin (Leominster) (Con):** We have covered an important subject today. My hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) opened the debate by asking all the right and awkward questions of the Government. He also patiently took some rather silly interventions from the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who clearly

had not read page 9, item 31 of the Spratt report.

My hon. Friend also took an important and valuable intervention from my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) about the removal of top soil from the Pirbright site, and the Government's complete failure to record where they have put it.

### **17 Oct 2007 : Column 891**

The Secretary of State did not do himself a great deal of credit in his response to my hon. Friend's opening speech. I believe that he told us that no work on a bluetongue vaccine will take place until the new heat treatment filters are fitted. As I understand it, the Pirbright factory was making a vaccine for a disease that we did not have in this country, and allowed that disease to escape. Now that there is bluetongue all around the Pirbright factory, it is not making the vaccine—although we now need it, because the disease has emerged. It defies belief that the Government cannot get anything right.

Nor is it right for the Secretary of State to suggest that no scientist had complained about the drains and that therefore the drains could not have been leaking. Scientists do not look down drains. That is the responsibility of DEFRA; it is supposed to regulate the site, rather than leaving it to scientists to complain about the drains. The idea that nobody acted negligently cannot be right; it is absurd and flies in the face of DEFRA's reactions to farmers, who are now being prosecuted. John Happlethwaite, 72, and his wife Sally, 69, are being prosecuted for not noticing, I believe, that their cattle had foot and mouth. They are not vets or veterinary inspectors, but they are being prosecuted while DEFRA, which is responsible for patrolling and regulating the Pirbright site, is, apparently, without blame. That is patent nonsense. The Secretary of State described farmers as the first line of defence; we cannot go around prosecuting our first line of defence, Secretary of State.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Chris Huhne) said clearly that the Government were guilty beyond reasonable doubt, and he is absolutely right. He issued a withering attack on the Government and robustly defended his farming constituents. Sadly, his mind may be on other things at the moment—in particular, persuading the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) not to vote for him.

The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) praised the Government and described his interest in animal welfare. He also described some of the difficulties that his pig farming constituents had had, but failed to make the point that the Government could do a great deal more for animal welfare. Top of that list would be to ensure that the right drugs were available for animals that have caught bluetongue disease—they need steroids, painkillers and penicillin. What is the correct dosage for animals with the disease? What guidance is there? Hon. Members may have seen the excellent article in this week's *Farmers Weekly*; it made clear that lessons from Holland can be learned, but I have not yet seen anything that shows that the Government have picked up on those valuable lessons.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (David Maclean) made a brilliant speech. He accused the Government of incompetence, citing at least 13 instances in which they had done the wrong thing because they are obsessed by farm movements and not their own biosecurity. He timed his speech to the moment, and it was a joy to hear him show that, without any reasonable doubt, the Government have been guilty of negligence.

The hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) rightly mentioned the importance of farm-gate prices. She spoke too about the power of the

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 892**

supermarkets, the speed of single farm payments and of hill farm allowances. She was also right to note the importance of producing our own food.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) thanked his local people and councillors, and spoke extremely eloquently about Merial. He rightly said that it was entirely DEFRA's responsibility to license, regulate, inspect and fund the Pirbright site. He also mentioned that footpaths had not been closed, something that has caused much distress to all our constituents across the country. It is a great shame that the Government have singularly failed to deliver the joined-up thinking that we were promised. He asked about compensation and about the quality and frequency of inspections, and he wanted to know whether DEFRA was happy about the present arrangements. He made some extremely important points, to which I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will respond when he winds up the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Jones) made a lovely speech about his pride in his constituency, and in its farmers and lamb production. He talked about the pathetic prices that farmers now receive—36p a head for certain ewes—and he spoke brilliantly about the legal precedent involved. He attacked the Government's reputation for competence, rightly citing the Prime Minister's cynical manipulation of the process, and he also spoke about accountability and resignations. He said that the farming industry will not forget what has happened.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) talked about the price for light lambs for export, and about the huge numbers of sheep being traded in Wales. Citing the *Rylands v. Fletcher* judgment, he made the case that liability lies with the Government. My notes are a little shaky, but I suspect that he meant that the person performing an action must take responsibility for it. That means that it is the responsibility of the regulatory body to ensure that none of its sites leak diseases, and especially not one as important and dangerous as FMD.

My hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Anne Milton) thanked the Government for briefing her and keeping her in touch. Her approach was very reasonable, and she quoted from Spratt about the long-term leakage problems. She made a very good case

about the state of the pipes, rightly saying that the Government had failed to keep them in good condition. She said that the Secretary of State was wriggling on a hook—quite generous, given what I saw of his performance. She also mentioned the lack of integrity on display, and I suspect that she might have been a bit tougher if the right hon. Gentleman were a less popular Minister, as this was not his finest hour.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) said that the damage done to the farming community by an outbreak at this time of year was like an attack on retail at Christmas time. He was absolutely right: all livestock farmers will have had a terrible time, and that is certainly true in my constituency. The price of lamb has collapsed, and the ripple effect will hit the beef price as the year goes on. He added that Labour had no rural representation in the Chamber, and it was unfortunate to see that there were no Labour Back Benchers listening to his speech.

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 893**

My hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newmark) made an excellent speech, in which he claimed that the Government were speaking with a forked tongue. I suspect he was making his speech with a silver tongue—[Hon. Members: “Oh!”] I accept that this is an extremely serious matter about which we should not joke. My hon. Friend the Member for Braintree also told the House about how vets and farmers in his constituency had been kept very short of information. He took an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) who talked about cattle falling from the back of lorries. Obviously, the Government’s handling of these things leaves a lot to be desired.

I started asking questions about bluetongue as long ago as 16 April when the Government seemed confident that they could handle any outbreak of the disease. Sadly, that has not proved to be the case. The virus has spread to 36 farms, 60 infected animals have tested positive since the first case on 28 September and now the disease is present in sheep.

The Secretary of State suggested that a vaccine will be available in the summer. I hope that is true and that the Minister will confirm that information. I understand that 36 scientists should be working on producing the vaccine at Pirbright, but obviously they are not because of the lack of the right heat filter.

Lord Rooker told my noble Friend Baroness Byford that DEFRA and its partners have been undertaking

“a cost analysis of potential bluetongue outbreaks and control measures in the United Kingdom”.—[ *Official Report, House of Lords*, 29 March 2007; Vol. 690, c. WA291.]

Has any work been done to examine how the disease is being handled in Holland? I have already mentioned the article in *Farmers Weekly* and I hope the Government will

look at it and reflect on what they can do to improve animal health in the UK.

What did the Prime Minister say when he was told about the foot and mouth outbreak? How did he react after coming back from his holiday to go on the radio on 8 September to tell everybody what his Government were going to do only to discover that the disease had broken out again?

There is another thing that is not quite right. The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said:

“Any issues relating to the funding of the effluent system, whether remedial or replacement, would be a matter for the IAH and Merial...the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council...and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.”—[ *Official Report*, 9 October 2007; Vol. 464, c. 450W.]

Nobody has mentioned their role. Have they been asked to contribute to the fund the Government have put together to help farmers? If they have, how much have they put in? After all, the Minister said that they were among the people responsible. We need to know who he thinks is responsible for the escape of the virus. We know from the Spratt report that the Pirbright site is not up to scratch and that the proposal made to DEFRA in 2004 was ignored. It is important that we have answers from the Minister.**7 Oct 2007 : Column 894**

I realise that we are running out of time, but it is worth reminding the House that the Bill for foot and mouth so far is £250 million. The single farm payment fine was £305 million. Bovine tuberculosis has cost £100 million. So far, that is £650 million of incompetence. Apparently, it costs about £240 million to build a 400-bed general hospital. We could have had nearly three hospitals if DEFRA had been competent.

The Department has failed to offer protection in the areas for which it is responsible. DEFRA has failed the people who trusted it and it has failed the test of competence.

**4.28 pm**

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Jonathan Shaw):** This has been an important debate for our agricultural industry and our farming communities. It follows the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 8 October, when he brought the House up to date with what had been happening over the summer in terms of foot and mouth and bluetongue.

During that period, we worked closely with farmers and their leaders. We are grateful for their co-operation. We are acutely aware of the pressures they face from the FMD and bluetongue outbreaks, which happened, as many Members said, at one of the worst possible times for livestock farmers. We shall maintain that close working relationship. As my right hon. Friend said, we shall organise a meeting for Members next week to



discuss bluetongue and answer questions.

Members made many points about FMD, with particular reference to Pirbright. Questions were put about the drains and the letter we received on 20 July. Did that letter say that the drains were damaged or in a poor state of repair? No, it did not. Was the work of the inspectors criticised in any of the reports? No, it was not. Was the age of the drains in any way connected with their possibly being damaged? No, it was not. Were we asked to fund new drains, because of damage? No, we were not—not at all. Did Spratt or the HSE comment on the work of the inspectors? Did they say that the inspectors' work was incompetent?

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** Will the Minister give way?

**Jonathan Shaw:** No, I will not give way; I have not got sufficient time. [*Interruption.*] I am not frit; I have got a lot of issues to get through.

We are putting in funding; we have given £31 million. If there was a priority and the people at Pirbright knew about it, they would have used part of that money to ensure that the drains were repaired. We gave them those resources. I was asked by the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) whether we would continue to fund that investment at Pirbright, and I can assure him and the House that we will continue to consider that investment.

On handling, three times a day, we had “bird tables”, to which some hon. Members came along and saw DEFRA and all our partners—from industry representatives to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals—working hard together for the farming community. We held regular meetings with the

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 895**

industry. There was good dialogue with the devolved Administrations. We made every attempt to inform Members of Parliament.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) mentioned animals being shot from helicopters. If he will provide us with that information, we will be very interested to see it, because my officials can find no information to that effect.

On footpaths, we followed the science at every stage in the decisions that we took, and our contingency arrangements have been agreed since the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak. We learned those lessons; we have the contingency arrangements, which are not just written by DEFRA, but consulted on every year and laid before the House. All the industry and its representative groups play a part in being involved in drawing up those contingency arrangements, which we follow. People were concerned about footpaths, but we followed the science. I attended public meetings in Surrey; we listened to the concerns of the local community, and we closed those footpaths.

The hon. Member for Leominster (Bill Wiggin) asked what we are doing to develop a

bluetongue vaccine. We have been discussing that with other European member states that have the disease, and we will work in partnership with them and the Commission to find a vaccine for it.

Hon. Members have made many points, and I will try to crack through as many of them as I can. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) asked when hill farm payments would be made. We said that payments are scheduled to start in early November and will be subject to EU state procedures, but we want to get those payments to hill farmers as early as possible and hope to do so in November.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) said that he supported the swift action taken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—action that was endorsed by the British Veterinary Association. He spoke about animal welfare and the high welfare standards of the pig industry in his constituency. We will maintain our dialogue with the pig industry and work with it to find solutions.

The right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (David Maclean) put his 12 charges to the Government. He said that it was all down to DEFRA all the time, but we have had our contingency arrangements since 2001, and they were drawn up after the involvement of industry and partners right across the sector.

My hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) referred to Mr. Birkett, a farmer, and the Lancashire NFU. She asked for single farm payments to be made as quickly as possible. I am sure that she will appreciate the difficulties that the Rural Payments Agency has had. We want it to ensure a smooth operation and we do not want to expose it to anything that will jeopardise its full recovery, but we will get those payments to farmers as soon as we possibly can.

The hon. Member for Woking spoke about the Institute for Animal Health, Merial and his constituents. We had many conversations throughout early August. He has made his criticisms—I have heard them—but I would like to commend him on the work that he did in representing his constituents.

## **17 Oct 2007 : Column 896**

The hon. Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Jones) spoke with passion on behalf of his constituents and about the difficulties that farmers are facing. We need to restore the markets so that prices increase.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) talked about hill farmers, and I have said that we want payments to get to them as soon as possible. He also mentioned bluetongue—we need to put suitable arrangements in place. We have our contingency plans and we are working with other member states to ensure that we can find a solution and a vaccine. We have spoken to supermarkets and hope that they will

listen to our comments, as well as to his remarks and those of all other hon. Members—

**Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire) (Con)** *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

*Question,* That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

*Question put accordingly,* That the original words stand part of the Question:—

*The House divided: Ayes 232, Noes 280.*

### **Division No. 211]**

[4.36 pm

AYES

Afriyie, Adam  
Ainsworth, Mr. Peter  
Alexander, Danny  
Amess, Mr. David  
Ancram, rh Mr. Michael  
Atkinson, Mr. Peter  
Bacon, Mr. Richard  
Baldry, Tony  
Barker, Gregory  
Baron, Mr. John  
Barrett, John  
Beith, rh Mr. Alan  
Bellingham, Mr. Henry  
Bercow, John  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Binley, Mr. Brian  
Bone, Mr. Peter  
Boswell, Mr. Tim  
Bottomley, Peter  
Brady, Mr. Graham  
Brake, Tom  
Brazier, Mr. Julian  
Brokenshire, James  
Browne, Mr. Jeremy  
Browning, Angela

Bruce, rh Malcolm  
Burns, Mr. Simon  
Burrowes, Mr. David  
Burstow, Mr. Paul  
Burt, Alistair  
Burt, Lorely  
Butterfill, Sir John  
Cable, Dr. Vincent  
Cameron, rh Mr. David  
Carmichael, Mr. Alistair  
Carswell, Mr. Douglas  
Cash, Mr. William  
Chope, Mr. Christopher  
Clappison, Mr. James  
Clark, Greg  
Clegg, Mr. Nick  
Clifton-Brown, Mr. Geoffrey  
Conway, Derek  
Cox, Mr. Geoffrey  
Crabb, Mr. Stephen  
Curry, rh Mr. David  
Davey, Mr. Edward  
Davies, David T.C. (*Monmouth*)  
Davies, Philip  
Djanogly, Mr. Jonathan  
Dorrell, rh Mr. Stephen  
Dorries, Mrs. Nadine  
Duddridge, James  
Duncan Smith, rh Mr. Iain  
Dunne, Mr. Philip  
Ellwood, Mr. Tobias  
Evennett, Mr. David  
Fabricant, Michael  
Fallon, Mr. Michael  
Farron, Tim  
Featherstone, Lynne  
Field, Mr. Mark  
Foster, Mr. Don  
Fox, Dr. Liam  
Francois, Mr. Mark  
Fraser, Mr. Christopher  
Garnier, Mr. Edward  
Gauke, Mr. David  
George, Andrew  
Gibb, Mr. Nick  
Gidley, Sandra  
Gillan, Mrs. Cheryl

Goldsworthy, Julia  
Goodman, Mr. Paul  
Goodwill, Mr. Robert  
Gove, Michael  
Grayling, Chris  
Green, Damian  
Greening, Justine  
Greenway, Mr. John  
Grieve, Mr. Dominic  
Gummer, rh Mr. John  
Hague, rh Mr. William

Hammond, Mr. Philip  
Hammond, Stephen  
Hancock, Mr. Mike  
Hands, Mr. Greg  
Harper, Mr. Mark  
Harris, Dr. Evan  
Harvey, Nick  
Hayes, Mr. John  
Heald, Mr. Oliver  
Heath, Mr. David  
Hemming, John  
Hendry, Charles  
Herbert, Nick  
Hermon, Lady  
Hoban, Mr. Mark  
Hogg, rh Mr. Douglas  
Hollobone, Mr. Philip  
Holmes, Paul  
Horwood, Martin  
Hosie, Stewart  
Howard, rh Mr. Michael  
Howarth, David  
Howarth, Mr. Gerald  
Hughes, Simon  
Huhne, Chris  
Hunt, Mr. Jeremy  
Hunter, Mark  
Hurd, Mr. Nick  
Jack, rh Mr. Michael  
Jackson, Mr. Stewart  
Jenkin, Mr. Bernard  
Johnson, Mr. Boris  
Jones, Mr. David  
Kawczynski, Daniel  
Kirkbride, Miss Julie

Knight, rh Mr. Greg  
Kramer, Susan  
Laing, Mrs. Eleanor  
Lait, Mrs. Jacqui  
Lamb, Norman  
Lancaster, Mr. Mark  
Lansley, Mr. Andrew  
Laws, Mr. David  
Leech, Mr. John  
Leigh, Mr. Edward  
Letwin, rh Mr. Oliver  
Lewis, Dr. Julian  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr. Ian  
Lidington, Mr. David  
Llwyd, Mr. Elfyn  
Luff, Peter  
Mackay, rh Mr. Andrew  
Maclean, rh David  
MacNeil, Mr. Angus  
Main, Anne  
Malins, Mr. Humfrey  
Maples, Mr. John  
Mates, rh Mr. Michael  
Maude, rh Mr. Francis  
May, rh Mrs. Theresa  
McCrea, Dr. William  
McIntosh, Miss Anne  
McLoughlin, rh Mr. Patrick  
Miller, Mrs. Maria  
Milton, Anne  
Mitchell, Mr. Andrew  
Moore, Mr. Michael  
Mulholland, Greg  
Mundell, David  
Murrison, Dr. Andrew  
Neill, Robert  
Newmark, Mr. Brooks  
Oaten, Mr. Mark  
Öpik, Lembit  
Osborne, Mr. George  
Ottaway, Richard  
Paice, Mr. James  
Paterson, Mr. Owen  
Penning, Mike  
Penrose, John  
Pickles, Mr. Eric  
Price, Adam

Prisk, Mr. Mark  
Pritchard, Mark  
Pugh, Dr. John  
Randall, Mr. John  
Redwood, rh Mr. John  
Reid, Mr. Alan  
Rifkind, rh Sir Malcolm  
Robathan, Mr. Andrew  
Robertson, Angus  
Robertson, Hugh  
Robertson, Mr. Laurence  
Rogerson, Dan  
Rowen, Paul  
Ruffley, Mr. David  
Sanders, Mr. Adrian  
Scott, Mr. Lee  
Selous, Andrew  
Shapps, Grant  
Shepherd, Mr. Richard  
Simmonds, Mark  
Simpson, David  
Simpson, Mr. Keith  
Smith, Sir Robert  
Soames, Mr. Nicholas  
Spelman, Mrs. Caroline  
Spicer, Sir Michael  
Spink, Bob  
Spring, Mr. Richard  
Steen, Mr. Anthony  
Stuart, Mr. Graham  
Stunell, Andrew  
Swayne, Mr. Desmond  
Swinson, Jo  
Swire, Mr. Hugo  
Syms, Mr. Robert  
Tapsell, Sir Peter  
Taylor, Mr. Ian  
Taylor, Dr. Richard  
Teather, Sarah  
Thurso, John  
Tredinnick, David  
Turner, Mr. Andrew  
Tyrie, Mr. Andrew  
Vaizey, Mr. Edward  
Vara, Mr. Shailesh  
Viggers, Peter  
Villiers, Mrs. Theresa

Walker, Mr. Charles  
Waterson, Mr. Nigel  
Watkinson, Angela  
Webb, Steve  
Weir, Mr. Mike  
Whittingdale, Mr. John  
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann  
Wiggin, Bill  
Willetts, Mr. David  
Williams, Hywel  
Williams, Mark  
Williams, Stephen  
Willis, Mr. Phil  
Willott, Jenny  
Wilson, Mr. Rob

Winterton, Ann  
Winterton, Sir Nicholas  
Wishart, Pete  
Wright, Jeremy  
Young, rh Sir George  
Tellers for the Ayes:

Mr. Crispin Blunt and  
Mr. Richard Benyon  
NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane  
Ainger, Nick  
Ainsworth, rh Mr. Bob  
Alexander, rh Mr. Douglas  
Allen, Mr. Graham  
Atkins, Charlotte  
Austin, Mr. Ian  
Austin, John  
Bailey, Mr. Adrian  
Baird, Vera  
Banks, Gordon  
Barlow, Ms Celia  
Barron, rh Mr. Kevin  
Battle, rh John  
Bayley, Hugh  
Beckett, rh Margaret  
Begg, Miss Anne  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Benton, Mr. Joe



Berry, Roger  
Betts, Mr. Clive  
Blackman, Liz  
Blackman-Woods, Dr. Roberta  
Blears, rh Hazel  
Blizzard, Mr. Bob  
Bradshaw, Mr. Ben  
Brennan, Kevin  
Brown, Lyn  
Brown, rh Mr. Nicholas  
Brown, Mr. Russell  
Browne, rh Des  
Bryant, Chris  
Burden, Richard  
Burgon, Colin  
Burnham, rh Andy  
Butler, Ms Dawn  
Byers, rh Mr. Stephen  
Byrne, Mr. Liam  
Cairns, David  
Campbell, Mr. Alan  
Campbell, Mr. Ronnie  
Caton, Mr. Martin  
Cawsey, Mr. Ian  
Challen, Colin  
Chapman, Ben  
Chaytor, Mr. David  
Clapham, Mr. Michael  
Clark, Ms Katy  
Clarke, rh Mr. Charles  
Clarke, rh Mr. Tom  
Clelland, Mr. David  
Clwyd, rh Ann  
Coaker, Mr. Vernon  
Coffey, Ann  
Connarty, Michael  
Cooper, Rosie  
Cooper, rh Yvette  
Corbyn, Jeremy  
Cousins, Jim  
Cummings, John  
Cunningham, Mr. Jim  
Cunningham, Tony  
Darling, rh Mr. Alistair  
David, Mr. Wayne  
Davidson, Mr. Ian  
Davies, Mr. Dai

Davies, Mr. Quentin  
Denham, rh Mr. John  
Devine, Mr. Jim  
Dhanda, Mr. Parmjit  
Dismore, Mr. Andrew  
Dobbin, Jim  
Dobson, rh Frank  
Donohoe, Mr. Brian H.  
Doran, Mr. Frank  
Drew, Mr. David  
Dunwoody, Mrs. Gwyneth  
Eagle, Angela  
Eagle, Maria  
Efford, Clive  
Ellman, Mrs. Louise  
Ennis, Jeff  
Farrelly, Paul  
Field, rh Mr. Frank  
Fisher, Mark  
Fitzpatrick, Jim  
Flello, Mr. Robert  
Flint, Caroline  
Flynn, Paul  
Follett, Barbara  
Foster, Mr. Michael (*Worcester*)  
Foster, Michael Jabez (*Hastings and Rye*)  
Francis, Dr. Hywel  
George, rh Mr. Bruce  
Gerrard, Mr. Neil  
Gibson, Dr. Ian  
Godsiff, Mr. Roger  
Griffith, Nia  
Griffiths, Nigel  
Grogan, Mr. John  
Gwynne, Andrew  
Hain, rh Mr. Peter  
Hall, Mr. Mike  
Hall, Patrick  
Hamilton, Mr. David  
Hanson, rh Mr. David  
Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
Healey, John  
Henderson, Mr. Doug  
Hendrick, Mr. Mark  
Heppell, Mr. John  
Hesford, Stephen  
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia

Heyes, David  
Hill, rh Keith  
Hillier, Meg  
Hodgson, Mrs. Sharon  
Hood, Mr. Jim  
Hoon, rh Mr. Geoffrey  
Hope, Phil  
Howarth, rh Mr. George  
Howells, Dr. Kim  
Hoyle, Mr. Lindsay  
Hughes, rh Beverley  
Humble, Mrs. Joan  
Hutton, rh Mr. John  
Iddon, Dr. Brian  
Illsley, Mr. Eric

Ingram, rh Mr. Adam  
Irranca-Davies, Huw  
James, Mrs. Siân C.  
Johnson, Ms Diana R.  
Jones, Helen  
Jones, Mr. Kevan  
Jones, Lynne  
Jones, Mr. Martyn  
Jowell, rh Tessa  
Joyce, Mr. Eric  
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald  
Keeble, Ms Sally  
Keeley, Barbara  
Keen, Alan  
Keen, Ann  
Kelly, rh Ruth  
Kemp, Mr. Fraser  
Kennedy, rh Jane  
Khan, Mr. Sadiq  
Kidney, Mr. David  
Kilfoyle, Mr. Peter  
Knight, Jim  
Kumar, Dr. Ashok  
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen  
Lammy, Mr. David  
Laxton, Mr. Bob  
Lazarowicz, Mark  
Lepper, David  
Lewis, Mr. Ivan  
Linton, Martin  
Lloyd, Tony

Love, Mr. Andrew  
Lucas, Ian  
MacShane, rh Mr. Denis  
Mactaggart, Fiona  
Mahmood, Mr. Khalid  
Malik, Mr. Shahid  
Mallaber, Judy  
Mann, John  
Marris, Rob  
Marsden, Mr. Gordon  
Marshall, Mr. David  
Martlew, Mr. Eric  
McAvoy, rh Mr. Thomas  
McCafferty, Chris  
McCarthy, Kerry  
McCarthy-Fry, Sarah  
McCartney, rh Mr. Ian  
McDonagh, Siobhain  
McDonnell, John  
McFadden, Mr. Pat  
McFall, rh John  
McGovern, Mr. Jim  
McGuire, Mrs. Anne  
McKechin, Ann  
Meacher, rh Mr. Michael  
Merron, Gillian  
Michael, rh Alun  
Miliband, rh David  
Miliband, rh Edward  
Miller, Andrew  
Mitchell, Mr. Austin  
Moffat, Anne  
Moffatt, Laura  
Mole, Chris  
Moon, Mrs. Madeleine  
Morden, Jessica  
Morgan, Julie  
Mountford, Kali  
Mudie, Mr. George  
Mullin, Mr. Chris  
Murphy, Mr. Jim  
Murphy, rh Mr. Paul  
Naysmith, Dr. Doug  
Norris, Dan  
O'Brien, Mr. Mike  
Olnier, Mr. Bill  
Owen, Albert

Palmer, Dr. Nick  
Pearson, Ian  
Plaskitt, Mr. James  
Pope, Mr. Greg  
Prentice, Mr. Gordon  
Primarolo, rh Dawn  
Purnell, rh James  
Rammell, Bill  
Raynsford, rh Mr. Nick  
Reed, Mr. Andy  
Riordan, Mrs. Linda  
Robertson, John  
Robinson, Mr. Geoffrey  
Rooney, Mr. Terry  
Ruane, Chris  
Ruddock, Joan  
Russell, Christine  
Ryan, rh Joan  
Sarwar, Mr. Mohammad  
Seabeck, Alison  
Sharma, Mr. Virendra  
Shaw, Jonathan  
Sheerman, Mr. Barry  
Sheridan, Jim  
Simon, Mr. Siôn  
Singh, Mr. Marsha  
Skinner, Mr. Dennis  
Slaughter, Mr. Andy  
Smith, rh Mr. Andrew  
Smith, Ms Angela C. (*Sheffield, Hillsborough*)  
Smith, Angela E. (*Basildon*)  
Smith, Geraldine  
Snelgrove, Anne  
Soulsby, Sir Peter  
Southworth, Helen  
Spellar, rh Mr. John  
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis  
Stewart, Ian  
Stoate, Dr. Howard  
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin  
Straw, rh Mr. Jack  
Stringer, Graham  
Sutcliffe, Mr. Gerry  
Taylor, Ms Dari  
Taylor, David  
Thomas, Mr. Gareth  
Thornberry, Emily

Timms, rh Mr. Stephen  
Tipping, Paddy  
Touhig, rh Mr. Don  
Trickett, Jon  
Truswell, Mr. Paul  
Turner, Dr. Desmond  
Turner, Mr. Neil  
Twigg, Derek  
Ussher, Kitty  
Walley, Joan  
Waltho, Lynda  
Ward, Claire

Watts, Mr. Dave  
Whitehead, Dr. Alan  
Williams, rh Mr. Alan  
Williams, Mrs. Betty  
Wills, Mr. Michael  
Wilson, Phil  
Winnick, Mr. David  
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie  
Wood, Mike  
Woolas, Mr. Phil  
Wright, Mr. Anthony  
Wright, David  
Wright, Mr. Iain  
Wright, Dr. Tony  
Wyatt, Derek  
Tellers for the Noes:

Mr. Frank Roy and  
Steve McCabe

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 897**

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 898**

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 899**

**17 Oct 2007 : Column 900**

*Question, That the proposed words be there added, put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

*Mr. Deputy Speaker declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House expresses great sympathy with farmers and the farming industry and acknowledges the difficulties they are facing as a result of the outbreaks of foot and mouth disease and bluetongue; recognises the work that has already been done by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Animal Health, farmers and their representative bodies and others in containing foot and mouth; agrees that the priority for the Government must be to work with the farming industry and others to support the resumption of market activity as quickly as possible; and notes the steps the Government has taken to deal with what happened at the Pirbright laboratory site.

## ARCHIVE 2001 -2007



[Fields of Fire](#) witness accounts of 2001

[Foot and Mouth policy 2001 - opinions](#)

FRONT PAGES

[Warmwell menu](#)

[FMD Front Page Current](#)

[General Archive Page](#) (new window)

Archive [August 2007 Surrey outbreak - stage 1](#)



Archive [July 2007](#)

Archive [June 2007](#)

Archive [May 2007](#)

Archive [April 2007](#)

Archive [March 2007](#)

Archive [February 2007](#)

Archive [January 2007](#)

Archive [December 2006](#)

Archive [November 2006](#)

Archive [October](#) 2006

Archive [September 2006](#)

Archive [August 2006](#)

Archive [July](#) 2006

Archive [June](#) 2006

Archive [May](#) 2006

Archive [April](#) 2006

Archive [March 2006](#)

Archive [February 2006](#)

Archive [January 2006](#)

[FMD Front Page September 2005 - Dec 2005](#)

[FMD Front Page Oct 2004 - August 2005](#)

[General Front Page \(includes other and related items\)](#)

[Front Page Autumn 2004](#)

[Front Page Summer - October 2004](#)

[Warmwell front pages Spring 2004](#)

[Warmwell front pages Oct 03 - Jan 04](#)

[Warmwell front pages Sept 2002](#)

[Warmwell front pages August 2002](#)

[Warmwell front pages June / July 2002](#)

[Warmwell front pages - May / June 2002](#)

[Warmwell front pages - April / May 2002](#)

[Warmwell front pages - March / April 2002](#)

[Warmwell front pages - the earliest pages in 2001 - March 2002](#)

---