



**Environment, Food  
and Rural Affairs  
Committee**

Tuesday, 11 February 2025

**The Baroness Hayman of Ullock  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State  
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
London**

**Subject: preventing outbreaks of foot and mouth disease and African swine fever in the UK**

Dear Sue,

My Committee is currently inquiring into animal and plant health, with an initial focus on biosecurity at the UK border. We have gathered written evidence – including from Defra – and held the first of a series of evidence sessions on the topic on [4 February](#).

The evidence the Committee heard on 4 February was alarming. I am writing to raise two matters of such importance and urgency that the Committee cannot wait until the publication of its report to address them. They relate to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Germany and funding for African swine fever checks at the Port of Dover.

#### Foot and mouth disease in Germany

On 10 January, foot and mouth disease was confirmed in Germany, representing its first cases since 1988 and the first in the EU in over a decade. In response, Defra took the decision to ban the commercial import of cattle, pigs, sheep, deer, buffaloes and their products from Germany (in addition to new restrictions on personal imports).

However, we have heard that it took six or seven days for controls on commercial imports to take effect due to failings in Defra's communication and IT systems, specifically IPAFFS. This is a highly concerning development; we know all too well the devastation this disease can cause for our farmers, rural communities and economy.

The evidence heard by the Committee contrasts to the assurances the Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs gave to the House on [15 January](#) that "there was no delay—essentially, as soon as we were informed, we put the appropriate processes in place, and staff at border control points were issued instructions to hold goods at the border. Everything was done as quickly as possible."

House of Commons  
Palace of Westminster  
London  
SW1A 0AA

**efracom@parliament.uk**  
**+44 (0)20 7219 1119**  
**Social: @houseofcommons**  
**parliament.uk**



The message from those on the frontline – in our local authorities and ports – is that communication from central government was not quick enough or clear enough. As a result, prohibited German goods made it through the UK border. The Head of Port Health and Public Protection at Dover Port Health Authority (DPHA) suggested that prohibited goods were able to “auto-clear the system via TODCOF”, the timed-out decision contingency feature that was introduced by Defra in April 2024 as part of the Border Target Operating Model (Q9). This raises questions about Defra’s use of auto-clearance processes for imports that the Committee will continue to pursue in its inquiry.

**Please provide a timeline of Defra’s response to the 10 January report of FMD in Germany, including when the decision was made to ban the import of relevant goods from Germany, when border control posts were informed and when IPAFFS was successfully updated and operating as intended.**

**Please also write in response to the following questions from the Committee.**

- **What quantity of prohibited goods was able to enter the country in the time between controls being approved and IPAFFS being updated?**
- **What steps have you taken to track and remove prohibited products and what assessment have you made of the potential risk of those products to the UK?**
- **What assessment have you made of the cause of the delay to controls being properly implemented?**
- **What steps are you taking to ensure this doesn’t happen again?**

Funding for ASF controls delivered by Dover Port Health Authority

In its evidence session, the Committee heard that personal import routes are being exploited by criminals who are bringing prohibited products of animal origin (POAO) into the UK on a commercial scale. This human-mediated pathway presents a high risk of African swine fever incursion according to Defra’s latest outbreak [assessment](#). There are additional biosecurity concerns associated with this illegal smuggling as well as public health and food hygiene risks.

Since September 2022, the work Dover Port Health Authority has conducted alongside Border Force has proved to be effective at identifying and removing prohibited POAO from vehicles. Meat smuggling is an increasing threat and DPHA’s work is more vital than ever. However, with current levels of funding DPHA is only able to provide 20 per cent operational coverage at the port in conditions that are not conducive to the nature of the work. The evidence provided to the Committee made clear that DPHA’s work is



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integral to seizures of illegal POAO and that in its absence seizures would plummet, allowing even more prohibited meat to flow into the country.

A funding settlement for DPHA's African swine fever operations has not been reached for 2025/26; I was grateful for the Minister's [response](#) to my topical question on 6 February on this point. **I emphasise that the Government must allocate appropriate funding to DPHA to continue to deliver this work, which is of critical national importance.**

It has been estimated by Defra that an outbreak of ASF could cost the UK between £10 million to £100 million and could devastate the rural economy and the communities it supports. This should be at the forefront of Ministers' minds when considering DPHA's funding proposals, as well as the public health and food hygiene risks associated with meat smuggling.

These are not the only matters for the Government to consider in relation to biosecurity at the border. In its evidence session on 4 February, the Committee scrutinised Border Force's use of intelligence and heard evidence relating to data gathering and strategy, the role of inland local authorities, collaboration between different parties, the location and operation of Sevington inland border facility and Defra's engagement with stakeholders. The Committee also heard that DPHA is conducting work on "live tourist lanes" at the Port that "were not designed to be pulling out tonnes of bloody, wet, dirty meat that cannot be contained or washed down", raising questions about resourcing and facilities at points of entry.

The Committee intends to take forward this important and wide-ranging evidence in its inquiry and conclusions and recommendations for Defra in its report. But we'd be grateful for your response to our immediate concerns relating to foot and mouth disease and funding for ASF checks at the Port of Dover by 24 February given the urgency of these matters.

Yours truly

Alistair

**Rt Hon Mr Alistair Carmichael MP**  
**Chair, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee**