

The annexed letter was co-authored by the members of the UK Task & Finish Group on UK Livestock Movements. The letter was sent to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on 31 March 2021.

13 April 2021

**Annex A: Letter from the UK Task & Finish Group on UK Livestock Movements to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.**

31.03.21

Sirs,

You will be aware of the ongoing issues regarding post-Brexit live animal trade between Northern Ireland and Great Britain and vice versa, in particular involving cattle and sheep. We have formed a relevant industry task and finish group to iron out the issues that have become apparent since the UK's departure from the EU.

Moving forward, we appreciate and accept that there will be scenarios and regulations which differ from the old normal, and that our industry must adapt to change, as must all other industries post-Brexit. Our concerns lie mainly with the trade in breeding sheep and cattle, the majority of which are listed within the pedigree Breed Societies of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland producers remain a solid part of these UK breed societies, and consequently have considerable influence within UK pedigree beef and lamb production.

There are currently three main areas of concern – in order of priority - that we would like to draw your attention to.

**1. Show Licences:**

Prior to the 1st of January 2021, livestock could be licenced to leave NI and travel to GB to attend shows and sales. These predominantly high value, high genetic merit, pedigree stock animals were presented at shows and sales. In the event of a non-sale, these animals were able to return to their original departure holding in NI, where they would remain isolated for 30 days prior to retesting for animal disease, before re-joining the herd or flock. Within the new export health certificate, there is no option which allows for this practise.

We cannot stress strongly enough the vital importance of this trade to both pedigree and commercial beef and lamb production, and the social interaction that these events provide, especially for the development of young breeders. The increase in performance that these animals provide is imperative to the industry as a whole. Their advanced genetics deliver ongoing potential for increased efficiency in feed conversion and a corresponding advancement in food production, with all the environmental and productivity benefits this provides. The absence of this trade will have an immediate and long-term detrimental effect on both sides of the Irish Sea. New residency requirements mean that traders brave enough to make the trip from NI to GB are doing so on a one-way ticket, opening the distinct possibility of distorted trade and an unfair market, and excluding NI farmers the opportunity to compete within their UK respective herd books.

In their Northern Ireland Protocol, the Government have committed to providing Northern Irish producers with unfettered access to the GB market. This is patently not being achieved with current legislation.

We would like to see the following actions:

- As an interim measure, immediate temporary reinstatement of the show licence, using legislation similar to those utilized for the easements of soil and used machinery movements. This should include a facility for short term residency and will allow the return of pedigree livestock to their farm of origin if necessary.
- An investigation into how the current legislation could be adjusted to allow a distinction to be made between commercial and pedigree animals with high genetic merit.

## **2. Sheep scrapie**

The new rules - which have been applied as the UK leaves the European Union - require that all sheep entering NI must be accompanied by an EU Export Health Certificate. The conditions on which a Certificate is granted are different to those which were previously required. Some of these new conditions, specifically those regarding scrapie monitoring and genotyping, mean that a high proportion of sheep previously entering NI cannot meet the new rules. Delegations and extensions of the transition period have been put in place to allow EU livestock to flow seamlessly into the UK, however, there has been no reciprocal agreements to allow trade to continue with the UK for our Northern Irish producers. I am sure you can see the irony in this!

There are currently very few scrapie-monitored flocks in the regions involved in this trade, and under current arrangements it takes seven years for a flock to become fully scrapie-monitored, and a minimum of three years before any movements can take place. You will agree that waiting even three years is not an acceptable timeline, nor is it a medium-term solution.

We would like to see the following actions:

- A reciprocal derogation to allow immediate trade to continue within UK countries.
- Modification of the Export Health Certificate and regulations to assist flocks to meet requirements within a much shorter time frame.
- Use of the Movement Assistance Scheme to cover the costs of scrapie monitoring.

## **3. Re-tagging**

The third of our concerns is a scarcely believable process involving re-tagging. Current policy appears to be that animals for export from GB to NI must have their UK tag replaced with a GB tag for export. On arrival in NI, these three tags – and therefore the traceable origin of the animal – are removed and replaced with sequential tags from the NI holding on which they are now resident.

While it does not prevent trade, the threat – and consequences - of losing full-life farm-to-fork provenance and traceability of UK beef and lamb production is directly opposed to Government objectives. The addition of the GB tag to animals prior to their departure from GB to NI is more than sufficient to highlight their country of origin and allows full traceability. The removal of the GB tag and the original pair of UK tags appears unjustified and unwarranted and creates both animal welfare and health and safety concerns. There are additional traceability issues of animals involved in health and performance recording schemes. The potential for errors in the case of a whole herd replacement following a bTB breakdown are colossal.

We would like to see the following action:

- Further to a meeting last week, we were informed that the Government's understanding of the EU Commission's requirements was that the addition of an extra GB tag prior to movement of the animal was sufficient. In the first instance, please could you direct us to the guidance given by the EU Commission within the NI protocol regarding this issue. If the above understanding is correct, this guidance would effectively solve the problem, allowing Northern Irish farmers to continue trading effectively within the United Kingdom.

We request that you give our points full consideration with a view to meeting with our small group at your earliest convenience to help us find a path that enables our NI pedigree sheep and beef producers to once again trade fully within the United Kingdom. It would be beneficial to all sides if an industry group could be created, in conjunction with the EU Commission, to look at the EHC to find a way to make it workable and user friendly for all concerned.

Yours faithfully,

Neil Shand,  
CEO, National Beef Association

On behalf of:

Edward Adamson, Secretary, NSA NI  
Victor Chestnutt, President, Ulster Farmers' Union  
Chris Dodds, Executive Secretary, Livestock Auctioneer's Association  
Martin Kennedy, President, National Farmers Union Scotland  
John Martin, Secretary, Holstein NI  
Robin McIlrath, CEO and Breed Secretary, Suffolk Sheep Society Ltd  
Norman Robson, Vice President, British Simmental Cattle Society  
John Royle, Chief Livestock Adviser, NFU  
Phil Stocker, CEO, National Sheep Association  
Barrie Turner, CEO, Aberdeen Angus Cattle Society  
Neil Wilson, Executive Director, Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers, Scotland

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