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Bluetongue vaccination freedom for farmers

SNP Press Release from Alyn Smith MEP

Alyn Smith MEP, member of the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee, has welcomed today's decision by the European Parliament to allow vaccination against the Bluetongue virus to take place on farms anywhere in the EU, in contrast to the previous system of only vaccinating within a specific restriction zone.

Bluetongue disease is a non-contagious virus spread by a species of midge and all ruminants - such as cattle, goats, deer and sheep - are susceptible, although symptoms are generally most severe in sheep. Since the early 2000s several epidemic waves of disease have hit many EU Member States, causing significant losses of livestock.

To control the spread of the Bluetongue disease better and make farmers' lives easier, the new rules will allow the use of new inactivated vaccines outside restricted areas where the disease has occurred recently. Unlike the live attenuated vaccines used in the past, the inactivated ones pose no risk of transmitting viruses to other animals.

Speaking from Strasbourg, Alyn said:

"No doubt there was good reason to restrict the use of vaccination a decade ago when the law was first introduced, as vaccines at the time were "live attenuated vaccines" and therefore carried the risk of the virus circulating. However, fortunately we are now in a position where new inactivated vaccines have been developed which do not pose such a risk. It makes sense to allow the wider use of these vaccines, outside of the restricted areas - giving farmers more flexibility and choice in determining how to protect their livestock, without having an expensive movement restriction regime imposed.

"This is a sensible move, but has taken its time coming due to what can only be described as institutional quarrels in Brussels. However, if Member States now put these rules into effect quickly, the new vaccines could be used for the 2012 vaccination campaign. Scotland has a good record in the fight against Bluetongue, helped by our geography no doubt, and this move will help us maintain our disease-free status."

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