

Trade implications of EU approval of ROI BVD Programme for NI farmers

The ROI's BVD Eradication Programme received official approval from the EU on 14th July 2022; this milestone has significant repercussions for farmers sending cattle to the ROI for breeding and production purposes. Approval of the ROI's BVD Programme under the EU Animal Health Regulation (AHR) is a remarkable achievement and comes about as a result of DAFM's support, both financially and legislatively, of the Animal Health Ireland-led Programme.

The cross-industry NI BVD Implementation Group has been requesting action by DAERA on a range of measures to be provided under new legislative provisions that would allow NI to align with the EU AHR and thus result in minimal impact to farmers selling cattle to the ROI, either directly, at mart sales or particular Shows and Sales.

The EU AHR, which has been in force since April 2021, is an extensive regulation that deals with transmissible animal diseases. It describes and legislates for two stages in a country gaining recognition of their progress in eradicating certain diseases: firstly, the Programme must be approved by the EU; and secondly, the Member State must apply for official freedom. As each stage is attained, additional requirements are made regarding animals being traded from countries that do not have an approved programme or the relevant freedom, so that the risk of that Member State re-introducing the disease is minimised.

Under the EU AHL, cattle being sold into the ROI now must either come from herds recognised by DAERA as being BVD-free, or are subject to additional measures, such as approved quarantine for 21 days and/or additional testing, including onerous requirements for pregnant stock.

The new barriers to the movements of cattle being sold for breeding and production to the ROI are not insurmountable. However, they will have an impact on farmer time and costs due to additional checks required to allow veterinary certification of the export.

The aim of the NI BVD Implementation Group is that an application would be made by DAERA for recognition of the NI BVD Programme at the earliest possible stage. To achieve this, the Implementation Group has reiterated the pressing need for herd restrictions and herd level BVD statuses to be introduced within NI. These are necessary to enhance the current programme and to reduce barriers to live trade.

The NI cattle industry has high animal health ambitions and wants to achieve BVD eradication. However there has been little recent progress with the programme, largely due to the lack of additional measures that are required to achieve eradication as evidenced by the ROI programme. Industry continues to request that DAERA put in place those measures that are essential for reducing BVD and which will result in additional benefits through reduced farm carbon footprints and lowered greenhouse gas emissions linked to ruminants, while facilitating trade to continue with a minimum of disruption.