



## **Beneficial effects of BVD PI Removal Scheme**

**An analysis of the Removal Scheme for BVD Persistently Infected (PI) calves so far this year indicates that there has been a marked improvement in the disposal rates of BVD positive calves during the spring of 2017 compared to the spring of 2016.**

The PI Removal Scheme came into operation on 1st February 2017 and a comparison of calves that had a positive result during March to June of 2017 with those that had a positive result during the same months in 2016 shows that a larger percentage were removed in 2017 within 6 weeks of their test result. In addition, an assessment of the distribution of applications and the number of BVD positive animals suggests that as the year has progressed a greater proportion of the positive animals are being claimed for.

The PI Removal Scheme has been delivered in a partnership between DAERA, the LMC and AHWNI. The money paid out has provided a level of support for the costs incurred in the disposal of the positive calves and, particularly in suckler herds, the purchase of replacements.

However, while the figures indicate an improvement in disposal rates, a significant number of positive calves are apparently being retained. Research has shown that retaining BVD positive calves doubles the risk of having further PIs during the following year, and retaining PI animals increases the risk of spread to neighbouring herds. It is recommended that PI animals are culled as soon as possible and strictly isolated until this is done.

Overall, the current observations on the Scheme are consistent with it improving the number and speed of PI calves being removed. Other factors such as the concerted communication efforts made within industry and increasing farmer awareness of BVD are likely to have also played a role.

It is worth noting how the support scheme in the RoI has been tailored towards encouraging herd owners towards the early removal of PIs: a higher payment has been put in place in 2017 for herds where PIs are destroyed within 3 weeks compared to destruction within 5 weeks. If a PI animal is not destroyed within 5 weeks, a restriction notice is issued to the herd and neighbours are notified. Their programme saw the number of Persistently Infected (PI) animals born in 2016 drop to less than one quarter of that seen in 2013 (the first year of their compulsory programme).

The review of the NI Scheme indicates that if incentives are continued a beneficial effect should be seen. Additional measures to encourage the removal of PIs would not only complement the Scheme but, based on the evidence from the RoI programme, would also intensify the drive to remove PIs, and so accelerate progress towards eradication of BVD.