



Monday 18th May

National Sheep Association
The Sheep Centre, Malvern
Worcestershire, WR13 6PH
Tel: 01684 892661
Fax: 01684 892663
enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk
www.nationalsheep.org.uk

Dear Animal Health and Welfare Pathway team,

The National Sheep Association welcomes the opportunity to respond to Defra's Animal Health and Welfare Pathway consultation and recognises the positive intent behind encouraging continual improvement in flock health, welfare and farm resilience across the sheep sector.

NSA is committed to progressive, practical improvements in sheep health and welfare that supports both high standards and the long-term sustainability of British sheep farming. Change must be viable and affordable and work within the sheep farming system. We would stress that financial viability is an absolutely core component of improving health and welfare, giving farmers the ability to invest with confidence. As an organisation, we believe successful policy must strike a careful balance between innovation and tradition, ensuring farmers are brought forward with confidence and understanding at a pace that is realistic for businesses of all locations and types.

While our responses to many of the suggestions were in the negative, we want to reassure Defra that NSA is broadly in favour of the overall aspiration of mandating vet visits. You will find that the narrative in the text boxes in our response is positive and offers what we believe is a more effective way forward. We do, however, have serious reservations about the proposals regarding evidence and data. NSA feels that for an industry that has such diversity, future legal requirements need to offer flexibility and proportionality.

NSA supports a proportionate and farmer-friendly approach to future veterinary Animal Health and Welfare visits. We believe that a record of the discussion, alongside a straightforward action plan agreed between farmer and vet - very much in line with what has been introduced through the Pathway Health and Welfare Review - would be more constructive and meaningful for the sheep sector than the proposed data driven flock health review. We recognise the important role of data but believe this should be progressed through an incentivised voluntary initiative.

Our response has highlighted the need for further industry and Defra discussion around thresholds and exemptions to Pathway visits. While recognising the need for proportionality, NSA feels the proposed threshold of fewer than 101 sheep is not the way to ensure health and welfare improvements for the national flock. Our proposals for proportionality, we feel, overcome this challenge.

Chief Executive: Phil Stocker
A company limited by Guarantee. Registered in England. Registration No. 37818.
Registered charity in England and Wales (249255) and in Scotland (SC042853)



your business your future

National Sheep Association is an organisation which represents the views and interests of sheep producers throughout the UK.
NSA is funded by its membership of sheep farmers and its activities involve it in every aspect of the sheep industry.



On the issue of data collection, NSA acknowledges the importance of improving national understanding around antibiotic usage, iceberg diseases, and wormer use. However, greater clarity is needed from government regarding how such data would be managed and used before we can form a fully informed position. A clear and agreed system for data collection and data interpretation, avoiding duplication, and working through the Livestock Information Programme is crucial before any mandating progresses.

NSA remains keen to work collaboratively with Defra and wider industry partners to ensure the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway delivers meaningful progress and positive outcomes whilst avoiding undue burdens on sheep farmers. The diversity in size, scale and nature of sheep farming is important to food production, the economy, and rural social structures. We want to see sheep health and welfare improve, in many cases by raising outcomes in the lower quartile of operators, but our strong belief is that we must avoid measures that affect the structure of our sector through poorly targeted and disproportionate regulation.

Positive change is best achieved through partnership, trust and practical implementation that brings the whole industry forward together. We look forward to helping where we can in developing the future of Pathway.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Stocker', with a small flourish at the end.

Phil Stocker
NSA Chief Executive