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Mark Ruskell, MSP

Via email rural.committee@parliament.scot

1 October 2026

Dear Convenor,

I wrote to you earlier this month to update you on further Bluetongue serotype 3 (BTV-3) cases identified in the South West and North East of Scotland.

Since then, unfortunately further positive cases have been identified by the Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) Scotland. As of 29 September, there have been 38 premises infected with BTV-3, with 20 affected sheep and 82 affected cattle. All but four of the premises have been within the Dumfries and Galloway area where a Restricted Zone has been in place since 10 September following confirmation from Deputy CVO Scotland that there was evidence of active circulation of the virus. The remaining cases have been detected by tracing animal movements from affected premises within the Restricted Zone. All premises where disease has been detected have been placed under movement restrictions.

Whilst the current strategy has been effective at slowing down incursion of the disease into Scotland, now that it has arrived and disease is circulating in South West Scotland, movement controls are now a less effective disease control method. On 25 September, a meeting was held with key Scottish industry representatives to discuss the current BTV-3 control strategy and there was unanimous agreement that the Restricted Zone should be extended to the whole of Scotland. As a result, I have agreed that the Restricted Zone will be extended to the whole of Scotland from 00:01 on Saturday 3 October.

Restricted Zones are in place covering all of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The change in Scotland will mean all movement restrictions will be the same across the UK. A General Licence will be required for moving animals between Restricted Zones but there will be no other BTV controls. Although animals will no longer require vaccination or PCR testing to leave a Restricted Zone, vaccination is, and will remain, the only viable long-term strategy for controlling BTV, especially if the disease becomes endemic within the UK in the future. I strongly encourage keepers to discuss vaccination with their vets to discuss the right approach for their animals and to make sure vaccine is available when they need it.

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As with my previous letters, I have shared again below some suggested public messaging for you and committee members to promote on their own social media channels below. I welcome your support in circulating these key biosecurity messages. Regular updates are posted on the Scottish Government's social media channels, and you can find posts to share at the following link:

Facebook: [ScotGov Rural | Edinburgh | Facebook](#)

Public Messaging

Bluetongue is a notifiable insect-borne viral disease that affects sheep, cattle, other ruminants such as goats, and camelids such as llamas.

It is mostly spread by midges, although it can also be spread by natural or artificial breeding, and through the placenta from mother to offspring.

It does not affect people or food safety.

Outbreaks can result in prolonged animal movement and trade restrictions. The disease itself can be very serious, with high rates of death in infected sheep and significant fertility and productivity problems in infected cattle.

Animal keepers should be very vigilant for any signs of notifiable disease and immediately report any suspected cases to the [Animal Plant and Health Agency](#). **It is a legal requirement to do so.**

If thinking of bringing animals into Scotland, we call on animal keepers to observe responsible purchasing and ensure they consider the risks carefully, check the health status of the animals and make sure they meet all licence or import conditions.

We strongly recommend all keepers of ruminants consult their private vet on how best to protect themselves, in particular by vaccination against bluetongue.

To keep up to date with the latest information you can [sign up for animal disease alerts from APHA](#). If you have already subscribed to this service from APHA and no longer wish to receive these disease alerts, complete the information on the [subscriptions page](#). You will then have the option to update your subscription.

End

Further Information

I have also written in similar terms to John Cooper MP, David Mundell MP, Craig Hoy MSP, Finlay Carson MSP, all South Scotland regional MSPs, Dawn Black MSP, Andrew Bowie MP, Dave Doogan MP and all North East Scotland regional MSPs.

Needless to say, should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call Chief Veterinary Officer Scotland, Sheila Voas, on 07810757987 or to contact my officials at Animal.Health@gov.scot.

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Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jim Fairlie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

JIM FAIRLIE

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