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Mark Ruskell, MSP

Via email rural.committee@parliament.scot

1 September 2026

Dear Convener,

I wrote to you on 21 August to inform you about three further premises where Bluetongue Virus serotype 3 (BTV3) has been identified and of the declaration of a temporary control zone to help limit spread to other parts of the country.

Since then, unfortunately, further positive cases have been identified by Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, Jesus Gallego. There are now 16 affected premises. On 21 August 2026 two positive cases were identified, one near Kirkcudbright and one near Castle Douglas. On 23 August 2026 a positive case was identified at premises near Dalbeattie. Two cases were identified on 25 August 2026, one near Lockerbie and one near Kirkcudbright. On 27 August 2026 a further two cases were identified, one near Canonbie and one near Twynholm. Four further cases were identified on 28 August 2026 in Newton Stewart, Annan, Dalbeattie and Kirkcudbright.

All these cases are in the Temporary Control Zone (TCZ) implemented on 20 August 2026 in South-West Scotland.

This bluetongue season there has been 664 cases (premises) in England and 73 in Wales with reports of significant mortality in sheep and infertility problems in both cattle and sheep. The majority of cases are in the Devon and Cornwall region but we are now starting to see other significant “hot spot” areas developing in other parts of England northwards e.g. around the Cheshire area and in Wales. There are now also two recorded cases in Cumbria. The Animal and Plant Health agency (APHA) are no longer testing to confirm reported cases in Devon and Cornwall given the number of cases being confirmed with resources being focused on other areas.

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My previous letter detailed the declaration of the TCZ on 20 August 2026 and the licencing regime permitting certain movements. I noted that this is a rapidly evolving situation and that other changes to the existing control strategy could occur depending on the disease situation at the time.

The current TCZ controls require animals to be PCR tested or, for cattle the option to be vaccinated with Bultavo-3, for movement out of the TCZ to live.

My officials have met with key industry stakeholders to discuss the overall BTV control strategy and the impacts of the controls within the TCZ. Following further assessment of the current situation, balancing disease containment with other impacts on certain sectors and taking account of ongoing industry views, we have updated movement rules for livestock in the TCZ in South-West Scotland. These most recent adjustments to the Disease Control Strategy should help alleviate the pressures on animal keepers within the TCZ and to facilitate important movements of lower risk animals such as store animals from the TCZ to the free area of Scotland.

The movements from 10 September 2026 are as follows:

- only Breeding bulls and pregnant cows will require vaccination and a PCR test, if leaving the TCZ zone (unless vaccinated with bultavo-3)
- all other bovines, ovine or caprine species do not require vaccination or a PCR test to leave the TCZ zone
- stags, adult male camelids and pregnant deer and pregnant camelids will require pre movement testing and are advised to consider vaccination in consultations with their private veterinary surgeon
- animal keepers are asked to reconsider which animals they intend on vaccinating.

Movement rules for animals coming into Scotland from restricted zones in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, or moving to those areas, remain unchanged for now but we must be honest about the limits of movement controls. Once the virus is circulating in midges, these controls offer no meaningful protection. Farmers should not expect or rely on them as a safeguard going forward.

In the near future, it may be the case that we start to consider BTV as an endemic disease for which the primary control strategy is vaccination given that this is a disease spread by midges. We will be meeting again with industry on 2 September to review our control strategy to ensure it remains fit for purpose based on current circumstances and I shall write to you again to keep you apprised of any further significant developments.

I am aware of the very high demand for BTV3 vaccines. The Scottish Government, along with its counterparts across UK have met with vaccine manufactures and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) to look at ways of replenishing stocks as quickly as possible. The VMD informed Government that the special imports certificate is now in place to allow stocks of BTV3 vaccine into the UK from the EU. This has allowed for the import of several million doses over the next few days and weeks.

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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 links:

X: [Scot Gov Rural \(@ScotGovRural\) / Twitter](#)

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 and all South Scotland regional MSPs.

Needless to say, should you have any questions, [REDACTED] contact my officials at Animal.Health@gov.scot.

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Yours sincerely,

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

JIM FAIRLIE

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