

# Written Ministerial Statement

*The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.*

## **Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs UPDATE ON CONFIRMED FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE IN GERMANY**

*Published at 5pm on Friday 17 January 2025*

This statement sets out the current steps being taken to protect our livestock and the wider Northern Ireland agri-food sector following confirmation of a case of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in Germany.

### **Background**

On 10 January 2025 FMD was confirmed in a herd of water buffalo in Brandenburg, Germany, north of Berlin.

As many of you will be aware, FMD is a severe and highly contagious viral disease that affects cattle, sheep, pigs, and other cloven-hoofed animals. It is classified as a notifiable disease, and it is essential to emphasise that failure to report it constitutes an offence.

It is crucial to clarify that FMD is not considered a public health threat and the Food Standards Agency has confirmed that products of animal origin remain safe for consumption.

In 2001, an outbreak of FMD resulted in dire consequences for our farming community and the wider economy, costing approximately £8 billion across the UK.

The emergence of FMD in Germany is therefore a significant concern, not merely for our livestock owners, but for the entire agricultural sector across the UK, Ireland, and the EU.

### **Actions Taken**

I want to outline the measures being taken to mitigate this risk.

German officials are actively implementing steps to prevent the further spread of the disease, including the culling and safe disposal of all susceptible animals and the establishment of disease control zones. These measures are aimed at ensuring that the disease does not extend beyond the currently affected area. Ongoing surveillance efforts have yet to detect any additional cases.

To protect Northern Ireland, we have strict import controls in place on the movement of animals and animal products from FMD-affected areas. This means that all susceptible species and their products from disease control zones in Germany are restricted from entering Northern Ireland.

Recognising the importance of collaboration, I spoke with my counterpart at the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM), Charlie McConalogue TD, to discuss our coordinated approach across the island of Ireland.

In addition, I will be meeting next week with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the UK Biosecurity Minister, Baroness Hayman, where I will discuss these developments and seek to ensure a unified response across the UK.

The Chief Veterinary Officer for Northern Ireland, Brian Dooher, and officials are also maintaining close and frequent communication with their counterparts across these islands to facilitate a comprehensive response.

In terms of FMD preparedness in Northern Ireland, my department has well established robust disease control contingency plans in place to manage the risk of disease incursions and protect our

farmers and food security. The FMD response plan outlines clear procedures for responding to suspected cases of FMD, including rapid diagnostic testing, protocols to restrict animal movements and the establishment of disease control zones to mitigate for onward spread of the disease.

This plan was tested extensively during a UK national exercise in 2018. Actions which would be taken alongside our strong veterinary surveillance system to detect unusual disease symptoms include prompt follow-up investigations of any suspect cases.

## **Communications**

My department is engaging in wide ranging communications reminding livestock keepers of the necessity of adhering to high levels of biosecurity. Comprehensive biosecurity guidance is available on the DAERA website:

[Foot and Mouth disease | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

This guidance emphasises the importance of maintaining high biosecurity standards on farms, including controlling access to livestock areas and disinfecting footwear and equipment.

Continued vigilance is paramount and it is essential veterinary practitioners and livestock keepers remain alert to any unusual symptoms reporting these immediately to a veterinarian or directly to DAERA. Further detail including photos of clinical signs are also available on the DAERA website.

While we have implemented significant protective measures, there is no room for complacency. We must continue to convey clear messages—both within the farming community and beyond—about the importance of responsible sourcing to protect our livestock from disease incursions, maintaining high biosecurity standards, and promptly reporting any unusual symptoms.

## **Next Steps**

My officials will continue to engage with stakeholders from across the agri-food sector to update them on this evolving situation and will continue to reinforce the importance of biosecurity measures and vigilance.

The Chief Veterinary Officer and his team will maintain the ongoing close contact with their counterparts and we have developed a clear and comprehensive communications plan, which will be adapted as necessary in the coming days. I am also committed to keeping colleagues informed and will provide updates as necessary.

I would request, at this time, that members assist us in disseminating key messages regarding responsible sourcing, maintaining vigilance, and the need for farmers to immediately report any unusual symptoms in livestock.

These steps will further help to ensure the protection of our livestock, and the agricultural sector which is vital to our economy.