

**Witness Name:** Roy Brannen

**Statement No.:** 1

**Exhibits:** RB

**Dated:** 18 April 2023

**UK COVID-19 INQUIRY  
MODULE 1**

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**WITNESS STATEMENT OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL NET ZERO**

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**This statement is one of a suite provided for Module 1 of the UK Covid Inquiry and these should be considered collectively. In relation to the issues raised by the Rule 9 notice dated 16 December 2022 served on the Scottish Government, in connection with Module 1, in relation to the Agriculture and Rural Economy Directorate (ARED), the Director General Net Zero will say as follows: -**

**Key figures and decision-makers**

1. The Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) Scotland has overall responsibility for Scotland's contingency and resilience for incursions of animal disease. This is a Senior Civil Servant (SCS) Deputy Director role reporting to the Director of Agriculture and Rural Economy. A full list of ARED SCS staff is set out in ARED Senior Civil Service Staff List, which is provided: [RB/0001-INQ000130961].
2. Simon Hall was the CVO Scotland from July 2009 – June 2011. He was succeeded by Sheila Voas who became 'acting' CVO in June 2011 before formally occupying the role in October 2012 to the present date.
3. Lead Ministerial responsibility for animal health lies with the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, presently Mairi Gougeon, and her predecessors, listed below:
  - May 2007 - May 2016: Richard Lochhead MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment; later Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment

- May 2016 - May 2021: Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity; later Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy; later Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism
- May 2021 - present: Mairi Gougeon MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands; later Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands.

### **ARED and Zoonotic Diseases**

4. The ARED is responsible for supporting Scotland's sustainable economic growth in agriculture, the food industry and in rural areas. This includes preventing, controlling and eradicating animal disease in Scotland, including zoonotic infections and enhancing animal welfare, which is the responsibility of the Animal Health and Welfare division (AHWD). This has been the case over the period in question to the present.
5. The AHWD is led by Scotland's CVO. The division's responsibilities include protecting domestic animal health and protecting human health by controlling animal diseases that may affect people. Contingency planning for exotic animal disease outbreaks, and animal disease control strategy, also falls under the remit of the division. The AHWD has increased in size since 2009 due to restructuring within ARED and additional responsibilities arising from EU Exit.
6. The Veterinary Adviser for Public Health sits within AHWD and reports to the Deputy CVO, with the CVO acting as the countersigning officer. The Veterinary Adviser for Public Health attends the Human Animal Infections Risk Surveillance group (HAIRS), which is a multi-agency cross-government horizon scanning and risk assessment group, encompassing the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), the Food Standards Agency (FSA), Public Health Wales (PHW), Public Health Scotland (PHS), Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), Welsh Government and Scottish Government. The group has met every month since February 2004 and acts as a forum to identify and discuss infections with potential for interspecies transfer (particularly zoonotic infections).
7. The Veterinary Adviser for Public Health is also a member of the Veterinary Risk Group (VRG). This group is chaired by the APHA and was established following the Anderson review into the 2007 foot-mouth-disease outbreak. This group monitors and ranks

emerging animal related threats and vulnerabilities and advises on action. The group consists of risk identification and risk management leads across all four UK administrations, in animal health and food safety. It meets monthly and reports to the UK CVO and her colleagues in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The VRG uses a multicriteria decision analysis tool (named ETHIR) to help with threat assessment.

8. The VRG and HAIRS both have experts covering multiple areas of zoonotic disease. Scottish Government also calls upon expertise during disease outbreaks from Animal and Plant Health Agency National Emergency Epidemiology Group (NEEG), and EPIC (the Centre of Expertise on Animal Disease Outbreaks which is funded by the Scottish Government). Partners in Defra produce Outbreak Assessments via International Disease Monitoring which feeds into surveillance of new/emerging zoonotic diseases of concern. The process of international and UK monitoring for animal diseases is described in the *UK Contingency Plan for Exotic Notifiable Disease of Animals (2021)*, provided: [RB/0002-INQ000130961].
9. In specific relation to zoonotic disease, there has been increasing interest in vector-borne infections that may now potentially occur here due to climate change. Research currently underway in the Scottish Government's portfolio of strategic research into the Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture 2022-2027 includes projects on vector-borne zoonoses, mainly those associated with ticks. The EPIC Centre of Expertise in Animal Disease Outbreaks undertakes horizon-scanning to monitor changing disease threats to Scottish livestock, including zoonotic vector borne diseases, such as West Nile Virus, as the climate changes.

### **Biosecurity Issues for ARED**

10. The AHWD Disease Control Team participates in local and national exercises simulating outbreaks of exotic notifiable disease, which may or may not be zoonotic. The most recent exercises for zoonotic notifiable exotic diseases were Exercise Cerberus in May 2016 testing rabies outbreak response, and Exercises Juniper and Holly which were avian influenza table top exercises in 2019/2020. There is an *Exotic Animal Disease Contingency Framework Plan*, provided: [RB/0003-INQ000130963], outlining government response to outbreaks in collaboration with operational partners that exercises are intended to test. For zoonotic disease outbreaks the plan determines close liaison between PHS and the relevant National Health Service (NHS) board. The public health response is led by an NHS Incident Management Team. Further explanation is

given in the *Scottish Regional Resilience Partnerships' Framework for Exotic Notifiable Animal Diseases Contingency Plans* (2022), provided: [RB/0004-INQ000130964].

11. The AHWD has published various communications products in relation to biosecurity as part of disease control policy. These products are adapted during incidents in relation to specific disease. For example in relation to the current avian influenza outbreak, see the provided document: [RB/0005-INQ000130960].
12. ARED's principal partners in relation to biosecurity are the other UK administrations, APHA which is our main delivery partner for animal disease control, Food Standards Scotland, PHS and the local authorities. Within ARED, the CVO holds the principal responsibility for biosecurity matters<sup>1</sup>.

### **Planning for Future Pandemics**

13. Contingency planning for animal disease is subject to a process of continuous improvement. The latest Animal Health and Welfare Strategy expired in 2021 and is due for renewal. The progress summary for this expired strategy is near publication. The next five-year strategy may be published by the end of 2023, but this is subject to competing resource pressures, for example, the current avian influenza outbreak. The 2016 – 2021 strategy is set out in *Animal health and welfare in the livestock industry: strategy 2016 to 2021*, provided: [RB/0006-INQ000130962].
14. The AHWD has not been involved in anything specific in relation to planning, readiness and preparedness for the Covid-19 pandemic. Pandemics primarily affecting humans are mainly a human, rather than animal, health matter. However, the AHWD produced guidance for various animal keeping sectors, and for the veterinary profession, during the periods of lockdown. More generally, and other than the involvement of the Veterinary Adviser for Public Health described above, human pandemic preparedness and any zoonotic 'spillover' is primarily a matter for human health and resilience policy.
15. The AHWD has not been involved in any reviews into ARED's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> In relation to animals. The Chief Plant Health Officer, also within ARED, is responsible for biosecurity matters in relation to plants.

**Statement of Truth**

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Personal Data

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dated:** \_\_\_\_\_ 18 April 2023 \_\_\_\_\_