

# Provisional common framework: Animal health and welfare

## Research Briefing

August 2022



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# **Provisional common framework: Animal health and welfare**

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The UK and devolved governments published the **provisional common framework on animal health and welfare** in February 2022.

Common frameworks are agreements between the UK and devolved governments on how to work together and manage divergence in areas previously governed or coordinated at EU level.

The governments are publishing common frameworks in provisional form for scrutiny. The Senedd's **Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee is undertaking scrutiny** of the provisional common framework on animal health and welfare.

Following parliamentary scrutiny, the governments intend to respond to recommendations and agree a final version of the common framework.

This briefing provides an overview of the provisional framework.

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## Summary

The provisional common framework on animal health and welfare sets out how the UK and devolved governments will work together and make decisions about animal health and welfare law now that the UK has left the EU. The quality of the drafting of the framework has been criticised by the House of Lords Common Frameworks Scrutiny Committee.

The framework commits the governments to working together on all animal health and welfare law, not just retained EU law. The governments will discuss and agree on changes to law and policy. They also agree not to diverge from baseline standards in a manner harmful to biosecurity, welfare or the UK internal market across relevant policy areas. The framework also provides for the governments to consider any implications stemming from international trade which have a direct bearing on its operation.

Part of the purpose of the common framework is ensuring the functioning of the UK internal market. The market access principles in the *UK Internal Market Act 2020* aim to ensure that (in general) goods and services that can be sold or authorised in one part of the UK can be sold or authorised in any other part. This could limit the effect of changes to Welsh law on animal health and welfare. However, the framework does not refer to the Act or the process for agreeing exclusions from the Act.

Through the framework, the governments will seek to agree whether to take the same approach to law and policy or diverge. If the governments do not agree on whether to take the same approach or diverge, they will seek to resolve the disagreement at the lowest possible level. They may then escalate the disagreement to senior officials and to Ministers.

The governments have agreed in principle to report regularly to parliaments on common frameworks. However, the framework does not require the governments to update parliaments and stakeholders on how it is working, or to involve parliaments and stakeholders in its review and amendment. The Welsh Government has committed unilaterally to report to the Senedd on common frameworks and to consult the Senedd and stakeholders during review and amendment.

## 1. Background

In the EU, animal health and welfare law aims to ensure high standards, protect animal and human health, and enable trade. It establishes general principles and sets specific rules in certain areas.

EU Member States consider and vote on legislative proposals on animal health and welfare at the **Standing Committee on Plants, Animals, Food and Feed**. Member States are responsible for implementing EU law. They may also set more stringent rules, provided that they are compatible with EU law. The European Commission monitors compliance with EU law.

Now that the UK has left the EU, most EU law has been **retained in domestic law**. Functions and powers have been transferred from EU institutions to domestic authorities. European Commission oversight has ended, with exceptions for arrangements in Northern Ireland. The UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments can make changes to retained EU law on animal health and welfare within their competence. Northern Ireland must **continue to align** with EU law on animal health and welfare under the Northern Ireland Protocol.

The UK must also comply with its international obligations, including international standards, new UK-EU agreements, and free trade agreements.

### Legislation

Animal health and welfare is a very wide-ranging area of law and policy. It is mostly devolved. Annex 1 to the framework provides an overview of retained EU law in scope of the framework.

However, the framework notes that the Annex does **not** provide an exhaustive description of all animal health and welfare legislation; nor does it cover domestic legislation.

This section briefly summarises the main areas of this legislation and notes key changes since the end of the transition period.

### Trade in animals and related products

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EU law on trade in animals and related products covers the import and transit of animals and animal products, setting requirements for veterinary checks and certification for animals and products imported from third countries into the EU.



Retained EU law (as amended) now provides for domestic authorities to carry out checks on animal imports to and exports from Great Britain. Checks on animal **imports** from and **exports** to the EU and Northern Ireland are being phased in.

In 2021, the **UK Government also set out plans** to restrict imports of certain animal products in a planned Animals Abroad Bill, including hunting trophies from endangered animals.

## Protecting animal welfare

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EU law sets standards for animal welfare. For example, this includes requirements for welfare conditions at **control posts** (for animals to be fed and watered during long journeys), conditions **during transit**, and sparing animals avoidable pain, distress or suffering **at the time of killing**.

Animal welfare requirements have been retained in domestic law following the end of the transition period, with some functions transferred to domestic authorities.

The UK Government's **Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill** sets out a range of new measures on animal welfare. As part of this, it will ban the export of live animals from Great Britain for slaughter. The Bill will also grant powers to UK, Scottish and Welsh Ministers to amend or revoke retained EU legislation, in the course of using existing powers.

Separately, the Welsh Government has set out plans for changes to animal welfare law as part of its **Animal Welfare Plan for Wales 2021-26**, including plans to develop a “national model” for the licensing and regulation of organisations that focus on kept animals.

## Identifying and tracing animals

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EU law sets identification and traceability requirements for livestock. This **aims to support** the control of animal diseases and the traceability of animal products for public health reasons.

The UK and devolved governments are in the process of making changes to domestic and retained EU law on livestock identification.

In 2021-22, the Welsh Government consulted on **Changes to Livestock Identification, Registration and Movement Reporting**. It aims to harmonise some of the movement reporting and registration rules across all livestock.

## **Controlling animal disease**

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The EU has an **Animal Disease Information System** for notification and information-sharing about disease outbreaks. The UK no longer has access to this system. EU law also sets rules for the prevention and control of certain animal diseases, including avian influenza, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and foot and mouth.

Retained EU law generally preserves disease control requirements. It transfers some functions from the European Commission to domestic authorities and removes requirements for domestic authorities to report to the European Commission.

In 2020, the Welsh Government set out some **proposals for new animal disease control legislation** in its consultation on the proposed Agriculture (Wales) Bill.

## **Non-commercial animal travel**

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The **EU pet travel scheme** enables owners of dogs, cats and ferrets to travel with their pets within the EU and in selected third countries with minimal disruption. The UK is no longer part of the EU pet travel scheme.

The UK Government's **Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill** sets out some changes to retained EU and domestic law on non-commercial movement of animals into Great Britain.

## **Professional qualifications**

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The EU single market provides for the free movement of people with certain professional qualifications across the European Economic Area, including for **veterinary surgeons** and **farriers**. This no longer applies in the UK. The regulation of the profession of veterinary surgeons is reserved, while the regulation of the profession of farrier is not.

The **Professional Qualifications Act 2022** sets a new system for recognition of professional qualifications gained abroad. The **Senedd refused consent** to this legislation.

## **UK Government's review of retained EU law**

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The **UK Government has set out plans** to introduce a Retained EU Law Bill (or "Brexit Freedoms Bill") to make it easier to change or repeal retained EU law (REUL) and to remove the special status it has in UK law. This could lead to existing

standards being removed or changed in domestic law.

The **UK Government has said** that it will not seek to make changes to retained EU law within Common Frameworks “without following the ministerially-agreed processes in each framework”.

The Counsel General and Minister for the Constitution, **Mick Antoniw MS, has stated** that there should be “no derogation from the standards that we actually hold to” and that the Welsh Government wants to improve on standards in Wales in devolved areas of responsibility where it can.

## International and UK-EU obligations

The UK has taken on new international obligations following the end of the transition period. The UK Government is responsible for negotiating international obligations, while the **devolved governments are responsible for observing and implementing them** where they fall within their competence.

### International obligations

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#### World Trade Organisation (WTO)

**The WTO SPS Agreement** encourages states to establish Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures consistent with international standards.

WTO Members discuss the implementation of the SPS Agreement at the **WTO SPS Committee**. The UK Government has taken on responsibility for representing the UK at the WTO SPS Committee.

#### World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)

The **OIE** is an international organisation that aims to protect animal health and ensure safe and fair trade in animals and animal products. The UK Government represents the UK at the OIE.

The OIE publishes global animal health standards for international trade. They act as reference standards for WTO Members to meet their obligations under the WTO SPS Agreement.

## UK-EU obligations

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### Withdrawal Agreement: Northern Ireland Protocol

Under the Protocol, some EU law continues to apply to and in Northern Ireland, including for animal health and welfare.

The Protocol has implications for trade in animals and animal products between Northern Ireland and Great Britain:

- for goods moving from GB-NI, relevant EU law continues to apply in Northern Ireland; and
- for goods moving from NI-GB, the UK Government's commitment to ensuring **unfettered access** between Northern Ireland and Great Britain means that qualifying goods can mostly move freely, with a few exceptions.

The main forum for discussing implementation of the Protocol is the **Withdrawal Agreement's Joint Committee** and its Specialised Committee on the Northern Ireland Protocol. Since its entry into force, the Protocol has been the subject of **multiple UK-EU disputes**.

### Trade and Cooperation Agreement

The UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) contains SPS provisions and **level playing field provisions**, which apply in agriculture.

Level playing field provisions apply to the management of impacts on the environment from agricultural or food production, notably through the use of antibiotics and decontaminants.

The TCA establishes an **institutional framework** for the UK and EU to discuss its implementation, including a Partnership Council, Trade Specialised Committees and Specialised committees (including on goods, SPS measures, and level playing field provisions). The **Welsh Government attends** the meetings as an observer.

### Trade agreements

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The UK Government is negotiating trade agreements with other countries following the end of the transition period.

For example, free trade agreements with **Australia** and **New Zealand** will both introduce full tariff-free access for agricultural imports (including animal products)

to the UK, phased in over a number of years.

Both agreements include chapters on animal welfare. They recognise that each party can determine its own laws and policies on animal welfare, and commit the parties to collaborate in international forums on the promotion of animal welfare.

The **Welsh Government** and **some stakeholders have raised concerns** that trade agreements could lead to increases in imports from countries that have different or lower animal health and welfare standards than the UK.

## 2. The common framework

The **provisional common framework** sets out how the governments will work together to make decisions about animal health and welfare in this new context outside the EU. The framework is given effect by a Concordat signed by Ministers. This is included in the framework document.

The House of Lords Common Frameworks Scrutiny Committee identified significant **errors and inconsistencies** in the framework. These make it more difficult to provide a clear assessment of its implications. The **Welsh Government has said** that errors will be corrected in the final version.

### Common frameworks principles

In 2017, the **governments agreed principles** for where common frameworks should be established.

The framework affirms these principles, and highlights some of them as key to animal health and welfare, including:

- enabling the functioning of the UK internal market, while acknowledging policy divergence;
- ensuring the UK can negotiate, enter into and implement new trade agreements and international treaties and comply with international obligations;
- respecting the devolution settlements and the democratic accountability of the devolved legislatures; and
- maintaining, as a minimum, equivalent flexibility for tailoring policies to the specific needs of each territory as was afforded by EU rules.

The framework also states that the governments agree to abide by the principles of the 2013 **Memorandum of Understanding on Devolution**. The governments

concluded a **review of intergovernmental relations** in January 2022, agreeing to create new interministerial structures to replace the Joint Ministerial Committee and revise the intergovernmental dispute resolution process.

## Principles for animal health and welfare

The governments agree **to not to diverge from baseline standards in a manner harmful to biosecurity, welfare or the UK internal market across relevant policy areas.**

‘Baseline standards’ means retained EU law as at the end of the transition period in Great Britain, and current EU minimum standards as they apply in Northern Ireland.

The governments agree that they should be able to diverge above existing standards, but that they should notify each other of such decisions so that any “**harmful divergence**” can be identified and addressed.

## Scope

The framework sets out that **the whole of animal health and welfare law (not just retained EU law)** is within its scope, unless the governments agree otherwise.

The **Welsh Government has said** that this is because the majority of animal health and welfare legislation is retained EU law, and so it would “not make practical sense to have separate structures under the Framework for discussions and decision-making on both retained EU law and non-retained AH&W law”.

This suggests that the governments will make joint decisions on all animal health and welfare policy and legislation through the common framework, **even where they would previously have had autonomy to regulate differently when the UK was in the EU.**

This is different from the approach in other common frameworks. For example, the **provisional common framework for food and feed safety and hygiene** provides that policy changes where retained EU law already allows divergence between different parts of Great Britain will fall outside its scope.

The Senedd’s Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee has asked the Welsh Government about the impact of this on the way that the Senedd and Welsh Government can exercise their competence. In April 2022, the **Welsh Government said** that the framework would not impinge on the ability of Welsh Government to make separate policy or legislation for Wales.

The framework will also cover veterinary medicines, although this is reserved. The UK Government confirms it will carry out adequate consultation with the devolved governments on relevant reserved matters, in line with the 2013 [Memorandum of Understanding on Devolution](#).

## Related policy areas

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The framework acknowledges that it will need to interact with policy areas where there are common frameworks, on food and feed safety and hygiene, zootechnics, and plant health. It does not set out in detail how the different frameworks should interact.

It does not consider whether or how it should work alongside the common framework for public health protection and health security.

The [Welsh Government has said](#):

Where issues or decisions span across or impact other policy areas, whether or not they have their own Common Frameworks, then officials within the four governments will engage with their counterparts to consider how best to address the wider issues and balance different considerations.

## 3. Working together

### Roles and responsibilities

The framework establishes a network of ‘discussion’ groups and ‘decision-making’ groups through which the governments will make decisions.

The [House of Lords Common Frameworks Scrutiny Committee has criticised](#) the framework for providing limited information about what discussion groups will do and about how the different groups will interact.

Annexes to the framework set out terms of reference for the decision-making groups. The groups include (with some variation):

- policy officials from the four governments;
- the Chief Veterinary Officers for the four governments;
- representatives of relevant arm’s length bodies and regulators, such as the Animal and Plant Health Agency, public health agencies, food standards agencies, and fish health inspectorates; and

- representatives of relevant UK Government departments (such as the Department for International Trade).

The framework sets out terms of reference for the decision-making groups:

- the **Animal Disease Policy Group** aims to reach agreement on UK and GB controls for exotic animal disease;
- the **Aquatic Animal Health Policy Group** aims to reach agreement on UK and GB controls for aquatic animal disease;
- the **Tuberculosis (TB) Liaison Group** aims to promote cooperation on bovine TB control; and
- the **Animal Welfare Policy Group** aims to facilitate the adoption of coordinated approaches to animal welfare, where the governments wish.

The groups will meet quarterly with the exception of the Animal Welfare Policy Group, which will meet monthly.

If agreement is not possible at policy group level, decisions can be escalated to the **Defra-DG Senior Officials Programme Board**. This brings together senior officials from Defra and the devolved governments on a monthly basis.

If necessary, decisions can be escalated from the Programme Board to the **Interministerial Group on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**.

## Sharing evidence and seeking views

Through the framework, the governments agree approaches to working together on law and policy, committing to:

- share data and evidence routinely;
- notify each other of any matters (including policy formation, proposal for legislation, public announcements and emergency responses) as soon as they are considered, so that joint discussions can take place before final decisions are taken;
- seek each other's views on the impact of decisions on the other governments at the earliest opportunity;
- carry out risk assessments (either separately or jointly), and share the results of risk assessment with all parties; and
- base any policy divergence on common evidence and advice.

The framework does not consider how the governments will balance the



requirement to notify each other of policy as soon as it is considered with the need to engage with stakeholders and involve them in making decisions.

## 4. Managing divergence

The framework sets out how and when the governments will decide to follow the same rules, and when to diverge.

### Making decisions about divergence

The governments agree to develop common policy approaches. If one of the governments wants to diverge, the framework sets out processes that must be followed:

- the government will notify each other of potential policy changes early on, and in time to have joint discussions about their implications;
- before one government diverges, the governments must see if they can agree a common approach that minimises divergence while still accommodating that party's wishes;
- if a government still wants to diverge, they should set out why this is the most suitable course of action. There should be an assessment of the implications for the UK internal market, the negotiation and implementation of international agreements, and biosecurity. Policy officials and Chief Veterinary Officers will consider the impact of the changes; and
- if the governments cannot agree whether to take the same approach or diverge, the dispute resolution process can be used.

### Managing the impact of the UK Internal Market Act 2020

Part of the purpose of the framework is ensuring the functioning of the UK internal market.

The **UK Internal Market Act 2020** sets out market access principles for goods, services and professional qualifications in law. These principles aim to ensure that (in general) goods and services that can be sold, or professional qualifications that can be recognised, in one part of the UK can be sold or recognised in any other part.

The market access principles in the Act could limit the practical effect of Welsh animal health and welfare legislation. During the passage of the UK Internal Market

Bill, the previous **Welsh Government raised concerns** about the market access principles leading to a “race to the bottom” on animal health and welfare standards. The framework makes no reference to the Act.

### Hypothetical example: goods

The mutual recognition principle for goods provides that goods originating from or imported into one part of the UK can be sold or authorised in any other part.

This principle explicitly covers statutory requirements that relate to the:

- production of goods (including the rearing, handling and killing of animals);
- identification and traceability of animals; and
- inspection, certification and authorisation (etc.) of goods.

The Senedd could legislate to require certain animal products sold in Wales to be accompanied by additional traceability information. However, the mutual recognition principle would apply. So an animal product permitted in or imported into any other part of the UK without that traceability information could still be sold in Wales.

The Act sets out limited exclusions from the market access principles for threats to human, animal or plant health.

The Act also prohibits legislation that discriminates indirectly against goods from another part of the UK, unless that legislation can be reasonably considered a necessary means of achieving a limited aim. The protection of plant, animal and human life is specified as a legitimate aim.

The UK Government has powers to create new exclusions from the market access principles or vary the list of legitimate aims by regulations. The four governments have agreed a **process for considering and agreeing exclusions to the Act in common framework areas**. The framework makes no reference to this process.

### Managing divergence from the EU and Northern Ireland

Under the Northern Ireland Protocol, Northern Ireland will remain aligned to EU law on animal health and welfare. The framework sets out that:

- as the UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments make decisions on animal health

and welfare policy and regulation, the Northern Ireland Executive will participate in discussions and their views will be taken into account; and

- where rules in Northern Ireland change in alignment with the EU, the governments will consider the changes and determine “any impacts or subsequent actions”.

It also states that:

If Northern Ireland has to diverge in order to maintain parity with the EU the same review process will be followed and the same assessments are made as whether it would be in the best interests of GB to follow suit or to allow divergence.

In early 2022, the then **Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs welcomed** this text, but noted concerns about how divergence between Northern Ireland and Great Britain as a result of the Protocol would be managed through the framework.

The framework states that the views of the **EU-UK Joint and Specialised Committees under the Withdrawal Agreement** will be “key” to assessing the impact of any divergence between Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

If Northern Ireland Ministers believe that concerns have not been adequately addressed, they will be able to engage the framework’s dispute resolution process.

Northern Ireland has already begun to diverge from Great Britain on animal health and welfare law, with the implementation of the new EU **Animal Health Law** from 2021.

The **Welsh Government has said** that it will continue to track changes to EU law “through our own investigations and via collaborative work with the other Parties”, and that the governments have worked together through the framework to address changes to EU Animal Health Regulations by amending domestic law.

The Welsh Government has said that it will consider the risks and benefits of keeping pace with EU law on a case-by-case basis, and endorsed the commitment from all governments in the framework that standards should not be eroded.

## 5. Managing international obligations

Part of the purpose of the framework is to ensure that the UK can negotiate and implement international obligations.

The framework sets out some commitments for the UK and devolved governments to work together on the negotiation and implementation of international obligations.

The governments also agree to consult with each other and agree on the implementation of international agreements, stating that a “collective approach” will generally be preferred.

The governments agree that international policy formulation will be based on “the current Devolution MoU and its accompanying International Relations Concordat” and that they “will automatically use any updated IR Concordat, and the wider outcomes of the Joint IGR Review”.

The **International Relations Concordat** was last updated in 2013; it was not revised as part of the Intergovernmental Relations Review. The Concordat does not explicitly reflect the UK Government’s increased role in agreeing post-Brexit international obligations in areas previously within EU competence, such as trade.

### World Trade Organisation

The framework notes that the UK has taken on new obligations as a WTO member at the WTO SPS Committee. It states that Defra is developing processes to consult the devolved governments on SPS measures and to participate in the work of the Committee.

The framework states that the **UK Office for SPS Trade Assurance’s** “co-ordination and Secretariat functions will ensure that the Parties work effectively together to meet our international obligations”. The **House of Lords Common Frameworks Scrutiny Committee has noted** that the framework is unclear on the importance of the Office to its functioning.

A **guide** produced by the UK Office for SPS Trade Assurance about its work states that:

The four [Devolved] Administrations work closely together to develop policy relating to the UK’s collective assurance system.

## Trade and Cooperation Agreement

The framework recognises that the TCA Specialised Committees and Partnership Council may discuss animal health and welfare. However, such matters fall within the Trade Specialised Committees of the TCA, which have different roles and more limited powers to its Specialised Committees.

The framework confirms that, where a UK-EU meeting agenda includes an item concerning implementation in an area of devolved competence, the UK Government agrees to facilitate the attendance of the devolved governments of a similar level to that of the UK Government representatives. The UK co-chair will have final discretion. The UK Government should also engage the devolved governments in preparation for meetings.

## International trade agreements

The framework states that it will allow the governments to “ascertain the impact of international trade on managing policy divergence”.

The UK Government commits to take the views of the devolved governments on animal health and welfare in trade negotiations in a timely way, through “trade-specific engagement fora”.

The **Welsh Government has said** that the framework allows the Welsh Government to influence the UK Government’s position on animal health and welfare policy issues in trade negotiations, and to escalate discussions to inter-ministerial level. **The Minister for Economy set out** the Welsh Government’s involvement in the UK-Australia Free Trade Agreement in a letter to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee in June 2022.

Previously, in December 2021, **he had said** that he was “disappointed” that Welsh Government representations about the impact of the UK-Australia free trade agreement for animal welfare standards “appear to have not been taken on board.”

The **UK Government must report** on whether certain trade agreements are consistent with statutory protections on animal health and welfare, informed by the **Trade and Agriculture Commission**.

## 6. Avoiding and resolving disputes

In the framework, the governments agree to seek to resolve disagreements at the earliest opportunity at official level, and only to engage dispute resolution processes once routine avenues have been exhausted.

Disputes could arise if the governments do not agree whether to take the same approach to law and policy or diverge, or if the governments disagree about whether the principles and processes set out in the framework are being followed.

Disagreements will first be discussed by officials at policy groups. If there is no agreement, the Defra-DG Senior Officials Programme Board will consider the dispute. If there is still no agreement, the dispute may be referred to Ministers at the Interministerial Group on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Finally, the dispute may be escalated to “appropriate intergovernmental processes”. In January 2022, the **governments agreed** a new inter-ministerial dispute resolution process as part of the Intergovernmental Relations Review. The **Counsel General said** this was a “groundbreaking step”.

The governments have agreed that actions under disagreement or dispute should normally be paused pending resolution. Although they have agreed that disputes should be resolved in a timely way, no timelines are set. This could result in delays to decisions. The **Welsh Government has said** that:

The initial pausing of any actions under dispute is an agreed part of the dispute resolution mechanism in frameworks, but it would depend on the case as the nature of diseases might mean pausing action pending a dispute could leave risks unmitigated.

The framework does not provide for disputes to be notified to parliaments or stakeholders. However, the **Welsh Government has committed** to notify the Senedd of disputes escalated to Ministers.

## 7. Monitoring, review and amendment

The governments have agreed that the Animal Disease Policy Group should hold an initial annual review of the framework one year after it is fully implemented.

The Group will report internally on the outcome of the review and propose the frequency for further reviews.

If the Group agrees, it may commission an independent panel to review the operation of the framework. If a government wishes to amend any element of the framework, it should raise this with the Group, or an appointed reviewer. The House of Lords Common Frameworks Scrutiny Committee has suggested that the framework is **contradictory** here on the roles of the Group and the appointed reviewer.

Unlike most other common frameworks, the framework does not set out standard text on how reviews should be opened and amendments agreed.

## 8. Transparency and accountability

The **Welsh Government has said** that stakeholders were given an opportunity to comment on a summary of the framework in November 2020. Responses from stakeholders were “very limited”.

The Senedd’s Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee is **considering the framework**. The **Committee consulted** on common frameworks within its remit in early 2022. In evidence to the Committee, **RSPCA Cymru welcomed the framework** as an opportunity for better coordination between the UK and devolved governments. However, it cautioned that the framework should operate transparently, should not restrict a government wishing to improve animal welfare standards, and should not risk restricting the power of non-Government parliamentarians to table proposals for changes to animal health and welfare law.

Committees in parliaments across the UK have also been carrying out scrutiny of the common framework. The **House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee** and the **Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs** have raised concerns about the stakeholder engagement with the framework, while the **House of Lords Common Frameworks Scrutiny Committee** has called for the governments to commit to updating parliaments on a regular basis. The Scottish Parliament’s **Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee** is also expected to consider the framework.

There are no commitments to give parliaments a role in monitoring the operation of the framework or scrutinising amendments. The framework says that the governments may use third parties to advise on review and amendment to the framework. This could include government bodies or external stakeholders. In March, **the Counsel General agreed** in correspondence with the LJC Committee to

notify the Senedd and stakeholders when a common framework is reviewed, and consider their recommendations before the review process concludes.

There is no commitment for reports on the operation of the framework to be produced or published. In November 2021, the **Counsel General said** that the four governments had agreed to future reporting to parliaments on common frameworks.