# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Bluetongue Virus Serotype 3 (BTV-3) Update** |
| **DATE** | **11 November 2024** |
| **BY** | **Huw Irranca-Davies MS, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs** |

I am pleased to report that official surveillance has concluded in Gwynedd and Ynys Môn, following two instances where BTV-3 infected animals were moved into the area. These infected animals were initially identified through the tracing of high-risk animal movements by APHA, who have been working tirelessly to help keep Wales free of Bluetongue virus. Follow up surveillance has found no further evidence of infection, and I can therefore confirm that Bluetongue restrictions have been lifted from both of the affected farms in Wales.

I would like to thank APHA and The Pirbright Institute, along with the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer for their work to investigate and resolve these incidents. I would also like to thank the farmers involved for their patience and cooperation around the disease control and investigation measures that were put in place.

We are fortunate that these incidents have only been near misses, and that wider disease spread has not happened in Wales. However, we cannot afford to be complacent with animal diseases. I must re-emphasise the importance of responsible and safe sourcing of livestock to keep Bluetongue out of Wales. Livestock movements pose by far the greatest risk to Welsh livestock.

Welsh Government’s policy of not allowing the movement of susceptible animals from the restricted zone in England, except to designated abattoirs will remain in place to underpin the efforts of industry. To help farmers and vets, APHA have provided an online, [Bluetongue interactive map](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fdefra.maps.arcgis.com%2Fapps%2Fwebappviewer%2Findex.html%3Fid%3D514ec88edec74575958d860f0196d2ea&data=05%7C02%7CRichard.Irvine002%40gov.wales%7C1acdddc8a22c41b6d0a208dcfd850095%7Ca2cc36c592804ae78887d06dab89216b%7C0%7C0%7C638663994917221779%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C4000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=JLjsQGU0UFc684u5AePh5i%2BoKRFlMEJHrsklh40TPMo%3D&reserved=0) that enables anyone to search by postcode and visualise the extent of the restricted zone, and I encourage everyone to use it before buying livestock.

It is crucial that farmers, vets and livestock traders work together and exercise caution, verifying the origin and health status of animals before movement. We have a collective responsibility to protect the health and welfare of our herds and flocks, and I urge all keepers to think not only of the risks that livestock movements could pose to their own animals, but also to their neighbours.

I would also like to extend thanks to our partners within the agricultural and veterinary sectors for their continued engagement with my officials on Bluetongue. Animal diseases are challenges that are best solved in partnership, and it is our collective ambition to keep Welsh livestock safe.

While we cannot predict what the future will hold entirely, looking ahead to next spring we have to be prepared that the threat of Bluetongue may grow. We will continue working closely with APHA, the Pirbright Institute and the other UK administrations to ensure we are prepared. We are committed to the ongoing partnership work with our industry working group, to protect Wales, and consider their advice around important strategic decisions, such as the role of livestock vaccination against Bluetongue.

For now, vigilance and reporting any suspected signs of Bluetongue to APHA is essential in preventing the establishment of the disease in Wales. Where there is any suspicion of the disease, livestock keepers and vets must report it so we can act fast and stop the virus getting a foothold. Whilst temperatures are currently lower, midges are still active, and infected midges can still cause new infections if they take a blood meal.

My policy goal remains to keep Bluetongue out of Wales, for the benefit of our animals and of those who keep them. It is by working together that I believe we have the best chance of keeping this disease out of Wales.