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NEWCASTLE DISEASE (ND) IN GAME BIRDS IN FRANCE

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1 Summary

Newcastle disease (ND) has been confirmed at a game farm in France. This is epidemiologically linked to a confirmed outbreak of ND in the UK. There is no evidence that disease has spread within France.

Large numbers of game birds and other poultry have been imported to the UK from France since the date when ND may have entered the affected holding in France.

It is unlikely that other game birds imported from France would have introduced ND to the UK but there is some residual uncertainty because France has not yet completed its investigations.

The information provided by France does not identify any consignments presenting a high risk so the most efficient and effective strategy is to rely on keepers to notify signs of ND in their birds.

Other imports of poultry and poultry products from France either before or after this outbreak present negligible risk.

2 Introduction

This risk analysis principally addresses the question of whether it is necessary for Defra to take any action with respect to game birds or other poultry recently imported from France.

We also consider the risk from continuing trade from France to the UK of poultry and poultry products.

ND is a serious disease of poultry caused by virulent strains of avian paramyxovirus type 1. It is notifiable throughout the EU. Trade in live poultry and poultry products is restricted when disease occurs. ND virus may be present in certain species of wild birds. Vaccination is practised in most countries. In the UK vaccination is permitted and widely employed but it is not compulsory.

3 Disease report

On 15 July 2005, the UK confirmed ND in pheasants on an estate in Surrey. Some of the birds had been imported from France, including those showing clinical signs of disease. The earliest date of infection was estimated as 16 June and the latest 27 June, based on an incubation range of 3-10 days.

Defra immediately informed the French veterinary authorities who investigated the farms of origin. One farm on two sites at St Mars de Coutais, Loire Atlantique département was found to have serological evidence of

disease in 20 pheasants. Mild clinical signs have been seen. The 20 000 pheasants and 35 000 partridges present on the holding were killed as a precaution. Virological tests are being carried out; there are no positive results to date. However, fragments of DNA found in the samples have demonstrated the same molecular sequence as that found in the UK outbreak.



France has not found ND virus in samples from the affected flock but there is molecular, epidemiological, serological and limited clinical evidence of virus having been introduced. France has confirmed disease and notified both the EU and OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health).

It is uncertain how long infection may have been present in the suspected flock but France estimates on the basis of clinical history that the earliest date on which infection was likely to be present was 1 June 2005. The origin of infection is unknown but it may have been migrating birds visiting a nearby lake.

The French authorities have reported that no birds left the affected farm after 1 June 2005, with the exception of one shipment to the current outbreak holding in England on 22 June.

France acted promptly to investigate and contain disease on the premises as soon as it was alerted by Defra 15 July. They killed 55,000 birds on suspicion of infection and blocked trade in live birds out of the affected department. Movements of poultry products and poultry for slaughter out of the surveillance zone were also blocked. The 19 poultry holdings within the 3km protection zone were inspected and sampled; there was no clinical evidence of disease and so far no positive laboratory results. There is also no evidence of disease in the 59 poultry holdings in the 10km surveillance zone. This is predominantly a game rearing area and there are no large poultry holdings nearby.

We believe that it is unlikely that infection has spread significantly in the region or more widely in France, although some uncertainty remains while laboratory investigations are in progress. ND virus can be spread by movements of birds or by anything liable to be contaminated with faeces – people, vehicles or equipment. 12 days after being alerted to the potential problem and carrying out investigations France has reported no further strongly suspected or confirmed cases. No birds have left the affected farm to a destination in France since 1 June 2005 (or to any other destination, other than the consignment to the UK on 22 June). Vaccination of poultry, including game birds, is permitted and practised in France although vaccination does not provide complete protection of every bird within a vaccinated flock.

4 Trade procedures

It is unlikely that the official veterinary authorities of France (or any other Member State) would permit infected birds to enter EU trade, although it is inevitable that the rigorous controls in place will occasionally fail.

Even when EU rules for trade in poultry are fully complied with, there is an inherent risk that birds will be consigned in good faith from a holding or region where disease is present but undetected. Member States of the EU must implement laws on disease surveillance, notification and control which minimises the likelihood of this happening but it can never be eliminated. The risk is increased when a disease shows few characteristic clinical signs. This could be because the species has low susceptibility, signs are suppressed by vaccination or during the incubation period when by definition there are no signs of disease.

Defra has no evidence of significant levels of serious non-compliance with import rules, although minor errors in certification and notification can occur, as was the case in the consignment linking the confirmed case in England with the suspect case in France.

The official veterinary services of Member States must ensure that trade in poultry, hatching eggs and day old chicks, including those of game birds is carried out in accordance with EU legislation. This is summarised in the flowchart at Annex 1 which shows that there are multiple barriers to the spread of notifiable disease. Movements are recorded on the TRACES computer system.

TRACES records 269 consignments totalling 1,205,686 game birds (over 4 days old and certified accordingly) moved from France to the UK between 1 June and 20 July 2005. Of these, 83 consignments totalling 538,172 birds came from Loire Atlantique. The data does not differentiate pheasants from other species.

In addition, TRACES shows 305 consignments totalling 2,446,859 items of poultry, hatching eggs and day old chicks moved from France to the UK between 1 June and 20 July 2005. Of these, 2 consignments totalling 12,520 birds came from Loire Atlantique. The data does not differentiate game birds from farmed poultry species. However, all these consignments would have been certified as coming from flocks officially approved as meeting EU requirements for biosecurity and disease monitoring. They therefore have a higher level of health assurance.

There is no central record of EU trade in poultry meat or other poultry products. When disease occurs, the affected Member state is responsible for implementing disease control rules which prevent movement of risk materials out of the affected area. France has gone beyond the requirements of these

rules by applying restrictions before disease was confirmed and by blocking trade in live birds from the whole affected department when they are only required to block the surveillance zone.

5 Exposure of UK poultry to infection

It is unlikely that infected birds (other than those already identified in the confirmed outbreak in Surrey) have been moved from France to the UK.

Commercial poultry is usually protected by high standards of biosecurity. This is not necessarily the case for free range or back-yard birds. Small flocks do not usually vaccinate because vaccine is only available in large quantities which creates practical difficulties in obtaining supplies.

Vaccination against ND is permitted in the UK and widely practised. This policy recognises that there is a constant low level risk of introduction of ND to UK poultry from wild birds. The industry has reinforced its vaccination programme in response to the current outbreak, including broiler chickens which are not normally vaccinated. Infection is unlikely to establish in an effectively vaccinated flock.

There has been heightened awareness of ND among poultry keepers since disease was confirmed. They see their birds daily so it is reasonable to expect them to carry out this surveillance at least as effectively as the SVS could achieve with a single inspection. Imported birds are of particular concern. Suspicion of disease has been notified to Defra on 17 occasions and investigated. 11 of these incidents are negative and results are awaited for the others but there is so far no evidence that any other imported consignment has introduced disease.

6 Tracing of imported consignments

When operated correctly TRACES identifies both the consignee and destination of imported birds. If either of these is accurate then it should be possible for the SVS to locate the holding in the UK which received them.

Birds are not identified individually, they could be mixed with birds from other sources and game birds would be released into the wild. It is therefore unlikely that all birds from a specific consignment imported several weeks ago could be examined but the general population in the vicinity of the holding might be of interest.

TRACES should also identify the consignor and origin of the birds. However, the significance of this information is best understood by the veterinary authorities investigating disease in their own country. In this case, France has not so far advised us of any further consignments which present an identifiable risk.

83 consignments of 538,172 game birds were imported from Loire Atlantique during the risk period so visiting all their holdings of destination would require considerable SVS resource, diverting effort away from controlling ND where it is known to exist and other high priority activities.

7 Conclusions

The normal risk to the UK of importing ND through intra-community trade is very low but can never be zero.

On the basis of the information available to Defra on 28th July 2005, the risk that consignments of game birds imported from Loire Atlantique (other than the one linked to the current ND outbreak) before France imposed movement restrictions is marginally higher than that presented by normal trade because the epidemiological investigation in France has not yet been completed. Any epidemic in migratory or native wild birds is difficult, if not impossible, to identify and monitor.

The resource required to carry out even a single veterinary investigation of every importation would be disproportionate to the likely benefit. Keepers have been made aware of their responsibility to report suspicion of notifiable disease and of the current risk from imports.

Should Defra receive information that specific consignments present a higher risk then a specific, targeted investigation in the UK would be justified.

France has now blocked trade in live birds from Loire Atlantique and there is no evidence that importations of game birds, other poultry or poultry products from other parts of France present a greater risk than that inherent in normal trade.

8 Annex 1

Procedure for importing poultry into the UK from EU Member States

