



Transcript of Lord Rooker's video message to Responsibility and Cost Sharing Regional Workshops

February and March 2008

Can I welcome everybody to this workshop on cost sharing and responsibility. I regret that I cannot be with you today. I'm attending at least three of the ten workshops to hear things at first hand and of course I'll get a full report from officials and speakers of everything that's said.

We certainly want, as far as Defra's concerned, farming to be profitable, sustainable, erm, and certainly successful on a world market as well as a European market. In no way in talking about cost sharing and responsibility are we being critical of present practices, it's just the fact that we have to make some changes. The present arrangements for animal health and animal disease control are just not sustainable.

We want to listen to what you've got to say, we want to help you be aware of our present contribution which is at least £400 million a year through animal health and that is not counting what disease outbreaks actually cost us – because we're on surveillance every day of the, of the year, in fact every hour of the day for, for many areas of the country.

Certainly, animal health's important both for wildlife and for public health. So there's a crossover. No-one's saying, erm, livestock keepers should be paying all the costs related to animal health and animal disease control, far, far from it.

Some might also argue the timing's wrong. Well, there's never a good time to start talking about a new policy. This is not even a consultation on a policy document, it's more or less a questionnaire. We've allowed eighteen weeks for this. We'll have to go away afterwards and think about it and it'll be later in the year when we come forward with any policy proposals and statements, and they'll require a full, normal, er, consultation. So we're not talking about a quick fix, something that's going to be rammed in over the next few months or indeed over, over the next year, far from it.

We've been talking to the industry about this since the outbreak of Classical Swine Fever in 2000. Obviously, the efforts of last year, Bluetongue, Foot and Mouth, Avian Influenza, have brought things to a head and we had consultations in 2006 and further discussions in 2007. So my argument has been, in discussions I've had last summer, from last summer, when I've said to people in the industry "how much responsibility do you want?" I didn't get much of an answer. So I thought the best thing to do was to publish a

document with some questions so we can have a discussion about it. That really is one of my questions, "how much responsibility does industry want to share in these decisions?" Er, it's very important because, erm, something's got to give from the centre. Er, policy makers, Ministers, even the vets. On the other hand, some decisions are very awkward, er, very unpopular and it may be that while you want to share in discussions reaching the decision, you want others to take the decision, take the public consequences for it. Those kinds of things are covered in the, in the document.

So we need to have a policy on this, erm, and I also have to say, erm, if we don't do anything, discussions are taking place in the European Union, Brussels is on the job, and we don't want something forced on us that we had no part in negotiating. Four or five countries in the European Union already have some cost sharing arrangements. They will go to Brussels to say what suits them. We want to get a consensus in this country, by which I mean GB, er to see if we can get a consensus to go to Brussels, say what suits us. So whatever's designed in Brussels on cost sharing, and we put responsibility on the agenda there as well, actually suits our way of doing things.

This is your opportunity really, er, to discuss in full. I appreciate that there are some sensitive issues about at the moment. Depending which workshop you're at you may be in the middle of a TB hotspot area and I appreciate we're asking for that argument to be put on one side while we discuss the principles and mechanisms of this. Er, at the present time we have not made decisions following the report of the Independent Scientific Group as I make this recording, and we will, er, quite soon after the Select Committee of the Commons has reported.

But we don't want that to stop the discussions. It may be that you want to discuss exotic diseases separately where we have a big outbreak of a disease we don't normally have. Or whether we can match in the normal endemic diseases we have in the country that cause us all the difficulty. You may want to discuss the arrangements: I don't favour big new quangoes for this I have to tell you; they cost a lot of money! If we can find ways of getting financial instruments, we want to reward farmers and livestock keepers who are doing the good things, and those who are not so good will have to pay a bit more. Er, I personally don't want all the cost to be put on livestock keepers, particularly at the point of slaughter. A third of what we grow in crops in this country goes to feed animals. I want the base of cost sharing to be as wide as possible, er, and I mean as wide as possible and not just, um, food production animals either, because other animals in the country, here for all sorts of reasons, are susceptible to illness and disease and that can cross over.

My last final point is that I made to one of the earlier, erm, consultations, is that Defra does an enormous amount of work into the surveillance into this country of illegal importations of food. We stop thousands of people in the ports each year, from all over the world, bringing in private supplies of food. And we tell them, and they get prosecuted as well, but we tell them the reason we stop them is two reasons: public health and animal health, that's the two

reasons. So we're on the case at the ports, not perfect but we literally do have a major effort in that, and that effort is being reinforced as, as we speak and as we meet. Obviously there are other issues relating to international trade are more complicated.

What we want is an open discussion on the facts that we've put in our document to get the best possible widespread range of opinions on the issues that we've raised. And I thank you all for coming today and participating, and I will be taking a full cognoscence with other Ministers of all what's said today. Thank you very much.