FMD Contingency Plan

1. A draft Welsh Interim Contingency Plan was prepared and developed in consultation with DEFRA, stakeholders and partners. The Welsh Plan will cover the operational arrangements, which will apply in Wales in carrying out the requirements of DEFRA’s National Contingency Plan. The Welsh draft was subject to a period of formal consultation between July and October 2002.

2. The draft has been subject to further development taking account of the responses to the consultation and the joint Government Response to the FMD Inquiries (the Assembly’s, Anderson and Follett). The revised draft will be sent to stakeholders and partners and will be the subject of a meeting with them on 18 February.

3. Assembly Government officials attended the DEFRA exercise on 12 December 2002, which tested the DEFRA National Plan. A similar, smaller scale exercise will be carried out in Wales later this year.

4. The National Contingency Plan produced by DEFRA is required to be put before Parliament, on 24 March and the Welsh Contingency Plan should be put to the Assembly around that time, the nearest Plenary session being 25 March. Hard copies of the Welsh Plan will be placed in the Library and the document will also appear on the Assembly Website.

Farm Incomes

5. The latest estimates of farm incomes in Wales drawn from the Farm Business Survey will be published on 11 February 2003. I will ensure that copies of the statistical press release are available for members of the Committee.

Forestry Commission

6. I was asked at the last meeting to report back to the Committee on the relationship between the Assembly, Forestry Commission and Forest Enterprise Wales, including their responsibilities and accountabilities.

7. The administrative arrangements for delivering sustainable forestry policies in Wales, including closer integration of forestry and rural affairs, were reviewed in the Forestry Devolution Review undertaken
during the course of last year. I reported the outcome of the review to the Committee on 16 October 2002 (at paragraphs 29 - 35 of my report) and circulated copies of the findings and recommendations from the review. Further copies can be made available to committee members should they wish. The detailed relationship between the Assembly and the Forestry Commission (including Forest Enterprise) will be set out in a concordat currently in the course of preparation between officials from the Forestry Commission and the Agriculture & Rural Affairs Department (ARAD).

**Forestry Devolution Review**

8. At the last meeting, I agreed to report to the Committee on action being taken to address the remaining recommendations resulting from the Forestry Devolution Review. This information is set out in Annex 1.

**Sheep tagging and identification**

9. The Committee indicated at the last meeting that it wished to discuss EU proposals on sheep tagging. The note at Annex 2 gives some background to these proposals.

**Rural Health & Well-being**

10. The Assembly Government has made a commitment to provide 3 years funding for the new All Wales Community Advice and Listening Line (CALL) which currently falls under the management responsibility of the North East Wales NHS Trust.

11. A report commissioned jointly from the Farming & Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA) later also recommended CALL as an appropriate base for the rural stress initiative and a separate rural stress line was set up and run by the staff providing the CALL service. The Assembly funding of both lines currently comes from the Health budget and spans the financial years 2001/02 to 2003/04. It amounts to some £250,000 per annum.

12. £600,000 (£500,000 from the Rural Recovery Plan) is being used to employ mental health workers to help combat rural stress. Workers have been appointed in Powys(2), Gwent and N Wales. The £600,000 (which includes a top-up from the NHS) is being spread over 3 years spanning 2002/03 through to 2004/05.

13. In addition, the All Wales Committee on Rural Stress has been reconvened, chaired by the Institute of Rural Heath, to establish the evidence base for rural stress and consider measures to tackle problems identified. The Assembly Government is represented on the committee as observers and I have provided funding to the Rural Stress Information Network to provide secretariat support to the committee.

**Big Cat sightings**
14. Following our discussion at the last meeting, I agreed to provide further details of the investigations by ARAD’s Wildlife Unit into big cat sightings in Wales. This is at Annex 3.

**GMO’s**

15. I provided members at the last Committee meeting with copies of the NIAB report as well as my letter to Michael Meacher of 14 January. I am arranging for Michael Meacher’s reply to be copied to members.

Annex 1

**Forestry Devolution Review – position statement on implementation**

I met with other UK Forestry Ministers last week at an inaugural meeting of what will be regular biannual meetings to discuss a range of cross cutting issues relating to forestry matters in the UK and internationally where collaboration would be advantageous. At that meeting we discussed, inter alia, progress on the implementation of the Forestry Devolution Review. Implementation of all of the recommendations is either complete or well advanced. The position on each is as follows:

i. **Ministerial Committee** – the new committee was constituted on 5 February, with agreement on the committee’s remit.

ii. **Executive Commissioners** – The appointments have now been made in Wales, Scotland and England, with Simon Hewitt appointed as Director Wales with effect from 1 April, as I reported at the last meeting of the Committee.

iii. **Integration with ARAD** – discussions are well advanced between the Forestry Commission and ARAD on ways in which integration can be improved. This will be set out in a concordat explaining the broad principles and practical steps to ensure closer collaboration.

iv. **Splitting Forest Enterprise** – this task has involved the greatest amount of work. On 1 April 2003, the Forest Enterprise will cease to exist as a GB agency. An interim arrangement will be put in its place in Wales to manage the public forest estate whilst we review options for the most appropriate model for managing our Welsh forests. This will be undertaken in a measured and considered way over the course of the next few months. The Forestry Commission has also taken the opportunity to look at which departmental functions can be decentralised. This will entail the transfer of some staff from the centre in Edinburgh to the Wales National Office in Aberystwyth.

v. **Forest Research** – The quinquennial review of Forest Research recommends the retention of a GB Agency. However, as part of the improved working arrangements I will, in future, clear the research strategy and annual programmes to ensure that they meet the research needs in Wales including the programmes arising from the Wales Woodland Strategy.

vi. **Whitehall Forestry Group** – The membership of this group, which has been renamed the International Forestry Group, has been expanded to ensure that the Welsh Assembly Government has a say in international forestry matters, where relevant to our interests in
vii. National Committee for Wales – Some of the powers of the GB Board of Forestry Commissioners will now be delegated, using powers in the Forestry Act, to a National Committee for Wales so as to decentralise decision taking consistent with the aims of the Forestry Devolution Review. The committee will be chaired by one of the Welsh non-executive Commissioners and will include a member from ARAD.

Annex 2

SHEEP AND GOAT IDENTIFICATION

Background

There are two developments. First, the individual identification for sheep and goats without manual recording which were agreed as part of the autumn controls on livestock; the relevant legislation expired recently and an amending Order came into effect on 1 February 2003 extending the requirement. Second, are EU proposals for individual sheep and goat identification which were published in December 2002.

EXTENSION OF AUTUMN CONTROL PROVISIONS

The requirement to individually identify all newborn lambs and kids came into force on 1 February 2003 following amendment to the Sheep and Goats (Identification and Movement) (Wales) (No 2) Order 2002. Farmers are also required to individually identify any animals born on the holding and not currently identified. The key points are:

- The eartag or tattoos must comprise the UK flock mark of the animal’s holding of birth and a unique individual number for each animal.
- There is no requirement to record this number, except where the maximum number of tags has been applied.

This goes part way to implementing the Commission proposals to enhance the current rules on Sheep and Goat Identification (see below).

Notification

Last week (w/c 3 February), Welsh farmers were sent a letter notifying them of the need to individually identify all sheep and goats that are born from 1 February this year.

A total of 39,000 letters were distributed, using the same database as the GWLAD distribution. We used this so as to try and ensure that the message reached all aspects of the farming community in Wales, from the large-scale farmer to those who keep one or two sheep as pets.
The industry had already been advised that this would be introduced back in the autumn and it has been publicised in the farming press.

Included in the bilingual letter was a helpline number (based in the Caernarfon office) which was widely accessed by farmers on the first three days of this week. However, the number of calls have tailed off by the end of the week.

Follow on action

An article in the next issue of GWLAD will include:

- a more in depth clarification of the requirements for individual identification;
- a Question and Answer summary based on calls received to the helpline.

The helpline will continue to be available.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION PROPOSAL FOR THE IDENTIFICATION AND REGISTRATION OF SHEEP AND GOATS

Key Proposals

- **Double tagging with effect from 1 July 2003** – All animals are to be double tagged with individual identification numbers within one month of birth or prior to movement whichever is the earliest. There is an option to apply to the Commission for a derogation to extend the period to six months for animals kept in extensive conditions.

- **Recording of individual IDs on farm records and movement documents with effect from 1 July 2003** - This applies to all movements except for a derogation for animals under 6 months of age going direct to slaughter. The derogation still requires the animals to be double tagged but only with the holding of birth code and month of birth. The farm records and movement documents only require the number of animals in the batch to be recorded along with the month of birth.

- **Recording month and year of birth for individual animals with effect from 1 July 2003**.

- **Documents accompanying each batch of sheep and goats being moved to be issued by the competent authority and to contain precise information on the identity, sex, breed and genotype (if known), month and year of birth of individual animals and movement details of each batch with effect from 1 July 2003**.

- **Database register of sheep and goat holdings by 1 July 2004**
By 1 July 2005 the database is required to record batch movements of sheep and goats.

The proposal also touches on electronic identification (EID). It confirms that an EID device can be used in place of the second tag from July 2003.

Initial views

Assembly Government agrees on the importance of enhancing and improving sheep traceability. However, any new system needs to be practical and enforceable. We already have many of the proposed elements in place. For example, the requirement for individual identification of sheep and goats is now in place (albeit on a single tag). We have a register of holdings and we record movements of batches of animals on animal movement licences.

The industry as a whole have indicated on each occasion manual recording of sheep IDs has been discussed that they see it as totally unworkable. To-date, key stakeholders throughout the GB along with Government have worked together to influence Commission views. This will continue with a view to ensuring that we achieve an effective system that works for Wales and the UK.

Annex 3

Big Cat Sightings

In Wales, there have been reports of over 170 sightings of big cats and alleged kills of livestock by big cats since 1994. The animals involved have included 115 ewes, 54 lambs, 4 rams, 1 dog and 2 horses (often more than 1 animal in each case). All reported sightings are recorded on a database held by the Wildlife Unit although the Welsh Assembly Government only receives reports when agriculture is involved as matters relating to public safety are the responsibility of the police.

As I noted in my last report, the Welsh Assembly Government’s policy is to investigate reports of alleged sightings of, and alleged attacks by, big cats on livestock in Wales. In cases where evidence is provided, staff from the Agriculture Department’s Wildlife Unit carry out site visits, collect carcasses for post mortem examination, assess video footage, take casts of paw prints and investigate any other evidence indicating the possible presence of exotic species. The evidence collected is assessed with the assistance of experts in British wildlife as well as research departments in zoos and universities and the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. In some cases, the assistance of experts in big cats from overseas is also sought.

During 2002 detailed investigations were carried out at 5 locations; Tregaron, Meidrin, Rhydcymerau, Pumpsaint and Llanybydder. Ewe and lamb carcasses as well as paw prints and evidence provided by local people was assessed by the Wildlife Unit with the help of the Veterinary Laboratory Agency and the DEFRA Wildlife Management Team. Evidence suggested that the sheep had either been killed by dogs or had died naturally and then scavenged by foxes, crows and other corvids. Paw prints seen were
either dog or small domestic and feral cats.

Five separate investigations have been carried out during January 2003; Llangadog, Trecastle, Pontfaen, Llandegley and Worthenbury. Evidence was gathered as before and expert opinion sought. Once again, the evidence suggested that dogs and not big cats were involved in the death of livestock.

A dossier containing photographs, video and audio tapes, and post-mortem reports gathered in West Wales over the past 6 months has been forwarded to the following big cat experts in USA, Canada and Scotland. British mammal experts and the RSPCA have also been asked to provide an opinion on the evidence presented.

- Researchers at Utah State University whose area of expertise is livestock kills by pumas.
- A tracker from Canada who investigates livestock kills by various predators, including big cats, on behalf of the Canadian Government.
- A research associate from the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, Banchory, Scotland who has experience of big cat behaviour from many years studying them in Africa
- DEFRA Wildlife Management Team who carried out an investigation into big cats on Bodmin Moor in 1995.
- The Welsh Mountain Zoo

Replies have already been received from several recipients of this dossier. Their views are that the animals killed and injured appear to have been the victims of dog attacks. Numerous photographs of plaster impressions of alleged big cat tracks were seen to have belonged to dogs. Both the audio and video tapes contained the sights and sounds of foxes according to the experts.

I want to assure Members that whilst the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Department has not discovered any hard evidence proving the existence of big cats in the Welsh countryside, officials approach investigations with a completely open mind and all incidents are taken seriously and investigated thoroughly. My officials have met the Senior Veterinary Investigation Officer for Wales at the Veterinary Laboratory Agency to agree a protocol for handling post mortem examinations. Officials are meeting senior officers from the Welsh Police Forces next month to discuss the whole issue of big cat sightings and alleged attacks and the Wildlife Unit is in the process of working with the four Welsh Police Forces to collate data of sightings from all over Wales which the Agriculture Department’s GI Services Unit will map according to the date and type of sighting or livestock attack, in order that spatial factors and possible patterns of attack can be considered.