



OFFICIAL DAERA MINUTES

MEETING TITLE	Northern Ireland Equine Stakeholder Group	
DIVISION/BRANCH REFERENCE	Equine Traceability	
VENUE	Via Teams	
DATE/TIME	30 th April 2026 11.00am	
LIST OF ATTENDEES		
	Organisation	Attendee Name
	Weatherbys	
	URSJA	
	NIVA&BVA-NI	
	PSNI	
	The Horse Trust	
	Breeders Elite	
	NIHB	
	DAFM	
	DAFM	
	HRI	
	World Horse Welfare	
	ABC Council	
	AVSPNI	
	HSI	
	DAERA Representation	Role
	Philip Johnston	DCVO NI (Chair)
		ET Head of Branch
		ET Team
		ET Team
		Senior Principal Veterinary Officer
	DAERA Vet	
	DAERA IRM and Trade programme staff	
	CAFRE	
APOLOGIES	-Breeder Elite	
KEY POINTS DISCUSSED		

Welcome

Philip Johnston opened the meeting with a welcome to everyone. Noted that this is the 2nd ESG meeting for NI. Thanked everyone for their support in getting Equine Establishment Numbers (EENs) of the ground and noted that it is the initial step and there would be a long journey ahead. He reiterated the need for industry engagement.

Philip introduced [REDACTED] as the new head of Equine Traceability Branch and passed to [REDACTED] to introduce herself.

Equine Traceability

[REDACTED] provided ET update including overview of EEN registration process. [REDACTED] thanked stakeholders and the ET team for their work in getting EEN's off the ground and noted the contributions from other teams including CSB- especially Downpatrick and DSD teams.

Overview of communications from ET team. [REDACTED] noted that during recent engagement the ET team became aware that equine operators were often not aware of current basic responsibilities such as returning passports to PIO's for invalidation when an equine is deceased and noted that ET are proposing to set up some comms to inform operators of their responsibilities.

[REDACTED] noted two issues: 1. Has come across several BHS passports applications not asking for EEN's and 2. people misusing EENs by using other people's numbers.

Philip Johnston noted [REDACTED] frustrations and agreed that the BHS issue should be sorted. Philip made the group aware that there was a letter of geographical extent that has been with Defra for a number of months and DAERA intend to move this forward asap to prevent further circumvention of the NI EEN system. Philip also noted [REDACTED] second issue that the EEN system in its current format is not perfect but that it is a foundational step and we needed to start somewhere. Over time as a full traceability system is introduced these loopholes will be tightened and closed.

[REDACTED] agreed with [REDACTED] on the misuse of EEN issue and asked for confirmation that there would be no consequence to PIO's for accepting an EEN which later proved to not be the establishment where the horse is kept.

Philip Johnston confirmed there would be no consequences at this stage.

[REDACTED] then also highlighted that URSJI were having issues receiving updates from ROI on death notifications.

Philip Johnston noted minutes of last meeting received- minutes agreed.

DAFM update-

- [REDACTED] provided an update on the implementation of the P. Wall report.
- The 2024 Equine Census achieved an 80% return rate, with over 24,000 active equine premises registered in ROI.
- Introduction of EENs has been a key driver of compliance in ROI and beyond NI.

- ROI is implementing stricter enforcement, requiring operators to maintain an active Equine Premises Registration Number (EPRN) on the database.
- From 2025, ROI has moved to a proactive enforcement model, including enhanced oversight and approval/registration of Equine Assembly Centres (EACs).
- A new Statutory Instrument is being introduced, including mandatory CCTV at all slaughter plants.
- The system now links ~110,000 equines to 24,000 establishments, improving traceability, accountability, and welfare; €500k has been invested through the Equine Traceability Scheme.
- Equine Herd Profiles have expanded from registration-only to support traceability from birth to death, welfare, and enforcement, based on location.
- An active herd profile is required for TRACES certification and is increasingly required for grants and competitions.
- Profiles will be used for enforcement, with responsibility assigned to the last named operator.
- Integration with TRACES is ongoing, alongside engagement with large sales houses to track movements.

Passports – Deceased Equines

- [REDACTED] raised concerns regarding passports for deceased equines not being returned to DAFM.
- [REDACTED] confirmed there has been no ROI slaughterhouse activity since 2024 and will investigate passport routing (including URSJI) and revert to DAERA and or [REDACTED] directly.
- [REDACTED] will follow up separately with HSI/URSJI to resolve passport handling issues.

Equine Enforcement – [REDACTED]

- NI will follow DAFM's lead in relation to equine traceability arrangements.
- Ongoing welfare and traceability concerns at ports were highlighted.
- A Task and Finish Group was established in late 2025, focusing on Horses arriving into Belfast.
- Noted there are on-going active investigations so not a lot of detail can be shared but that there are point-of-destination checks, particularly for high-risk consignments.
- Areas of non-compliance have been identified.
- A series of internal meetings have taken place to develop strategic responses, alongside engagement with DAFM to address illegal movement issues and agree a collaborative approach.
- This work will continue, with action taken in response to intelligence received.
- Notes that systems are in place to protect confidentiality and intelligence sources; stakeholders were encouraged to share relevant information to protect animal welfare and the integrity of the food chain.
- Philip supported this approach and encouraged information sharing.
- [REDACTED] noted he was happy to discuss matters offline; [REDACTED] requested a follow-up discussion with [REDACTED]

Epizootic Disease update-

- West Nile Virus (WNV) identified as an emerging disease threat, with increasing proximity to the UK and ROI.
- Surveillance is critical; both GB and ROI are monitoring wild birds and mosquitoes.
- WNV poses a significant zoonotic risk; in humans it can cause encephalitis and paralysis.
- A vaccine is available for horses, but not for humans.
- It is anticipated WNV may reach the British Isles within the next few years.
- African Horse Sickness (AHS) discussed as a serious equine disease, closely related to bluetongue (9 serotypes), and not directly contagious between horses.
- Four clinical forms were outlined:
 - Subclinical (mainly zebras and African donkeys)
 - Acute
 - Peracute (almost always fatal)
 - Acute/Mixed (70–80% mortality)
- Overall mortality in horses can reach ~50%.
- Current risk of AHS incursion into the UK is considered negligible, however livestock disease trends (e.g. bluetongue) may indicate future risk to equines.
- The emergence of arboviral diseases is increasing due to global movement, human activity, and climate change.
- The potential impact on the equine sector would be devastating.
- Enhanced equine traceability will support disease control by understanding horse location, movement, and enabling rapid communication during an incursion.
- Surveillance and cross-jurisdictional collaboration were emphasised as essential to protect the NI horse population.

AOB

Next proposed date of meeting week commencing 2nd November 2026

- [REDACTED] PSNI- Operation Gallop expanding into the inclusion of ending violence against women and girls against the backdrop of [REDACTED] case, UUJ- commissioned a questionnaire – QR code to share to members.
- [REDACTED] noted the usefulness of the links group event held in CAFRE Enniskillen.
- [REDACTED] agreed and noted the relationship between equine traceability in regard to prevention of harm to humans and that the development of a full traceability will be beneficial from this aspect.

Philip Johnston thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.

ACTION POINTS/OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE/TARGET DATE: None

- Arrange meeting with DAFM to discuss URSJI issues- DAFM/DAERA, HIS/URSJI to interact directly.

Minutes written

by: [REDACTED]

Date: 30/04/26