



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

IMPACT ASSESSMENT, DOCUMENT

# Compulsory Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) eradication scheme for Wales: integrated impact assessment

An integrated impact assessment (IIA) on the impact of the Compulsory Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) eradication scheme for Wales.

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# Section 1. What action is the Welsh Government considering and why?

## Background

Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) is a pestivirus infection of cattle, which can cause a variety of clinical outcomes that range from sub-clinical infections to more severe outcomes including abortion, infertility, and the fatal Mucosal Disease. BVD is maintained by a small population of animals that become “Persistently Infected” (PI) with the virus. PI animals are the major reservoir of BVD, becoming infected whilst in the uterus during early pregnancy. Such infections remain throughout the pregnancy and after birth, for the lifetime of the animal.

BVD impacts on production by reducing milk yield and causing loss of appetite in infected cattle. This has the potential for significant economic consequences to cattle keepers and also has animal welfare implications. It also affects productivity and can result in less efficient cattle farms. This will directly contribute to increased CO2 emissions and climate change.

There are approximately 11,000 cattle herds in Wales and of the 8,917 herds screened for BVD (approximately 84%), 2,473 (28%) tested positive for the virus. Within those herds, 796 PI animals have been identified. Of the 796 PI animals identified, the data shows 50% of these were retained on farm, where they will continue to shed virus for their entire lives, 25% were sold on to other farms and only 25% were slaughtered. This activity is due to the current lack of legal obligation to remove PI animals from herds and cannot contribute to an effective eradication effort.

Eradicating BVD from Wales will improve standards of animal health and welfare and help the Welsh Government achieve its Net Zero targets sooner, as eradicating BVD from a typical Welsh herd of 40 cattle could reduce the carbon

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footprint by 70,200kg CO<sub>2</sub>e annually. In addition, eradication should bring significant economic benefits in terms of increased farm productivity, including increased milk yield and reproduction rates. The Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Group recognised the control of BVD as a priority for Welsh industry and supported the development and implementation of an industry led scheme for Wales – Gwaredu BVD - and secured £9m funding from the Welsh Government Rural Development Programme 2014-20.

During the voluntary programme, the screening for BVD was undertaken at the same time as testing for Bovine Tuberculosis (TB). This was supplemented with veterinary advice and support to identify and remove PI cattle from the herd. The scheme successfully screened approximately 83.3% of Welsh cattle herds, leading to the identification of 940 PI animals. However, data from the voluntary scheme showed it is not possible to ensure PI removal from farms and BVD eradication through voluntary means.

Following the voluntary phase of the Gwaredu BVD programme, the programme managers intended to introduce a compulsory programme, underpinned by legislation. The Welsh Government has stated legislation would be considered, provided a successful voluntary phase and appropriate evidence could be provided to shape and justify legislative controls.

In 2020, Gwaredu BVD submitted a proposal to the Welsh Government outlining the detail of how a compulsory BVD eradication scheme could operate in Wales, which was approved in principle in November that year.

The Gwaredu BVD programme managers' intention was to see legislation introduced on 1 April 2021, when the voluntary phase of the scheme was due to end. Due to restrictions on legal resource due to COVID-19 and EU Exit related work, this was not possible, and the Minister took the decision to delay the introduction of BVD legislation, until sufficient legal resource became available.

In 2021, Gwaredu BVD confirmed the scheme's underspent funds would be

used to extend voluntary screening until the end of December 2022, to allow the Welsh Government time to secure legal resource and develop legislation for a mandatory eradication scheme. The BVD eradication effort in Wales will seek to align with those of the other administrations, in order to pursue effective eradication for the UK as a whole. We will work with the other administrations to help establish this UK-wide effort.

Legislation, underpinning mandatory BVD screening and PI removal is currently in force Scotland and Northern Ireland, yielding positive results. England is working towards introduction of its own legislation for BVD.

Animal Disease Policy are working with Legal Services to deliver this legislation, with a coming into force date of 1 July 2024.

## **The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – 5 ways of working**

### **Long-term**

The compulsory BVD eradication scheme will be introduced via secondary legislation to underpin the necessary enforcement measures for BVD screening.

The eradication of BVD from Welsh cattle herds will provide the following long-term benefits:

1. The general health and welfare of Welsh cattle will improve and the absence of BVD will make them less susceptible to other diseases.
2. Welsh farms will become more efficient, with production no longer hampered by the presence of BVD in herds, increasing potential profits per animal for farmers.
3. More efficient farms and more productive animals may reduce the carbon

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footprint of herds and decrease the cattle industry's contribution to climate change.

4. The decrease in infection amongst cattle will reduce the need for antibiotic use and help combat “antimicrobial resistance” (AMR).
5. Being able to advertise BVD freedom will make Welsh farms a more enticing trade prospect for UK and Third Countries.
6. An effective eradication scheme in Wales will contribute to the UK-wide effort to eradicate the disease.

## Prevention

The compulsory BVD eradication scheme will include incremental penalties for holdings that do not comply with the regulations and movement restrictions for infected or untested cattle. These measures will help reduce the risk of spreading BVD between farms and across borders. It will also be possible for keepers to view the BVD status of other herds.

In the long term, such practices will hopefully contribute to a change of attitudes in Wales towards BVD, whereby the prevalence of the disease will not be tolerated by keepers and a steady reduction in positive cases will provide a pathway to eradication.

## Integration

The industry led eradication schemes in each of the UK countries will be managed separately but will seek to align to ensure cross border movements do not negatively impact the eradication efforts of other UK countries. If possible, the ability to share relevant BVD status data between farms and scheme operators will alleviate this issue.

## Collaboration

An industry led BVD Governance body, will manage the delivery of the BVD eradication scheme and will therefore be responsible for the successful implementation of the legislation.

The BVDCymru database system will provide a platform for keepers to manage and access data relevant to their own holding or the holding from which they may buy or sell. This feature will allow keepers to check the BVD status of other holdings.

BVD testing will be carried out by approved veterinary practices and the cooperation of vets will be vital to the success of the scheme.

BVD tests will be processed by approved laboratories and the cooperation of accredited laboratories will be vital to the success of the scheme.

## Involvement

The proposed legislation was preceded by an 8 week public **consultation**, which gathered views on the processes and proposals of the compulsory scheme, to help shape the legislation during its drafting phase.

The consultation was launched on 30 June 2022 and closed on 25 August 2022.

Gwaredu BVD hosted a reception at the 2022 Royal Welsh Agricultural Show, attended by the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd to promote the results of voluntary scheme and discuss the introduction of BVD legislation.

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# Impact

## Costs and savings

Although there will be cost implications to the industry associated with the BVD legislation around testing, eradication of BVD means more profit for farmers in the future. In addition, eradication will bring significant economic benefits in terms of increased farm productivity, including increased milk yield and reproduction rates.

## Mechanism

The Welsh Ministers are making The Bovine Viral Diarrhoea Order (Wales) 2024, in exercise of the powers conferred on them by the Animal Health Act 1981, to eradicate BVD from Wales and promote animal health and welfare.

# Section 8. Conclusion

## 8.1 How have people most likely to be affected by the proposal been involved in developing it?

The proposed legislation was preceded by an 8-week public consultation to gather views from members of relevant industry, vets, cattle keepers, farming unions, business owners and other members of the public. The public consultation was launched on 30 June 2022 and closed on 25 August 2022. A summary of the responses to the consultation was published in December 2022.

Officials have engaged with key stakeholders to co-design the BVD legislative

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proposal based on the consultation responses to improve our understanding of BVD and ensure cattle industry buy-in in the eradication programme.

Gwaredu BVD hosted a reception at the 2022 Royal Welsh Agricultural Show, attended by the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd to promote the voluntary scheme.

## 8.2 What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?

### Positive impact

The positive impacts as a result of a BVD scheme will be the long-term contribution to the eradication of the disease from Wales (and by extension, the UK). The aforementioned benefits from this are:

- the general improvement of cattle health and welfare
- increased efficiency of Welsh farms
- potentially increased profits for keepers
- reduction of the Welsh cattle industry's carbon footprint
- reduced antimicrobial usage in cattle production systems, combating antimicrobial resistance (AMR)
- improved trade prospects for Wales, due to BVD freedom
- alignment with the UK-wide eradication effort
- increased awareness among farmers on the importance of biosecurity and responsible sourcing of cattle

### Negative impact

The potential negative impacts of the eradication scheme are:

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- The increased administrative burden for keepers when managing testing, PI isolation and movement restrictions

An increased financial burden for keepers, who will be required to pay for BVD screening and testing.

- The BVD regulations will be new to cattle keepers and some issues with compliance may arise in the short term, causing restrictions and penalties for holdings

### **8.3 In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal:**

- **maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals; and/or,**
- **avoid, reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?**

The industry-led eradication schemes in each of the UK countries will be managed separately but will seek to align to ensure cross border movements do not negatively impact the eradication effort other UK countries. If possible, the ability to share relevant BVD status data between farms and scheme operators will alleviate this issue.

### **8.4 How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?**

Good communication, supplying keepers with clear information on how the scheme operates, the rationale for its introduction and penalties for non-compliance will be key to establishing a successful eradication effort. Care should be given to accommodate those with limited online access by utilising a variety of communication routes, including vets, who can provide advice

verbally, the BVDCymru governance board, agricultural shows, markets, and others.

The support of keepers is vital for the success of the scheme and our engagement must be consistent to bring about the long-term change in attitude towards BVD. We would expect keepers to benefit from the experience of their peers to ensure compliance and to benefit from BVD eradication.

Practical, bilingual advice should be available to keepers who don't understand the scheme or are consistently non-compliant with its regulations.

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