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PMWS In Argentina.

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THE **Veterinary Record**

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Future of the College library under discussion

Artificial insemination in sheep

Effect of sperm number and deposition site on fertility

Fish welfare

Protocol for assessing brain function and the effectiveness of stunning and killing methods

Journal of the British Veterinary Association



be obtained from its website at www.competition-commission.org.uk/inquiries/vetmed.htm. If members have any comments or questions on the inquiry, then e-mail the BVA at bvahq@bva.co.uk or telephone on 020 7636 6541.

P. Jinman, Vice-President, British Veterinary Association, 7 Mansfield Street, London W1G 9NQ

FMD inquiries

SIR, – Eventually, the impact of the 2001 foot-and-mouth disease outbreak on the public, political and scientific standing of the veterinary profession will rest less on the direct memory of those who saw large numbers of veterinary surgeons and students performing selflessly and thoroughly in the most harrowing conditions, than on the findings of the various inquiries. The potential is there for the ‘Shipman effect’, that is, the unwarranted undermining of general confidence on the basis of very specific shortcomings. While none of the inquiries seeks scapegoats, politically it is inevitable that scapegoats must be found: the outbreak caused too much financial and emotional damage to be shrugged off as an act of God and handled similarly if it were to happen again. Already there are academics who advocated the unprecedented slaughter of healthy animals who remain determined not even to contemplate that they may have been mistaken, despite Dr David Shannon’s admission (*Science and Public Affairs*, February, p 7) that ‘the initial modelling was done without a full understanding of the disease and the nature of the industry’. Rather, they assert that the veterinary profession was too mathematically illiterate to appreciate the brilliance of their solution to ending the epidemic by early June 2001.

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons called unambiguously for an independent inquiry, modelled on the Northumberland Report into the 1967/68 outbreak. The lack of such an inquiry is most serious in the examination of what was done and the lessons to be learned, since this is the most political aspect. It is, therefore, wholly inappropriate that this aspect, far from being subject to independent scrutiny, is being covered ‘in-house’; when those holding the aces keep the cards so close to their chest, suspicion seems well founded. The House of Commons Select Committee on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in their report on the ‘Impact of foot-and-mouth disease’ (January 23), noted that the ‘lessons learned’ inquiry was so closely linked to the Cabinet Office that it ‘would inevitably make people doubt whether it is truly independent’, doubts echoed by Mr Richard Lissack QC (*The Times*, February 19), who asked how there could be confidence in its independence since it was chaired by a former adviser to the

Prime Minister and based in the Cabinet Office. Incredibly, the Prime Minister, who voluntarily took charge, a few weeks before calling an early General Election, and thereby presided over the introduction of contiguous culling, will give his personal account but there will be no transcript; his evidence will merely be referred to in the minutes. Those in our profession who rightly called for an independent inquiry should reinforce, to the Select Committee, the wisdom of its scepticism and encourage it to probe to the darkest depths.

It is now clear (*VR*, December 15, 2001, pp 729-743; December 22, 2001, p 778) that the epidemic was already subsiding before the contiguous overkill, with all the suffering and the huge logistical logjams which it created, was even announced, so the political stakes are extremely high. This ‘inquiry’ lacks any semblance of openness, accountability, transparency or even basic probity – it has the formula for whitewash and the stench of ‘Slaughtergate’.

Bob Michell, The Mill Barn, Mill Lane, Exning, Suffolk CB8 7JW

PMWS in Argentina

SIR, – Postweaning multisystemic wasting syndrome (PMWS) was first reported in Canada in 1991 (Clark 1997). Since 1996, an increasing number of cases have been diagnosed worldwide (Allan and Ellis 2000), and, nowadays, porcine circovirus type 2 (PCV-2) is considered to be the causal agent of this disease (Bolin and others 2001). We would like to present the first description of PMWS in Argentina.

Six six- to eight-week-old pigs originating from a one-site, farrow-to-finish operation located in the south-eastern part of Cordoba Province, Argentina, were investigated. Clinical signs observed on the farm included diarrhoea, respiratory distress, paleness of the skin and, occasionally, icterus. Necropsy and conventional histopathological techniques were conducted at the General Pathology Laboratory, Veterinary Faculty, National University of Rosario, Argentina. Gross changes consisted of jaundice, generalised lymphadenopathy, hydropericardium, ascites and pulmonary consolidation of the cranial lobes. Histopathological changes were characterised by depletion of lymphocytes in the interfollicular areas and follicular centres with extensive karyorrhexis or necrotic cell debris in the lymph nodes. Infiltration by macrophage-like and multinucleate giant cells, and the presence of eosinophils surrounding necrotic areas, were also observed in the lymph nodes of all the pigs examined. Inclusion bodies characteristic of PCV-2 infection were observed in the cytoplasm of macrophages and/or multinucleate giant cells of the lymph nodes. Mild inflammatory histiocytic infiltration was

observed in the liver, kidneys and heart. The lungs of all the pigs showed a variable degree of bronchointerstitial pneumonia.

In addition, *in situ* hybridisation (Rosell and others 1999) to detect PCV-2 was performed at the pathology department of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain. The results showed high levels of PCV-2 nucleic acid in all tissue samples studied.

Currently, it is unknown how widespread PCV-2 infection or PMWS might be in the Argentinian swine population. We believe that this first description of PMWS should be considered for further studies regarding the extent of this syndrome in the country. Epidemiological studies should be conducted to assess the relative importance of PMWS in Argentina and the risk factors associated with this disease.

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Human disability and the veterinary profession

SIR, – For a non-veterinarian like myself, *The Veterinary Record* is a very useful source of information about issues affecting those who work within the very wide walls of the veterinary profession. However, one issue worthy of further consideration within your pages is that of human disability. For the past 15