

Inter-island animal disease control

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Overview

All of the Scottish islands involved in the inter-island animal disease network (Lewis and Harris, Orkney and Shetland) are unique, with distinct resources, topography and infrastructure that means that livestock disease control is approached differently. Similarities between the islands exist and there is potential, and enthusiasm, for inter-island collaborative working. Many participants felt this was a unique opportunity to come together and share experiences and key learnings that could only help all involved. There was a recognition that a 'one size fits all' solution would not be appropriate and that there was space to create shared actions. Together they felt they could develop bespoke solutions to challenges many had already encountered.

Objectives

Building on previous work by the brief authors (Figure 1), the meeting was planned to deliver the following short- and longer-term objectives:

Facilitate Knowledge Sharing and Collaborative Solutions (Short term) – Encourage islanders to exchange experiences, information, and strategies to foster a working relationship that supports the co-develop of sustainable disease control strategies. It was recognised that while no single solution fits all contexts, lessons from the islands can benefit others.

Enhance animal disease control measures (long term) – To use the natural boundaries of islands to improve disease control while ensuring effective monitoring of incoming animals to prevent the introduction and spread of diseases.

Major Findings

Findings from previous individual workshops in combination with the inter-island workshop have identified the following island-specific challenges and opportunities:

Lewis & Harris have renewed their interest in intra-island community working and believe together they can achieve a good level of animal disease control. Challenges still exist, including;

- a lack of control over animals moving onto the islands (multiple ports of entry)
- limited vet service staffing, and services for diagnostics and treatment
- sourcing investment required for improved port infrastructure

Orkney has a well-supported livestock industry and want to move on to addressing sheep scab on the islands. Their agriculture industry faces challenges including;

- a lack of monitoring and control of imported animals, particularly those arriving from the mainland
- the need for a new slaughterhouse on the islands
- a training requirement for dipping and dipping licences

Shetland livestock producers have a robust process in place to control imported animals via the Shetland Animal Health Scheme. A bylaw put in place in July 2024 supports diagnostics and treatment of animals. They have fewer challenges but need to remain vigilant about potential disease incursions. They identified the following challenges;

- access to diagnostic tests can be challenging, mostly due to the remote nature of the islands and the need to send samples to centralised laboratories on the mainland for testing
- there can often be a long turnaround in obtaining diagnostic test results
- high lab costs for test results can be prohibitive for some producers
- lack of producer engagement with communal and collaborative activities

Together the island representatives identified potential areas of collaboration that will be put in place over the coming months. Future opportunities to meet, both online and face to face, will help further strengthen the collaboration and allow for the identification of new areas where connections can be made.

Relevance to Policy

Strengthening regional animal health legislation – The success of Shetland’s bylaws on animal disease control have helped the island successfully manage a number of high priority animal diseases, a version of localised animal health policies may be developed and provide significant beneficial for other islands. Shetland has benefited from this level of disease control and are now able to brand their livestock as coming from a high health status area and can thus ask for a premium price, due to the nature of the health checks that are in place on the island.

Improved livestock movement monitoring - Access to livestock movement data is essential to understanding the scale and nature of any disease risks and helps in the planning, development and implementation of effective control strategies. Making it easier for researchers to access the available data sources (e.g., animal movement, disease notifications and farm level data would enhance epidemiology and disease tracking and help implement effective biosecurity measures. This could be achieved by having a broader overarching data sharing agreement with the EPIC CoE, rather than multiple individual data sharing requests.

Cooperation from the ferry companies operating the transport links to, and between, the islands to collect and share animal movement data would be extremely useful (e.g., monitoring animal movements and disease spread). In addition, it was felt this assistance would enable them to make future plans and seek funding to implement some of the required infrastructure and monitoring processes to be put into place. Seeking funding to improve port facilities, for example, lairage areas for animals when ferries are delayed would help to prevent animal health and welfare issues.

Important Assumptions and Limitations

This inter-island meeting was designed to be qualitative in nature, with attendees selected due to their interest and expertise but was not developed to produce statistically representative findings. Instead, we have focused on interacting with a relatively small number of key individuals on each of the islands to produce rich textual data and in-depth understandings of the current situation. Working with, and supporting these, key individuals is aimed at assisting and empowering them in driving change and making improvements to each island's animal disease control.

Inter-Island animal disease control: our journey to Inverness and beyond

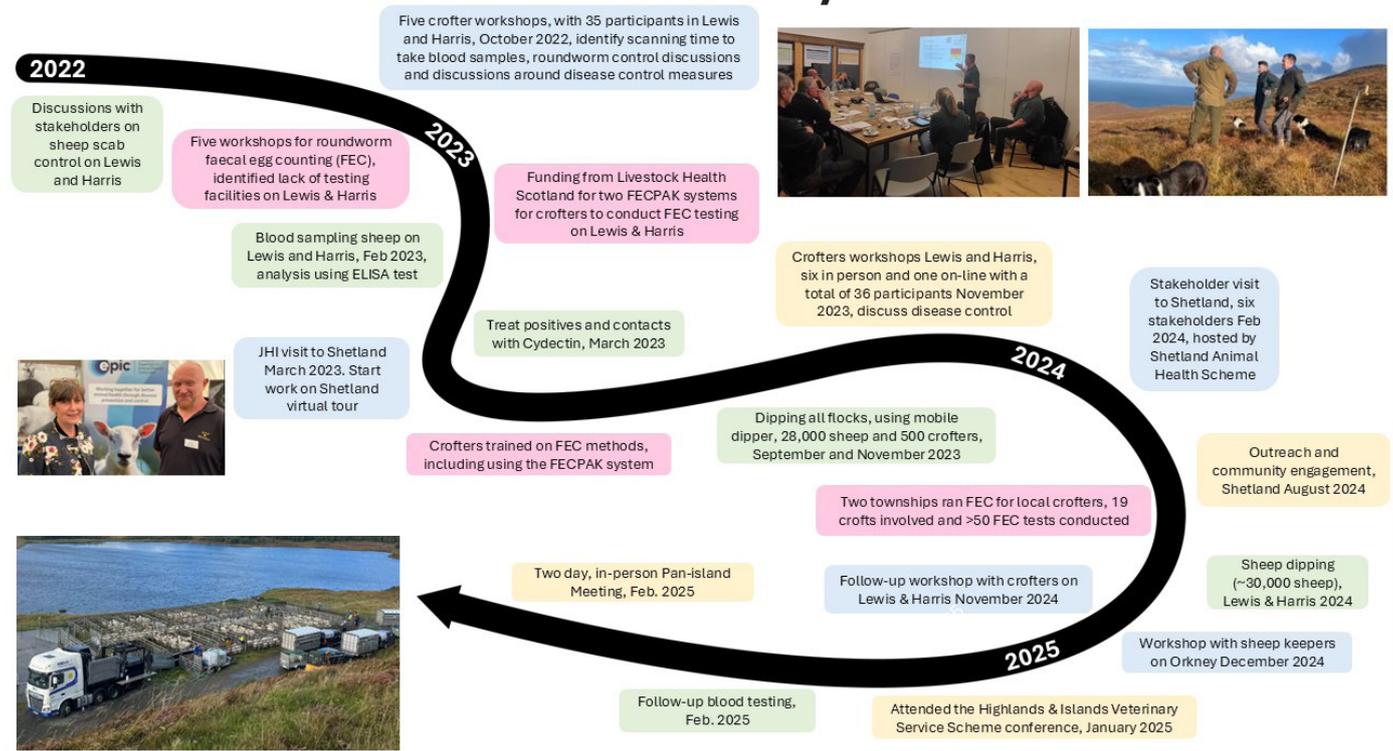


Figure 1: Previous engagement and research activities with stakeholders from the three islands prior to holding the inter-island meeting

Links to Existing Publications and Reports

[Our impact: Sheep Scab and Pan-Island Initiative Project](#)