

## **HUDGHTON WARNS LABOUR MEP'S TO KEEP HANDS OFF FMD REPORT**

Ian Hudghton MEP, SNP Agriculture spokesperson in the European Parliament is warning UK Labour MEP's to keep their hands off an EU report focussing on last year's outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease, which might make embarrassing reading for Tony Blair's government in London. The report will be debated next Tuesday in the Strasbourg plenary session, amidst rumours that MEP's from the UK Labour Party, will try to water down the committee's recommendations in an effort to save the London Labour's blushes.

The Kreissl-Dorffler report, has been produced by the Temporary Committee on Foot and Mouth who heard evidence from many of those hit by last year's epidemic, and makes several key recommendations, should Europe be faced with a future FMD outbreak. However, it's the four pages of sharp criticism of the UK Government's handling of the crisis, which Mr Hudghton and others suspect Labour MEP's will try to amend by way of a face-saving exercise. Anticipating such a move the SNP member said:

"Members of the Foot and Mouth temporary committee have carried out an immense amount of research into last year's outbreak, culminating in a range of radical and far-reaching recommendations should Europe be faced with such a crisis again. These recommendations have not just been plucked out of thin air but are based on hard facts presented to them by people from the communities worst affected by last year's outbreak.

Much of that evidence may not exactly be what the Tony Blair and DEFRA want to hear, but that's tough. The truth often hurts, as those who saw their livestock destroyed before their eyes or their income from tourism dwindle away to nothing know only too well.

In the Kreissl-Dorffler report, the UK Government are criticised for their lack of preparedness and disorganisation, and the lack of local state veterinary centres. All of these factors are blamed for creating a climate of confusion and delays in which the disease was given time to spread. Worst of all, the authorities in the UK are condemned for their failure to give sufficient attention to the views and concerns of local people in the regions affected. I will be furious if Labour members in try to strike that off the record when we meet in Strasbourg next week.

Labour MEP's will do nobody any favours by watering down these criticisms just to save Tony Blair's face. The evidence presented to the Committee, embarrassing though it might be for the Labour Party, nonetheless informs the recommendations made. The report has to be taken in its entirety."

The report, which goes before a full sitting of the Parliament on Tuesday (17 December) seeks a radical shift in the EU's approach to Foot and Mouth disease, away from solely focussing on commercial implications to giving greater consideration to social and animal welfare issues which such an outbreak brings. MEP's will be asked to overturn long-standing EU policy on vaccination to control the spread of FMD which, if passed next week would mean that vaccines could be considered as a "first-choice" option.

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