RESPONSE TO PROPOSED CLOSURE OF 
INVERNESS VETERINARY INVESTIGATION CENTRE – A NEW VISION
By
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1 Background. SAC have asked for responses to proposals for the future of the veterinary investigation service based at Inverness. This paper presents an analysis of four options and concludes that one option presents significant animal health surveillance opportunities which the other options do not.

2 What is needed?
2.1 The farming industry needs a veterinary investigation service that provides it with good wide ranging surveillance and diagnostic service, early identification of emerging diseases, changes and patterns.
2.2 To provide this there needs to be highly trained and experienced pathologists carrying out post mortem work. They need to be backed up by a laboratory facility, which does need to be on the same site.
2.3 Veterinary practitioners require access to a facility for post mortem and experienced pathologists who are familiar with the farming systems locally.
2.4 Whatever system is implemented biosecurity is one of the highest priorities.

3 The four options I have considered are:
3.1 Retain the status quo
3.2 Close the facility and train local vets to carry out the post mortem work.
3.3 Set up a local post mortem facility
3.4 Set up an itinerant post mortem team.

3 The key points of concern for the industry are the availability of a local, highly trained and experienced cadre of vets who can provide a post mortem and investigation service, the access to laboratory facilities and staff with knowledge of the local farming methods and challenges.

5 Retain the status quo
5.1 This not an option due to financial constraints and costs and is why the consultation is being undertaken.

Strengths: - retains on site facility, staff, expertise
Weaknesses: - used principally by farms and crofts within a given radius; delays in post mortem start time; not available out of office hours
Opportunities: - local service available
Threats: - low throughput does not give good surveillance

6 Close the facility and train local vets to carry out the post mortem work.
6.1 This is an option and follows to some extent the model developing in England.

Strengths: - provides service at no cost to SAC for staff, may have to provide some subsidy to cover the cost of the post-
Weaknesses: - training for local vets to carry out the work will not equate to the standards and quality of trained
mortem

Opportunities: - for local vets to develop skills in post mortem work, to engage more closely with farm clients

Threats: - as each practice will be doing their own post-mortem work no-one will have an overview of new disease patterns developing in an area.

7 Set up a local post mortem facility

7.1 This option is appealing to local farmers as politically there is a visible presence in the area

Strengths: - facility available to enable high quality post mortems to be carried out;

Weaknesses: - Cost to set up run and maintain, potential dumping ground for carcases, requires staff on site during working hours, only open through office hours

Opportunities: - centralising lab facilities and only samples are submitted

Threats: - closure in the future if further cuts are to be made, rising overheads

8 Set up an itinerant post mortem team

8.1 The current veterinary staff are retained locally to carry out on farm post mortems by travelling to the carcass.

Strengths: - staff with daily post mortem experience; consistent standard of post mortem

Weaknesses: - potential problems with post-mortems on large carcasses on farm; dealing with animal by-products on farms outside of derogated areas

Opportunities: - good surveillance; with the investigating vet visiting premises to do post mortem a full investigation can then be done including sampling of relevant groups at same visit; to carry out other surveillance work

Threats: - retaining quality staff, ensuring training is fit for purpose, carrying out audit, CPD; Health and Safety on farm

9 Summary

9.1 The lab is facing closure and a replacement appears to be not cost effective.

9.2 Of the above options the only one which will fulfil the needs of the industry and the veterinary profession is option 4.

9.3 Option four poses unique problems in travel, resource and equipment. None of these are insurmountable e.g. a supply of dolafs can be kept at a location and taken to farms where burial is not an option (either legislatively or physically) and collected after the post mortem by the knackery. Staining of Category One material would be
required. Safe systems of lifting large carcases would need to be worked out but given that most of the work will be under 300Kg liveweight this should not be a significant issue.

9.4 Option four retains highly trained staff.

10 A vision for the future

10.1 It is noted that the laboratory in Edinburgh is the most expensive to run. Close it.

10.2 SAC is not the only organisation which runs laboratories in Scotland.

10.3 The potential for a number of organisations to share a multi functional laboratory facility and this should be explored by Scottish Government e.g. NHS, SEPA, Scottish Water, Local Authorities. The overhead cost saving is potentially significant across these organisations.

10.4 Laboratories do not need to be located at specific sites so perhaps the above agencies could explore the concept of a world class laboratory being built at the University of the Highlands and Islands. This would also provide a new step into the concept of One Health. It will also provide the University with an opportunity to develop new courses relevant to laboratory work which ties in with work they are already doing in their colleges.

10.5 There is arguably the need for another Cat 4 lab in the country and this would present the ideal opportunity for this development.

11 Conclusion

11.1 Instead of looking at the closure of the Inverness lab as a backward step we should be looking at this as an opportunity to improve services and develop a vision for the delivery of laboratory services as a main stream function for a lot of organisations instead of each one carry the same overheads as all the others.

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