

E-MAIL FROM: John F. Robins, Secretary, Animal Concern Advice Line (ACAL), c/o Animal Concern, Post Office Box 5178, Dumbarton G82 5YJ. Tel 01389-841111. Mobile: 07721-605521. Fax: 0870-7060327. Animal Concern Advice Line (ACAL) is a recognised Scottish charity: No. SC030982. Animal Concern Advice Line was established in 2001 to take on the charitable work of Animal Concern which was founded as the Scottish Anti-Vivisection Society in 1876.
E-MAIL: acal@jfrobins.force9.co.uk Website: <http://adviceaboutanimals.info>

Richard Lochhead MSP,
Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and the Environment,
The Scottish Government,
Holyrood,
Edinburgh

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

In August 2014 I wrote to you regarding my concerns over lameness in sheep. I told you about sheep farmer and veterinary surgeon Ruth Clements and her 5 point plan to reduce or eradicate foot rot in sheep. I received a reply from Dr Beverley Williams, your Animal Welfare Team Leader.

In her reply on your behalf Dr. Williams agreed that “lameness has a huge impact on the welfare of an animal” and she stated that Ms Clements 5 point plan “... is certainly good advice that we would encourage any sheep farmer to consider.”

In my e-mail to you I stated that part of the advice given by Ms Clements is that the most common treatment for foot rot in sheep, foot trimming by the farmer, can actually make the situation worse.

Earlier today I read the “Codes of practice for the welfare of sheep” on your Government’s website. On the section on lameness in sheep Paragraph 29 states that treatment “... may also necessitate regular and careful paring”. Over a year after Dr Williams told me that your Government would encourage farmers to follow the good advice from Ms Clements I find that rather than encourage sheep farmers to consider the Clements 5 point plan your Government advice is the opposite of what she recommends.

I recently received a copy of a communication from Stewart Stevenson MSP to one of our supporters who had asked Mr. Stevenson to look into the issue of welfare of sheep on Scottish farms. Mr. Stevenson had sought advice on the matter from the Scottish Parliament’s Library.

The reply indicated that little is known about the extent of lameness in sheep in Scotland. However various estimates and surveys of farmers (some going back to 2002) would suggest that an average of circa 10% of the flock suffer from lameness at any time. Government stats show that in June 2014 the sheep population was 6.69 million on around 14,800 farms in Scotland. This would mean that as many as 669,000 sheep are suffering from lameness at any time. This is totally unacceptable in terms of animal welfare.

Stewart Stevenson’s constituent had asked him; “How many lame sheep are delivered to Scottish slaughterhouses per year?”. In his reply Mr. Stevenson said that according to the Food Standard Agency between October 2013 and September 2014 there were 17 incidents of sheep being delivered to slaughterhouses in Scotland. I understand this refers to 17 incidents where action was taken against the persons responsible for the sheep. Given the extent of lameness in sheep this

would suggest that a great deal needs to be done to improve monitoring of the condition of sheep taken to marts and abattoirs in Scotland.

I once again request that the Scottish Government make a direct approach to Ruth Clements and seek her assistance to redraft your codes of practice for the welfare of sheep.

You will find her contact details here: [Ruth Clements](#)

I was astonished and dismayed to read in the letter from Stewart Stevenson to his constituent that “Regarding deaths due to exposure there are no figures collected for cause of death in sheep in Scotland.” He went on to state that the information he had received suggested new born lamb mortalities due to any cause “... range from 5% where ewes are lambing on improved pasture to 15% where ewes are lambing in extensive hill situations.” Mr. Stevenson also reported that figures given in Scotland’s Rural College Farm Management Handbook suggest there is a 3% mortality rate for older hill lambs and 2% for older lambs in other situations while ewe mortality rates are 10 to 12% on the hill and 5% in other situations. With the Scottish flock at over 6.5 million animals this means that tens of thousands of animals are dying every year.

I ask that the Scottish Government take urgent steps to address this unacceptable situation. On the issue of lameness I suggest adopting the Clements 5 point plan as recommended best practise and prosecuting any sheep farmers who do not take positive steps, including the use of available vaccinations, to alleviate the suffering of individual animals and help reduce and perhaps eradicate lameness in Scottish flocks. Given the extremely wet summer we have had this year sheep welfare will have been compromised even further making it more important that your Government takes action as soon as possible.

I further ask that all livestock farmers be required to submit six monthly reports detailing the numbers of mortalities among their animals with an indication of what caused their deaths.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

John F. Robins,
Secretary