

# **VHS NEWS UPDATE**

## **Testing of wild fish**

The first sample of wild fish, taken from the river Nidd since the autumn water temperatures have fallen to an appropriate range for detecting VHS virus (VHSV) infection have proven negative for the virus. A second sample was taken on 14/15 November and results are expected on the 28/29 November.

## **Cooperation with mortality record collection**

We would remind farmers within the original control zone that it is still of vital importance that they continue to provide mortality records to the Fish Health Inspectorate. Now water temperatures have dropped to the range where we can expect to see VHS develop if the virus is there, it is especially important. We understand that all fish farmers renewed their commitment to provide these records when the Inspectorate conducted visits in October.

## **Source of outbreak**

Several possible pathways of introduction of VHSV onto the affected farm have been considered and investigated. However, despite considerable epidemiological investigation, the source has not yet been clearly identified, although the course of the disease on the affected farm suggests a low level introduction of the virus into the fish population.

## **Sentinel population at Nidderdale**

The introduction of 10,000 3 to 5 gram fish to Nidderdale Trout Farm was permitted by Defra on the 14<sup>th</sup> November, to act as a sentinel population. The farm site was thoroughly disinfected immediately after the outbreak in May, fallowed for 5 months, and is operating under rigorous biosecurity measures following the new introduction.

This trial restocking with tests for VHS virus will enable Defra to make a more informed decision about any future commercial restocking at Nidderdale.

The Cefas Fish Health Inspectorate sampled 150 of the fish from the consignment prior to introduction to the Nidderdale site. These fish are being tested to confirm that they are free of VHSV. The population is being confined at normal stocking density and the Inspectorate will take further 150 fish samples on a regular basis to test for VHSV.

Nidderdale Trout Farm has undertaken to inform the Fish Health Inspectorate immediately of any unusual signs or increased mortality in the fish population and provide a daily record of mortalities. If, at any point, the presence of VHSV is

confirmed, all fish will be immediately slaughtered and the farm drained and disinfected as before.

If VHSV does reoccur at the site, it will not be necessary to reinstate controls over the larger area outside the current unapproved zone, unless the supplier of fish is implicated and contact tracing becomes necessary.

### **Re-approval of zone**

Defra is preparing an application for a programme to re-establish the approved status of the Ouse catchment currently excluded from the GB approved zone for VHS. Applications need to be approved by the Commission, through the Standing Committee for the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFAH) and will take the form of a sampling programme in farms holding susceptible species. In the existing European regime, there is a requirement for a 2 year absence of clinical outbreaks, followed by 2 years of sampling. The new fish health Directive, agreed in October, requires only the 2 years of sampling. We will endeavour to get the programme agreed under the new arrangements if at all possible.

Consideration can also be given to gaining approved farm status for farms within the new non-approved zone, where those farms meet the requirements and if it is possible to gain such approval in a shorter timescale than re-approval of the entire zone.

### **Trout Industry Assistance Scheme (Hardship fund)**

As you will be aware, the British Trout Association are in the process of developing a scheme to offer trout farmers' financial assistance if their businesses are affected by disease control restrictions. The Association has invited all trout farmers (members and non-member of the BTA) to comment on outline proposals for such a scheme. The idea is that funds will be raised through subscriptions from potential beneficiaries, possibly through the existing feed levy arrangements. Defra is offering technical assistance with the design of the scheme and, the Minister will consider what form of 'pump priming' can be offered.

**Defra  
Fish Health Unit  
Veterinary Exotic Diseases, Research  
& Official Controls Division  
22 November 2006**