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# Sustainable Development Action Plan

2007 - 2011

# VLA Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP) 2007-2009

## Foreword by Chief Executive

The Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) is an Executive Agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The VLA is comprised of a regional network of 16 laboratories (including one in Scotland and two in Wales) with a central facility near Weybridge in Surrey. Additionally there are two Surveillance Centres at the Liverpool and London Veterinary Schools. We provide all sectors of the animal health industry with animal disease surveillance, diagnostic services and veterinary scientific research.

We aim to safeguard public and animal health through world class veterinary research and surveillance. You can find out more about VLA's work at <http://www.vla.gov.uk/>

This is VLA's second Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP) and it covers the period from November 2007 to the end of 2009. We produced our first plan as part of the commitment to the UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy – *Securing the Future* (March 2005), under which all Government departments and their executive agencies produced focused sustainable development action plans based on the Strategy.

That plan set out how, by *using sound science responsibly and promoting good governance*, we would contribute to *ensuring a strong, healthy and just society*, and help to *achieve a sustainable economy*. Our progress against that plan has been independently assessed by Defra and the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/> who have made suggestions for improvements to our SDAP for this second iteration. It includes a number of actions across a range of our activities which I believe will contribute further to the Government's SD objectives (set out below). It also shows how we are increasingly embedding SD principles and priorities in our decision making.

I have designated the VLA Business Director as SD '*champion*' to oversee the implementation of the plan. Our "Estates and Environment Manager" will take the lead in raising awareness of SD across VLA, monitoring and reporting progress to Directors and identifying and taking forward initiatives under this plan. We will carry out a review of the plan in October 2008 and update our goals if required.

I hope you find this plan a useful introduction to how the VLA is playing its part in achieving the challenging but important goal set by *Securing the Future*: 'to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations'. If you would like more information about the plan or any other aspects of our approach to SD please contact

Elizabeth Davies, Estates and Environment Manager on 01932 357483 or by email [e.a.davies@vla.defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:e.a.davies@vla.defra.gsi.gov.uk)

I am personally and professionally fully committed to the goal of sustainable development and I know that my colleagues and staff are too. I therefore have pleasure in signing off this plan as a record of VLA's corporate commitment.

**Professor Steve Edwards**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Veterinary Laboratories Agency**

## **What Sustainable Development means for the VLA**

### **VLA's Science Vision is to be acknowledged as:**

- innovators in a global network of veterinary excellence
- working collaboratively with other suppliers of veterinary and public health science
- applying new technology and other scientific advances throughout the agency
- using our network of laboratories to provide the best possible services

As an Executive Agency VLA's mission and strategy are intrinsically linked to the Government's overall aims and objectives for veterinary public health and sustainable agriculture and food industries. As a member of the Defra family we support Defra's aims and objectives, its Five Year Strategy (*"Delivering the Essentials of Life"*) as well as the department's vision for its science agencies.

We are a key delivery agent for the Chief Veterinary Officer in tackling their top priority – 'to avoid an animal health crisis'. We will also play an active part in helping Defra and the devolved administrations in the implementation of the Animal Health and Welfare (AH&W) Strategy for Great Britain. This strategy seeks to 'develop a new partnership in which we can make a lasting and continuous improvement in the health and welfare of kept animals while protecting society, the economy, and the environment from the affect of animal diseases'. Part of that 'partnership' is our provision of veterinary investigation

and laboratory diagnostic services for private veterinary practices at subsidised prices, reflecting the surveillance value to Government of the information so gathered.

We provide top quality scientific knowledge and advice for Defra as specified in its Evidence and Innovation Strategy (E&IS). In turn the E&IS will define Defra's science procurement requirements over the period 2005-08, which we will look to fulfil in our areas of expertise.

VLA contributes to the public health objectives of Defra and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) through our knowledge and expertise of zoonoses and food chain related threats.

We also play a key role in the international veterinary and public health arena, largely through our status as an international reference laboratory for a wide range of infectious and non infectious diseases. As part of this we help the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) meet their objectives.

A detailed five-year strategy for the Agency is set out in VLA's corporate plan 2007 -12. This covers our:

- Status
- Services
- Customer base
- Finances, including efficiency measures
- People
- Buildings

The strategy is based around five key aims:

- To provide our customers with the highest quality scientific data and advice to support evidence based policymaking while providing best value for money.
- To work collaboratively to deliver leading edge veterinary research, surveillance, consultancy and laboratory testing services through a series of integrated science programmes.
- To maintain an emergency response capability for animal health and public health threats.
- To develop colleagues to their full potential and recognise their individual and collective contribution.
- To work by a set of principles and values that underpin our behaviour:
  - Be open to constructive criticism and external challenge
  - Develop leadership to promote shared vision and values
  - Demonstrate rigour and responsibility in relation to our science
  - Share knowledge and communicate openly at all levels
  - Strive for excellence whilst confronting poor performance
  - Treat everyone fairly and recognise their views and contributions
  - Treat everyone with dignity and respect
  - Work together to turn problems into solutions

Each year when we review our vision and agree targets we will ensure that our core business activities and outcomes are consistent with and contribute to the:

- five guiding principles of *Securing the Future*: Living within Environmental Limits; Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society; Achieving a Sustainable Economy; Promoting Good Governance; and Using Sound Science Responsibly  
<http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/uk-strategy/index.htm>.
- four priority areas for immediate action described in *Securing the Future*: Sustainable Consumption and Production; Climate Change and Energy; Natural Resource Protection and Environmental Enhancement; and Sustainable Communities; and
- Defra's renewed Mission of Living within Environmental Means.  
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/busplan/spending-review/psa2007.htm>

This process ensures that sustainable development is fully taken into account in our working processes and procedures.

## **The Benefits of Sustainable Development for the VLA**

The targets and outcomes described in our Corporate Business Plan, demonstrate the VLA's corporate commitment to ensuring that the Government's goals for sustainable development as described in the priorities and principles above are achieved. By achieving these outcomes we:

- help protect the environment (*Living within Environmental Limits*);
- enhance the sustainability of livestock production in the UK (*Achieving a Sustainable Economy*);
- promote confidence of consumers and importing countries in the safety of animal products originating in the UK so that high and stable levels of economic growth and employment are maintained (*Achieving a Sustainable Economy*);
- help protect farmers, veterinary surgeons and members of the public by ensuring that emerging veterinary diseases are monitored (*Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society*);
- help to ensure a healthy society through our work on Food Safety (*Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society*); and

The financial and business benefits of SD are also highly important to VLA. These include the significant efficiency and cost savings that can be recognised in terms of energy management, waste management etc and the competitive advantage gained by the associated cost savings, and recognition of our ISO14001 status.

## **Contribution to Sustainable Development in our Regulatory Activity and Policy Development**

The VLA itself does not carry out any Regulatory Activity or Policy Development. We do however support Defra's policy development in safeguarding public and animal health by providing expert advice through world class veterinary research and surveillance based on *sound science used responsibly, good governance* and risk based decision-making.

VLA's role is to help Defra deliver its new departmental strategic objectives (DSOs) in the following areas;

- ***Economy and society resilient to environmental risk and adapted to the impacts of climate change*** – specifically by *Protection of the economy, human health and ecosystems from environmental risks, animal diseases and other emergencies.*
- ***A thriving farming and food sector, with an improving net environmental impact*** – specifically by *Improved welfare of kept animals.*

## **Contribution to Sustainable Development in our infrastructure and by our commitment to staff**

VLA has a large and diverse estate covering sixteen sites, totalling 49 ha and providing workspace for almost 1400 staff (FTE of 1200). We recognise that our buildings and facilities have a large carbon footprint and represent VLA's most significant environmental impact and we have therefore focused on introducing a number of initiatives to contribute to Defra's Mission of *living within environmental limits* ;

- We reuse all but our "special waste" at Weybridge by burning it in our incinerators which is recognised by Defra as an efficient way of recovering the energy and reducing our gas usage
- We send very little waste to landfill,
- We recycle batteries, mobile telephones and toner cartridges
- We dispose of electronic and IT equipment properly meeting our legal obligations;
- We ensure that our stationery and the paper we use for photocopying and printing comes from recycled material;
- We are taking steps to reduce our energy usage by installing T5 lighting, Power Perfectors, Enersol Units, wind turbines, solar thermal heating panels, rapeseed boilers and using CHPs.

- Our capital redevelopment programme has sustainability as its core and all buildings aim for BREEAM excellent.
- We purchase from local suppliers where possible.

To help contribute to *reducing carbon emissions* and costs we encourage our staff to avoid travel between sites wherever possible by using video and teleconferencing and we have invested in all our sites to ensure that each has the capability and infrastructure to facilitate remote meetings. If business travel is unavoidable we then encourage the use of public transport rather than travel by private vehicle. We have a car share database available on our intranet and encourage staff to walk or cycle to work, we have cycle parking facilities and showers available at all sites.

We also have a well established culture that recognises the diversity of staff as set out in VLA's staff handbook – chapter 13 – Equality and Diversity and in which we practice behaviours that are designed to promote both *personal well being* and business performance, as such VLA has been formally recognised as an Investor in People since 1999 and the policies are set out in the VLA staff handbook – chapter 9 – Learning and Development.

To contribute to our staff's work life balance we have a nursery on site at the central Weybridge facility, and also run a playscheme for under 12s during school holidays. We also have a canteen, a social club/bar and a gymnasium/fitness room at Weybridge.

## **Key Areas for Action**

### **Leadership**

- We will develop the objectives and targets within our Business Plans covering the period of this report by 31 March each year, taking fully into account the priorities and principles of *Securing the Future* and Defra's renewed Mission for 2008 - 2011 of *Living within our environmental means*, and the new departmental strategic objectives.
- We will re-emphasise to staff our commitment to SD through our established team briefing process and through revamping the sustainable development pages on the VLA intranet.
- We will carry out a review of the plan in October 2008 and update our goals, if required.
- We will introduce a quarterly newsletter on sustainable development, publishing the first edition in March 2008.

## **Building capacity/capability**

- We will maintain links with Defra, other Defra Agencies and the SDC throughout the period of this plan to share knowledge and best practice of SD. We will do this by attending periodic meetings with Defra , the SDC and other Defra Agencies and implementing their comments on this plan and the VLA's 2007 SD progress report.
- We will raise the awareness of our people of the latest Defra SD agenda and support them in thinking about how it impacts on their work and actions. We will do this through regular team briefings, through introducing a new quarterly newsletter and through revamping the SD pages on our intranet.

## **Engagement and SD communications**

- We will ensure that the Business Director and/or the Estates and Environment Manager is available to staff who will be able to invite them to their team meetings to answer any questions and to listen to any suggestions they may have to improve our SD related actions. Suggestions will be welcomed and those that are carried through will be advertised in the quarterly newsletter.
- We will give staff the opportunity to comment on the SDAP as part of the awareness campaign above by 31 December each year and the plan will be accessible to staff via our Sustainable Development intranet pages thereafter.
- We will publish the plan on both our public website and intranet. We will invite staff and other stakeholders to send comments to our SD Champion.
- We will report on the outcome of our actions in our Annual Report and Accounts for 2008 and 2009 and consider using the SDC progress reporting template to help us frame the information.

## **VLA as an employer of choice**

- We will carry out a staff opinion survey in 2008 to measure the levels of *personal well being* of our people.
- We will aim to at least maintain the high level of satisfaction of our people (in 2006 - 67% were satisfied with their job, 65% were proud to work for VLA and 72% felt they were treated with fairness and respect), as a measure of *personal well being*.
- We will ensure that we continue to meet the Investor's in People (IiP) standard.

- We will ensure that recruitment complies with the Civil Service Commissioner's Recruitment Code and that staff are appointed through open and fair competition and on merit.
- We will ensure our appraisal system continues to be based on a well established competency framework and meets the liP standard
- We will refresh awareness across VLA via team briefings, weekly bulletins and intranet notices by 30 March, of the initiative to offer one day's special leave with pay for volunteering.
- We will encourage our staff to volunteer and aim to increase the number of our people volunteering during the period of this plan.

### **Sustainable operations**

- Working with Defra Estates Division and the Shared Services Directorate we will continue to implement the following measures to enable us to reduce our carbon footprint and to be able to demonstrate reductions towards the Ministerial targets set;
  - A commitment to regularly review energy use at all sites and to compile an action plan to control or reduce consumption where this would be economically viable – as a first step we are installing a number of additional meters and an automatic meter reading system.
  - T5 lighting – a trial is being undertaken to evaluate the possible savings.
  - Power Perfectors have been purchased for two buildings.
  - Enersol fuel efficiency units have been installed on some boilers and are being evaluated.
  - Horizon scanning for any new technologies which could enhance energy efficiency.
- On the Weybridge redevelopment we will continue with plans to install wind turbines, heat recovery units, natural air cooling, solar thermal heating, grey water harvesting etc as part of sustainable buildings.

### **Procurement**

- We will review our procurement procedures in relation to SD.
- We will devise our own sustainable procurement strategy by 31 March 2008, using feedback from the Procurement Capability Review, working with Defra's central procurement initiatives and sharing knowledge of SD procurement in practice.

- We will support the sustainable procurement strategy by providing training for key procurement in April/May 2008, calling on Defra for guidance on appropriate training.
- We will between April 2008 and March 2009, review the implementation of the procurement strategy and subsequent expenditure, and identify key procurement sustainability impacts. We will consider the feasibility of using this information as baseline to set targets in the next plan.
- We will report on progress on the implementation of the strategy in our Annual Report and Accounts in June 2009.

## Travel

- We will by 31 December 2008 consider the feasibility of the VLA participating in the Government Carbon Offsetting Fund to help the Government to reduce carbon emissions by 20% by 2010.
- We will issue a weekly bulletin by 31 March 2008 requiring all staff to consider the feasibility of reducing travel by using video or telephone conferencing facilities. We will consider starting a register to record all instances where these facilities are used as an alternative to travelling.
- We will promote the health benefits of cycling and walking and publicise the facilities available for cyclists at all sites. We will also seek to publicise and widen membership of our Bicycle Users Group.
- We will continue to calculate carbon emissions for air travel on a quarterly basis and will compare figures year on year to monitor reductions in emissions and to learn lessons about alternative means of travel.

## IT

- We will embed SD in our IS/IT strategy for 2008/9 and include priority areas to be agreed by VLA's IT Strategy Committee (ITSC).
- We will work with our hardware suppliers to define an optimum IT hardware strategy which incorporates sustainability alongside usual VFM and other business demands.
- We will provide new software and hardware technologies in order to reduce unnecessary travel, support flexible working and improve work/life balance for VLA staff.
- We will, to coincide with the move into our new corporate HQ building at Weybridge, upgrade any older IT equipment with new energy efficient equipment

and where practical incorporate shared multi-purpose devices which will help to reduce the amount of energy consumed .

- We will remind our staff via team briefings, weekly bulletins and the intraVet, that they can help conserve energy by turning off their computer screens in business hours when they are not using them, as well as turning off all equipment when they go home.
- The SD lead and members of the Accommodation team will carry out unannounced spot checks four times a year to record the number of empty desks with screens not turned off and issue personal reminders as appropriate.

### **Governance and accountability**

- We will ensure that our Business Plan takes account of Defra's renewed Mission and the resulting annual targets set for us by Defra Ministers' each year.
- We will ensure that our performance against our high level business objectives including the high level business objectives in this plan are subject to independent audit in the Spring each year.
- We will include the actions in this plan in team workplans (where appropriate) to ensure that we implement them and monitor progress at quarterly SMG meetings.
- We will review and act on progress specifically against the plan at our quarterly SMG Board meetings starting in January 2007. Minutes will be posted on the SMG intranet pages providing an audit trail.
- We will review and act on infrastructure related implementation of the plan at our monthly Sitewide Coordination meetings, and report progress to SMG on a quarterly basis.

**VETERINARY LABORATORIES AGENCY  
NOVEMBER 2007**