Update for Tynwald Members – BSE Negligible Risk (NR) Status – March 2026

1. Current Position on BSE Status

The Isle of Man continues to operate under Undetermined Risk rules because the Island was not included within the UK's August 2024 application for Negligible Risk status to WOAH. DEFA officers were formally informed of the UK application in March 2025, which was too late to join the submission. The UK Government has since confirmed that the Isle of Man's exclusion was unintentional.

As a result:

- Manx-born cattle continue to require full Specified Risk Material (SRM) removal, including spinal cord, and additional segregation measures.
- Great Britain–born cattle no longer require these measures following the UK's status change.
- This regulatory divergence is driving processing practicalities and cost implications in some GB abattoirs. Unfortunately, some GB abattoirs are not accepting Isle of Man born cattle.

2. Impact on Farmers and Markets

2.1 UK Abattoir Costs

Costs for Manx-born cattle vary significantly between plants with some GB abattoirs having introduced additional charges to cover extra handling and segregation requirements. Other GB abattoirs continue to process Manx cattle with no additional costs, including ABP (one of the largest abattoirs in the UK), which has confirmed it will continue to take Manx born cattle at no extra cost but with some logistical adjustments.

DEFA has not yet been able to establish verified financial impact figures but continues to gather evidence, noting a varying cost differential between GB and IOM born cattle. It is not clear if this is a reflection of the market, or if this is a reflection of anticipated additional slaughter costs associated with the contrasting BSE status.

The Department has been working with GB meat plant associations and exporters to gather information on which plants will continue to take Isle of Man born cattle, but the information they are providing is not consistent. Thus the Department has written to over 60 abattoirs in the north of England and Wales asking for information on their position on accepting Isle of Man born cattle.

2.2 Export Volumes

Exports of Manx cattle continues; 634 cattle were exported to GB between Nov 2025–Feb 2026, compared to 620 in the same period the previous year, demonstrating that trade is continuing despite challenges.

3. Route to Restoring Parity

Our application for Negligible Risk status currently sits with UK authorities for review. The 2026 WOAH assessment window closed before the Island was aware an application was required. The earliest available WOAH assessment is May 2027, with EU alignment likely 6 months later, meaning restored parity would be late 2027 at the earliest. However the UK Chief Veterinary Officer has written to the EU to see if they will accept an application prior to the WOAH application; this would not resolve all of the issues but would help. We understand they are still awaiting a response from the EU.

4. Engagement with UK Government

As stated at the February sitting of Tynwald the Isle of Man Chief Veterinary Officer, DEFA's Chief Officer, and I recently met with Baroness Hayman of Ullock, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at DEFRA. The meeting was constructive and, as outlined above, the UK government has committed to exploring whether an early application to the EU could be made before WOAH's 2027 determination. There was also a commitment to more regular meetings between DEFA and DEFRA Ministers.

5. Support Under Consideration

DEFA is currently identifying GB abattoirs willing to accept Manx cattle without surcharges. It is also assessing potential practical and financial interventions, ensuring any support is proportionate, fair, and aligned with the long-term Agricultural Strategy. Officers are continuing to monitor and analyse evolving costs and impacts as more data becomes available.

The Department is working with the meat plant to ensure it is ready to support additional cattle if required.

6. Conclusion

DEFA recognises the seriousness of the situation and the uncertainty it brings for farmers. We remain in constant contact with UK officials, abattoirs, and industry partners to minimise disruption and secure market access. Work continues at pace to progress the Island's Negligible Risk application and to prepare potential support measures where needed.