

Review of 2024 and a Vision for 2025!

It has been a privilege to represent and serve members of our local veterinary profession as President of the North of Ireland Veterinary Association this year. At its core, NIVA is a membership organisation, for all members of our profession, and my aim from the beginning was to encourage our members through dealing with some topical issues and creating opportunities for us to get together and catch up – to get beyond surviving at times to thriving! At the start of the year, I was absolutely delighted to bring back the termcard – there have been so many positive comments about it!

Insights

In NIVA we've been dedicated to placing the veterinary viewpoint at the centre of high level discussions and lobbying on key animal health and welfare issues. On access to veterinary medicines, we continue to emphasise to the Cabinet Office the need for information and action in terms of solutions and mitigations, at the earliest opportunity. Veterinary representation on small animal issues has been provided in tandem with BVA-NI.

NIVA continues to represent the veterinary profession at the Agricultural Policy Stakeholders' Group, where we continue to press for greater emphasis on animal health and welfare, and coverage of all the livestock sectors in DAERA's Sustainable Agriculture Programme.

With the production of the CVO's review into bTB and the establishment of the TB Partnership Steering Group, in NIVA we're glad to be at the table to contribute to the discussion and policy development going forwards.

Looking back

Our CPD events this year have been really well attended, the feedback has been excellent and the discussions fascinating. From the joint meeting in March with AVSPNI, with Professor Eric Morgan (QUB) and Dr Maria Guelbenzu (Animal Health Ireland) on part one of 'Reducing the consequences of endemic diseases of livestock', attended by over 80 vets to part two at 'TB@T3' where over 90 vets turned out, we've been challenged and hopefully enthused.

Our first outing as an Association to Balmoral Show went extremely well and I was very pleased to welcome the AERA Minister Andrew Muir, Health Minister Robin Swann, AERA Committee Chair Tom Elliott, DAERA Permanent Secretary Katrina Godfrey, CVO Brian Dooher and other key stakeholders to the informal event. An equally important gathering took place at the Seniors' get-together in the Long Gallery at Stormont, where John Hill gave an absorbing presentation on the invasion of the Asian Hornet. At the Summer YVN day at Edenmore, Lara Wilson focussed on communication skills, with encouraging levels of engagement with our younger colleagues.

In May I was delighted to host our first webinar, as mandated by our membership, with Nic Masters, international zoo vet based at Toronto Zoo, who encouraged us to engage with the issues faced in managing non-domestic species. His presentation provided excellent background to our visit in June to Belfast Zoo where we were fascinated by Michael Griffith's terrific talk on developments and conservation projects at the zoo, and it was fantastic to see so many children enjoying the superb interactive session with the zoo's education team. Our

second webinar, this month, brought us ideas for psychological hacks as we interact with clients, customers and others, thanks to Alison Burrell of AHI.

In October the launch of NIVA's Equine Welfare Priorities report at Stormont drew an impressive line-up of speakers, thanks to the work of Esther Skelly-Smith, and was a highly successful day. Our November debate on the concept of 'rewilding' allowed us to grapple with its ethics (testing the concept of thriving together!), courtesy of Dr Jonny Hanson. And we thoroughly enjoyed an outstanding presentation by our very own Susan Cunningham, who has been using her "spare" time in recent years to volunteer with the Worldwide Veterinary Service and Mission Rabies.

Looking out

This year I've been pleased to be able to raise awareness for a couple of charities, including Life Beyond (a support service for bereaved families run by Rural Support) and Ripple Effect (previously known as Send A Cow and which is making a marked impact in Africa). We've also donated to VetSupport (on top of the subscription collection), Daisy Lodge and 'Four Roads to Freedom'. Thank you all for your generosity!

Credit must go to NIVA's Officer team and Council for stepping beyond their normal voluntary tasks to shoulder more duties than usual this year. We have appreciated the work of VetNI, both behind the scenes and in expertly facilitating events throughout this year, particularly as they have dealt with some difficult times. Going forward, we're optimistic that our re-defined working relationship will benefit both NIVA members and VetNI.

Reflections

There have been sadnesses for our veterinary family during this year, as we lost several members. At such times, we're inclined to pause and think through what really matters in our lives. One song I've listened to regularly this year has been 'This beating heart' by Matt Redman - the words are poignant:

Something inside of me
Knows there is surely more than this
Echoes of eternity all around us.

A reminder to make every day count...

Looking forward, an evening with Prof Darrell Abernethy (previous epidemiology lead in Veterinary Service) promises to be entertaining. Please register if you haven't done so already, and come along to meet with friends old and new.

Our Vision

In NIVA, there are wonderful opportunities for good friendships, good company and good communities including all members of the veterinary profession irrespective of their career direction.

While it's been an unexpectedly challenging year, I am very happy to have had the opportunity to give a little back to the profession. Thank you to all of you who have been very supportive this year. I wish Kirsten a wonderful year ahead as she takes on the Presidency. May NIVA continue to thrive!