

MEMORANDUM FOR SUBMISSION TO CABINET

BY HON. MINISTER OF TRADE, INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURE

SCHEME FOR THE ERADICATION OF CAPRINE BRUCELLOSIS

Several years after the vaccination of goats was introduced in Malta, the incidence of caprine brucellosis had fallen to a level where an attempt at the total eradication of the disease could be economically justified.

The Second 5-Year Development Plan (1964-69) provided a sum of £10,000 to be used in incentive payments to goat owners to encourage them to eradicate brucellosis from their herds.

In 1965, therefore, a voluntary scheme was introduced which promised a bonus payment of 15/- per goat in herds that had been registered as brucellosis-free. To qualify for registration the owner was required to slaughter positive goats on his own account, but received the bonus of 15/- a head on the disease-free herd. This generous incentive was necessary since it was considered that compulsion could not be applied until the newly developed diagnostic methods, on which testing depended, had been proved in practice. The voluntary scheme was well supported by herds in Gozo; more than a quarter of the herds present, had been registered as brucellosis-free.

By this time, however, the incidence of caprine brucellosis in Gozo had fallen to a level of about 2½% and since the technical methods used had been proved sound, it was considered that the eradication of caprine brucellosis could, henceforth, be more speedily and economically achieved by changing the procedure to one of compulsory testing with slaughter of positive goats and payment of £10 compensation per head for goats slaughtered; no more bonus payments would be made. At a level of 3% of reactors, the proposed method would be much less costly, e.g. in a herd of 100 goats with 3 reactors Government, under the old voluntary scheme, would have to pay £72.15s. in bonus payments the first year and the same sum in each subsequent year if the necessary re-tests were to be carried out. Under the proposed compulsory scheme, on the other hand, Government would need to pay only £21 (£10 per goat - £3 realized from the sale of the slaughtered goat as meat) compensation in the first year and nothing in subsequent years so long as the herd remained free.

As a measure of economy the old bonus scheme, under which £3,000 of the original £10,000 had been spent, was stopped early in 1967 and the necessary legislation to make testing slaughter compulsory, was passed in the Spring of the same year. However, up to the end of 1967 the introduction of the new scheme was still being held up pending the Financial Secretary's approval for the payment of compensation for goats slaughtered, although £7,000 still remains available. This delay has produced disappointment amongst the department's staff, who were waiting to work the scheme, and also amongst herusmen who, as a result of Government propaganda were anxious to push on with eradication.

There are several reasons why the campaign should be first applied in Gozo. It is estimated that there are somewhat in the region of 225 positive goats to be slaughtered and this would cost £1,575. The eradication of caprine brucellosis from Gozo would demonstrate that financial aid was being put to good use and would encourage the provision of more aid for future schemes.

Hon. Ministers are asked to consider whether the proposed compulsory testing scheme with the slaughter of positive goats and payment of £10 compensation per head for goats slaughtered should be introduced in Gozo.

19th February 1968.