

## **NORTH EAST SCOTLAND AGRICULTURE ADVISORY GROUP: 7 SEPTEMBER 2022**

### **BULLETIN: LIVESTOCK FEED LOSS ISSUE**

#### **1 Executive Summary/Recommendations**

**1.1** This reason for this report is to respond to a query raised by Cllr David Bremner at the prior meeting of NESAAG – specifically the implications of large flocks of herring gulls competing with outdoor pig herds for feed.

#### **2.1 The Group is recommended to:**

##### **2.1.1 Note this bulletin**

#### **3 Discussion**

**3.1** Noting the large flocks of herring gulls around outdoor pig unit feeding stations in Moray, Cllr David Bremner asked at the prior meeting of NESAAG whether feed cost and other implications were known. Contact was made with Andy McGowan, Managing Director of Huntly-based Scottish Pig Producers. He advised that it was indeed a major problem. ‘As well as the losses of feed, they (the gulls) are significant vectors for disease, including Salmonella’. The volume of feed lost is not known but is considerable – one unit was surveyed and over 10,000 gulls were counted - but as a ‘red list’ species, conventional vermin control methods are not possible. Mr McGowan advised that some success has been achieved by redesigning feed station designs to make it harder for gulls to access the feed. But that comes at a cost to the farmer and the long term effectiveness of the modifications is unknown – gulls can be very persistent.

**3.2** Some preliminary discussions were undertaken by Economic Development to assess whether sensory deterrence might be an option. A contact within the energy sector advised that girders on offshore gas platform have been adopted as nesting ledges for over 30 years by thousands of kittiwakes, despite attempts to discourage them by using traditional deterrents. These include roof spikes, commonly seen on buildings. The kittiwakes were reported to have favoured sites with spikes, weaving debris around them to improve the storm resistance of their nests. Now that some platforms are being decommissioned, the birds need to be dispersed humanely before nesting season begins, by using a combination of deterrence measures including light, sound and deploying raptors. The cost of these measures is reported to be very high.

**3.3** Information online suggests that the range of diseases spread by birds to pigs (typically through contaminated feed and/or water) can include E.coli, Campylobacter, Listeria and Brachyspira (Swine dysentery). Pigs raised indoors are also vulnerable. Management measures include avoiding feed spillages around mills, feed bins and feed stations. An array of acoustic and

visual scarers is also suggested - birds quickly 'habituate' to a single deterrence strategy. A rotating series of deterrence measures is therefore recommended. Simultaneous combinations of different methods may also be helpful. Acoustic deterrence may not be acceptable to local residents. Over and above exclusion strategies, it may be possible to reduce the scale of the problem by considering changes to feed type, to either 'wet' or pelleted feed, by shortening the length of the 'feed face' or by relocating the feed stations to nearer the fence line.

- 3.4 Around 60% of Scotland's pigmeat is produced in NE Scotland. Given the sector's importance, regionally and nationally, and in the light of emerging digital and other technology, it may be possible to research and explore novel solutions, potentially as a student project or an academic study, should local farmers wish to pursue the matter further.

#### 4 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 4.1 This report is relevant to all of the following Council priorities:

| Pillar          | Priority                                     |
|-----------------|--|
| Our People      | Education<br>Health & Wellbeing              |
| Our Environment | Infrastructure<br>Resilient Communities      |
| Our Economy     | Economy & Enterprise<br>Estate Modernisation |

- 4.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed.

| Subject  | Yes | No | N/A |
|--|-----|----|-----|
| Financial  |     |    | X   |
| Staffing   |     |    | X   |
| Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland              |     |    | X   |
| Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing |     |    | X   |
| Climate Change and Sustainability                |     |    | X   |
| Health and Wellbeing                             |     |    | X   |
| Town Centre First                                |     |    | X   |

#### 4 Scheme of Governance

- 5.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

- 5.2 NESAG is able to consider this item in terms of its remit to provide a NE Scotland focus to enable issues and concerns across the agricultural and related sectors to be addressed. This includes strengthening economic development links across the wider land-based sector and food industry, contributing to regional and local priorities, improving links between industry, the environment and biodiversity and contributing to policy development and consultations.

**Alan Wood, Director of Environment & Infrastructure Services**

Report prepared by Derek McDonald, Industry Support Executive (Rural & Maritime)  
29 August 2022