

Media Release



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NPA calls for tougher illegal meat import rules after 'deeply worrying' Dover seizures

The NPA has called for all non-commercial meat imports to the UK be made illegal and for more resources to be allocated to enforcing the law, after it emerged that large quantities of meat are being seized at the Port of Dover.

Revelations that 57 tonnes of illegally imported pigmeat have been seized at the Port of Dover since September 2022 are deeply worrying. This included 5.5 tonnes of illegal meat seized over the weekend before Christmas, alone.

Beverley Edmondson, Port Health Manager at Dover District Council and Port Health Authority, said the large quantities being seized by Dover Port Health Authority (DPHA), despite 'limited resource', could be just the 'tip of the iceberg'.

In an article for the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health's EHN magazine, she gave a sobering update on the port's progress in implementing rules introduced in September 2022 to protect the UK pig herd from African swine fever (ASF). The rules make it illegal for travellers to bring pork products weighing over 2kg into the country from the EU unless produced to EU commercial standards.

"We are seeing unprecedented quantities of illegal, non-compliant meat, unparalleled at any other point of entry," Ms Edmondson said.

"Our experiences over the last 12 months have highlighted the scale and scope of the illegal meat trade, and why our work to remove it from the food chain is so critical. We estimate that, for every tonne of illicit meat removed, there are multiple tonnes entering GB undetected," she said.

She suggested the work should be placed under port health authority jurisdiction, rather than Border Force, for specific high-risk locations such as Dover, and said it was 'imperative resources are appropriately channelled and maintained to ensure we can keep this stuff out'.

NPA response

NPA chief executive Lizzie Wilson praised the work being done by the DPHA on behalf of the pig industry. "This can be difficult and unpleasant work and we are hugely grateful for the tireless efforts being made by DPHA to seize this illegal meat that could contain ASF virus," she said.

"But the volumes being seized are deeply worrying. The most worrying aspect of all this is the assumption that the meat being seized at Dover represents only the tip of the iceberg. It is, sadly, inevitable that lots of this illegally imported meat is getting into the country, some of which could well be infected with ASF.

"We understand, anecdotally, that due to the cost-of-living crisis, there is a growing black market for meat in this country, which will be driving the demand for illegally imported meat for both domestic and commercial use.

"As we know from the regular emergence of ASF in new areas across Europe, often attributed to human spread, it will only take one incident of a piece of infected meat reaching a pig to bring the entire pig industry to its knees.

“We are therefore calling on the Government to extend the current ban to all non-commercial pork imports rather than just consignments over 2kg. This will make it simpler for travellers to understand and easier to enforce.

“It is also absolutely essential that, as Beverley Edmondson suggests, this vital work is properly resourced – it must be maintained and strengthened, wherever possible. “We also urge the Government to consider her call for responsibility for these checks to be transferred from Border Control to the port health authorities.

“We continue to call on Defra to improve our border controls, generally, and are seeking assurances from Government that there will be no more delays to the implementation of proper border checks on commercial imports via the Border Target Operating Model, which has now been postponed five times.

“An outbreak of ASF would be catastrophic for the pig sector, with many knock-on effects. We urge the Government to take this threat seriously.”

Notes to editors

- 1) You can read more about the work at the Port of Dover [HERE](#)
- 2) ASF continued to spread to new parts of Europe in 2023, often attributed to human-mediated spread. It was [discovered in wild boar in Sweden for the first time in September](#). In May, [ASF jumped to a new area of southern Italy in domestic pigs and wild boar](#). There were major outbreaks in the Balkans in 2023.
- 3) APHA has designated the risk of ASF entering Great Britain from the human-mediated pathway as ‘HIGH’ (occurs very often), while the risk of entry in live animals and products of animal origin (POAO) from affected countries, remains at ‘MEDIUM’ (occurs regularly).
- 4) The Government has repeatedly delayed the introduction of official import controls on EU POAO, with checks at ports not due to start until April 30, 2024.
- 5) Rules introduced in September 2022 to protect the pig sector from ASF make it illegal for travellers to bring pork products weighing over 2kg into the country from the EU unless produced to EU commercial standards.
- 6) The NPA [recently called on for action from Government to prevent and prepare for an outbreak of ASF](#). Key points:
 - No further delays on checks for goods entering the UK from the EU under the Border TOM. Physical checks at ports are due to commence in April, after numerous delays.
 - Improved border controls for meat imports, including sniffer dogs at ports/airports/Eurotunnel and postal hubs) and better communications, including messaging at points of entry, to emphasise the risks of bringing in meat products.
 - A review of APHA resource and available expertise to ensure it has the capability to respond quickly and effectively to notifiable disease outbreaks, particularly as the ongoing Avian Influenza prevalence means that we could see concurrent outbreaks of two different notifiable diseases.
 - The urgent need to agree a plan for regionalisation with our trading partners to ensure that unaffected parts of the UK could still export pork in the event of an outbreak.

More information

For more information, email: NPA@npanet.org.uk, tel: 02476 858780