

VETERINARY IRELAND PRESS RELEASES

Media Release (19 June 2008)

Veterinary Ireland responds to Competition Authority Report on the Profession

The Competition Authority today (19 June 2008) launched its report on competition in veterinary services in Ireland. The report highlights areas where changes in current veterinary practice could, “make it easier for consumers to make informed decisions about veterinary services, encourage vets to offer new and better services, and ensure an adequate supply of veterinary services in Ireland in the long term.”

The report recommends that the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food monitor the number of vets providing food animal services, consider the introduction of lay TB testing following completion of the Herd Health Initiative and change the law to allow corporate bodies to supply veterinary services. It also recommends that the Veterinary Council of Ireland should limit its restrictions on advertising and remove its prohibition on touting.

In a very initial comment on the recommendations in the report, Veterinary Ireland President Ciara Feeney said: “At first reading of this report I would acknowledge that there are a small number of “restrictions” in place which can be termed as such when viewed from a solely “competition” viewpoint. When other over-riding considerations such as public health, animal health and animal welfare are taken into account however it becomes clear that such “restrictions” are in fact vital “protections” imposed by legislative and ethical requirements with which the profession has to comply. These “protections” are imposed mainly by Irish and EU legislation for the benefit of veterinary clients and their animals and in the best interests of the population as a whole. They are not designed for the competitive benefit of the veterinary profession”.

In launching its report the Authority acknowledged that “recent legislation went a long way to modernising the profession.” In that context the legislators had the opportunity to consider and debate some of the issues being raised again today, as had the Veterinary Council appointed under the new legislation when developing the current Code of Conduct. The legislators and Council members adopted earlier recommendations but decided against some others – bearing in mind their other responsibilities for the protection of public health and animal health and welfare. “Nevertheless,” Ms Feeney said, “Veterinary Ireland will work with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food and the Veterinary Council of Ireland in their further consideration of the five specific recommendations in the report”.

Commenting on some of the details in the report, Ms Feeney went on to welcome the Authority’s recognition that “new threats to animal health, such as Johne’s Disease, Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis (IBR) and bovine mastitis will become increasingly important as a result of the globalization of food markets and animal products”. “We would concur entirely with the Authority’s view that in response Ireland may need to broaden the scope of its disease-eradication programmes which could increase the demand for veterinary services”, she said.

The report also acknowledges that “there are wide variations in fees charged by vets and in charging methodologies” – a clear reflection of the competition which exists in this area. “The use in the report of CSO data to confirm that the price of private veterinary services in the agriculture sector has generally increased in line with the general rate of inflation and the rate of inflation for agricultural inputs over the last twelve years”, was also welcomed by Veterinary Ireland.

The Report also states that “there do not appear to be any pressing restrictions on those wishing to provide veterinary services” and bodies such as – the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and the EGFSN – the body appointed by the Government to advise it on aspects of education and training related to the future skills requirements of the enterprise sector in Ireland - are quoted in the Report as not perceiving “any shortage in the supply of vets in Ireland”.

As a final comment on the Report, Ms Feeney said that the veterinary profession is proud of its work on behalf of the public and with their animals. “We believe that the profession’s commitment and contribution are recognized and Veterinary Ireland would not want to see this hard-won reputation damaged or diminished – even inadvertently – in any discussions of matters such as this”, she concluded.

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