

Decision of the Charter Case Committee

in respect of

JOHN CHRISTOPHER MANSON, MRCVS

The Charter Case Committee met remotely on 29 July 2025 to consider the following allegation against John Christopher Manson MRCVS:

that, while acting as Official Veterinarian on behalf of the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), an executive agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, (Defra) he:

1(a) On or around 23 October 2023, signed an Animal Health Certificate numbered EHC23/2/354288 for two bovine animals to be exported from the United Kingdom to the European Union via Northern Ireland, when:

- (i) that certificate indicated that the two bovines had been subjected to a clinical inspection within the 24-hour period prior to loading for dispatch to the European Union, carried out by an official veterinarian, who did not detect signs indicative of the occurrence of diseases; and*
- (ii) he had not undertaken a clinical inspection in accordance with APHA's and/or Defra's requirements and he had not ensured that there had been any such clinical inspection by an official veterinarian.*

1(b) With regards to the matters set out at 1(a) above, your conduct:

- (i) was dishonest; and/or*
- (ii) was misleading; and/or*
- (iii) risked undermining procedures designed to promote animal welfare.*

Background

1. Mr Manson MRCVS (the Respondent) is a registered veterinary surgeon.
2. The concerns in this case were raised by APHA, an executive agency sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) to safeguard animal and plant health for the benefit of people, the environment and the economy. As a part of this work, APHA contracts Official Veterinarians ("OVs") to carry out specific services including export certification, testing and surveillance for animal diseases.

3. In October 2023, the respondent was engaged by an exporter as an OV to certify two cattle as fit for export to the Republic of Ireland. On Thursday 19 October 2023, he signed an Export Health Certificates (EHC) for each of the two animals, stamped the certificates with his OV stamp, then initialled and signed each page.
4. The animals arrived in Larne in Northern Ireland on 21 October 2023 and were inspected by Veterinary Inspectors (VIs) from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) prior to continuing their journey to their final destination. The VIs noted that there were some errors on the certificates, that the two bovines did not have the correct ear tags in place, and that there was also a problem with their journey log.
5. As a result, the VIs decided that the cattle could not be admitted into Northern Ireland. They were kept at Larne until Monday 23 October 2023, when they were re-exported back to Scotland, where they arrived at approximately 18.00 after a ferry journey of approximately 2 hours.
6. The animals were returned to Larne on the evening of the same day, accompanied by new EHCs signed by the Respondent and dated 23 October 2023. The certificates, which were copies and not the originals, stated that the animals had been clinically inspected by an OV within the 24-hour period prior to loading for dispatch to the European Union, and the certifying OV had not detected signs indicative of the occurrence of diseases.
7. The VIs at Larne noted that the practice stamp on the EHCs showed that the Respondent was based in Cheshire and they were concerned whether there had been sufficient time for the cattle to have been returned to Cheshire for inspection and to have been returned to Scotland for the ferry crossing to Larne that evening.
8. The VIs reported their concerns to APHA, who contacted the Respondent to ask how he had come to sign these new certificates. In an email, dated 27 October 2023, the Respondent replied: *"As I physically couldn't travel up to Scotland to re inspect the animals prior to completing the replacement EHC 23/2/354288 I arranged a video call with the transporter. I was able to see that both heifers had GB ear tags present and were fit and healthy."* In a subsequent interview with APHA on 1 December 2023, the Respondent confirmed he had carried out the inspection via video call.
9. As APHA rules provide that a clinical inspection for the purpose of an export health certificate must be made in person, not remotely, an APHA Review Panel was convened on 24 January 2024 to make an assessment. The Review Panel determined to suspend the Respondent's authorisations in relation to certain exports for a period of two years. Other authorisations, for example with regards to essential skills (ES) and tuberculosis testing (TT) remained in place. APHA then reported these matters to the College in April 2024.

10. Having reviewed the information, the Preliminary Investigation Committee identified the following concerns, namely that:

- a) The Respondent signed the two export health certificates on 23 October 2023 confirming that the animals had been clinically inspected by an OV within 24 hours of loading for export to the European Union, and that there had been no indication of the occurrence of disease,
- b) The Respondent's signing of the certificates was misleading as he had not clinically inspected the animals as required by APHA rules, given that he had not done so in person (and nor had any OV).
- c) The Respondent was dishonest when he certified to this effect, as he knew at the time he was signing that he had not clinically inspected the animals as required by APHA rules, and that they had not been clinically inspected by any other OV.
- d) The Respondent's certification of these animals in these circumstances risked undermining procedures designed to promote animal welfare, namely a system of export health certification by veterinary surgeons, which had been put in place in order to prevent the spread of disease.

11. In response to a request for information from the College, the Respondent provided a response on 12 June 2024 and set out the background to this event. With regard to the concerns raised he said in summary:

- he accepted that there had been errors on the original EHCs and although he had had conversations with the VIs in Larne, the VIs had decided to return the animals to Scotland.
- on 23rd October 2023 he received multiple calls and messages advising that a new EHC had been applied for and it should be available to complete.
- he understood that, at this point, the animals were in transit back to Scotland and were booked on a boat back to Larne that evening. He was unable to travel to Scotland to carry out a further physical examination and was unwilling to sign the certificates without carrying out an examination.
- he advised that a local veterinary practice should be approached to see if they could carry out the examination and sign the certificates, but when the transporter declined to do so, the Respondent agreed to complete the new EHC on the basis of a remote inspection of the animals via video. He said that he felt under pressure and “*an overwhelming sense of guilt and responsibility for the welfare of these animals, caused by my errors of certification*”. While he understood that his decision to conduct a remote video inspection was against the regulations, he felt he was doing it for the good of the animals.

- he could see on the video that these were the two same heifers he had originally inspected on the Thursday afternoon, that they both now had a GB ear tag present and that both still looked in good health. He was also reassured that the Veterinary Surgeon in Larne had deemed them fit to travel back to Scotland just hours earlier. He completed the EHC and emailed a scanned copy to the transporter.
 - he had not acted for financial gain but to try and correct his previous mistakes and in an attempt to uphold animal welfare.
12. In a subsequent correspondence to the College in January and March 2025, Mr Manson acknowledged that he had “*made a grave error of judgment*” by certifying on the basis of remote inspection but had done so as he was “*concerned for the animals’ welfare*”. He noted that, in certifying the animals without physically inspecting them, he was not following the APHA regulations or RCVS guidance but added “*I remain fully committed to safeguarding the integrity of all veterinary certification and recognise the importance of correct and accurate export health certification to maintain trust in the process. Whilst some of the errors made on the original certificates were due to misleading or ambiguous guidance, others were due to poor attention to detail by myself, for which I accept full responsibility and offer my apologies.*”
13. In an email dated 7 April 2025, Mr Manson accepted the allegations that had been raised against him, including that his conduct had been dishonest and misleading.

Decision

14. The Charter Case Committee (the Committee) was provided with the following documents:
- The folio of papers, including the notes and outcomes of the investigation by APHA
 - The signed witness statements from:
 - IA, the Veterinary Inspector from DAERA on duty in Larne at the time
 - DW, a Veterinary advisor, APHA
 - VW, Review Panel lead, APHA
 - Correspondence between the Respondent and the College.
15. As a preliminary point the Committee reminded itself that it was only considering the issues in the charges and that other issues raised by APHA, including the ear tags and journey log, do not form part of this.

16. The Committee noted that, in January 2024, following an investigation, APHA had concluded that the Respondent had signed the export health certificate to certify that a clinical inspection, which must be carried out in person, had been carried out for the re-export of the two bovines when he knew this was not correct and that, as a result, he had (i) falsely certified the export health certificate and (ii) had carried out a remote inspection when he knew this was not allowed for live animal exports. The Committee noted that the Respondent had not appealed APHA's decision on the findings or the sanction.
17. The Committee also took into account the admissions made by the Respondent including his acceptance of the charges made against him, including that his actions had been dishonest and misleading.
18. The Committee reminded itself that the standard of proof to be applied was the Civil Standard of Proof, that is the balance of probabilities.
19. In this case the Committee gave careful consideration to all of the evidence available and was satisfied, on balance, that there was a realistic prospect of finding the allegations proved based on the Respondent's own admissions and the evidence available.
20. The Committee then considered whether it would be appropriate to conclude this matter by issuing the Respondent with a warning, either public or confidential, without the need for a referral to the Disciplinary Committee for a hearing.
21. It bore in mind that the overarching remit of the RCVS was to protect animal welfare and to act in the public interest, which included protecting the public, maintaining proper standards within the profession and maintaining public confidence in the profession. The Committee therefore considered whether a Warning would meet these criteria.
22. The Committee took into account the serious nature of the charges in this case. Although the Respondent had acknowledged that he was aware that the regulations for live exports required a certifying veterinary surgeon to be physically present before signing the EHC, he had signed the certificates on 23 October 2023, when he knew this was not the case and that he had only been able to carry out a video inspection. The Committee considered that the Respondent's actions had been dishonest and misleading because he knew when he signed the certificate that it was not compliant with the regulations.
23. The Committee also took into account the wider implications of the Respondent's actions. In deciding not to comply with the regulations, the Respondent had knowingly undermined the integrity of the certification system, which was in place to promote animal welfare and to ensure public health and which depended, to a large degree, on the competence and honesty of Veterinary Surgeons. His actions had therefore a wider impact than the welfare of the two animals involved.

24. It noted that the Respondent was an experienced Veterinary Surgeon and had previous experience of the work of an OV and should have understood the importance of the need for accuracy and integrity when carrying out his role. His failure to do so was a serious departure from the standards expected of a Veterinary Surgeon and may also serve to undermine public confidence in the profession, and the certification system.
25. However, the Committee noted that the Respondent had accepted responsibility for his actions. When concerns were raised about the EHCs by the VIs in Larne, he had disclosed straight away that he had not been physically present at the re-examination but had carried it out remotely. He had also made full admissions to APHA in their investigation, and to the College. The Committee noted that the Respondent accepted that his actions had been a “*grave error of judgement*” and that his actions had been misleading and dishonest.
26. In addition, the Committee was satisfied that the Respondent had shown insight and remorse for his actions. The Respondent accepted that his actions in relation to the second EHCs were not compliant with the regulations and that this had implications not only for the animals concerned but also for the certification system more widely, and the public’s confidence in the same. He had expressed genuine regret for his actions which he attributed to the stress of the situation, the timescales involved, and his belief that the situation needed to be resolved promptly for the welfare of the animals.
27. In summary, the Committee concluded that while the charges found against the Respondent were serious, and in particular the allegation of dishonesty, Mr Manson had shown significant insight and remorse into his actions. He had accepted that his actions could have had serious consequences for animal welfare and for public health and that his failure to comply with the regulations had undermined the integrity of the certification system.
28. It appeared that the Respondent’s actions had been a response to the specific circumstances of this case and his belief that he was acting for the benefit of the two animals involved. While the Committee did not consider that this could justify the Respondent’s actions, it bore in mind that this appeared to be a single incident and there was no evidence of attitudinal dishonesty. It had seen that the Respondent had stated to AHPA that he had decided not to undertake EHCs in future and that, taken together with the insight and remorse shown by the Respondent, suggested that the likelihood of repetition was low. In the circumstances the Committee considered that there was little risk of harm being caused by the Respondent to animals, the public, or the wider public interest, going forward.
29. On that basis, the Committee was satisfied that it was reasonable and proportionate and in the public interest to conclude this matter by issuing Dr Manson, MRCVS, with a Warning as to his future conduct, as set out below.

30. The Warning will remain on Dr Manson's record for a period of 6 months from the date of issue. The Committee considered that this period was proportionate bearing in mind the seriousness of the charges and to protect the public interest, which includes protection of the public as well as maintaining proper standards within the profession and maintaining public confidence in the profession and the regulator.

Publication

31. The Committee determined that the Warning should be published in accordance with the RCVS policy on publication.

Warning

32. The Committee therefore requested the Registrar to conclude this case by issuing the registrant, Dr John Christopher Manson, MRCVS with a Warning as to his conduct in respect of the matters set out in the charge and to note that this Warning will be taken into account by any future Committee which has to consider imposing a sanction. The Warning will be publicly available on Dr Manson's record for a period of 6 months from the date of issue.