**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Organisations say we must hit pause on ‘devastating’ suckler beef calving interval proposals**

Scotland’s smallest herds with fewer than 30 cows, which make up almost half (49%) of all beef holdings and 10.3% of total breeding dams, could see potential funding reductions of £241,240, the loss of one and a half livestock marts and a large abattoir.

This is the warning in an analysis of the proposed amendment to the Scottish Suckler Beef Scheme which seeks to add a 410-day calving interval addition. The Scottish Sucker Beef Support Scheme Briefing (SSBSS) Report (December 2024), authored by Neil Wilson, Executive Director of IAAS, is issued today by the Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland (IAAS), the National Beef Association (NBA) and the Scottish Beef Association (SBA).

Speaking on behalf of IAAS, which represents Scotland’s livestock auction marts, NBA and SBA, Mr Wilson says: “We seek a pause to the current course of action to allow all impacted stakeholders to reconvene with Government to agree a more suitable way forward. This will allow us to understand the Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment carried out for this policy update. If we do this at pace, we can still achieve a policy outcome during 2025 from this vital beef sector support scheme.”

The consequence of these changes will have far-reaching, and seemingly politically unconsidered implications, Mr Wilson adds: “Calving interval conditionality is a metric driven criterium that aims to target poorer performing herds, but its introduction could have a damaging ripple effect along the whole red meat supply chain that would undoubtedly lead to consolidation and closures of marts and meat processors.

“In 2023 Scottish marts sold 344,564 head of cattle for a value of £415.8 million – the loss of 100,000 head of breeding cattle would result in a contraction of almost one third and the economic loss of £120.6 million in cattle sales to the Scottish economy. This could easily lead to contraction in the sector with the loss of marts in remote areas a real possibility.”

In terms of beef processors, he adds that the five largest Scottish beef processors currently process 75% of the entire Scottish beef kill. The total kill is 344,700 [QMS 2024 Scottish Red Meat Industry Profile] with 258,525 head being processed by the five largest processors.

“The implementation of this conditionality on a historic support payment for the beef sector increases the risk of losing at least one large processor to the Scottish sector resulting in economic output and job losses. It would undoubtedly also lead to an acceleration in the closure of private kill facilities across Scotland, which is an area that Scottish Government has seemed keen to support,” Mr Wilson says.

Commenting on the wider net-zero targets intent of the calving interval conditionality, Mr Wilson says: “The overall impact of this proposed conditionality to the SSBSS has been poorly planned and researched, and the greenhouse gas emissions reduction implications have not been calculated by the Government, and we suspect that the impact on GHG reduction will be negligible at best. Government has failed to fully consider the impact across all farm sizes, and they have totally failed to consider the impact across the entire supply chain. The estimated emissions reduction put forward as being achievable under this policy will only be realised if a substantial number of ineligible cows are culled.

He adds: “We understand a mechanism needs to be implemented; however, this currently ignores the original rural development nature of the current scheme and the implementation of such could lead to a state of rural hardship that has not been accounted for.

“By pausing the conditionality introduction proposals now, impacted stakeholders will also be able to make a case to Government on how this policy could be finessed to support producers and supply chain participants and act as a foundation for the restoration of growth and the end to contraction of our beef industry.

“We need to find a way to work together to meet Government aspirations as well as delivering a comprehensive support package to assist producers with income support alongside advice on how calving interval and other performance metrics could be improved.”

The IAAS, NBA and SBA report is based on Scottish Government funded research from SRUC: Calving Intervals in Scotland’s Cattle Population: Conditionality Options Output Ref: RESAS/005/21 – W9, predominantly using the 2021 data for calculations.

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**Notes to Editors**

**About**

**IAAS**

The Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland (IAAS) is the representative body for livestock markets, valuers and auctioneers across Scotland. We fight for the interests of those markets and the central role they play in the working of the rural and agricultural economy. <https://iaas.co.uk/>

**NBA**

Since its inception almost twenty-five years ago, the NBA, has grown from strength to strength, and today, it remains the only dedicated voice for British Beef Farmers. At all times, its mission is to continually promote and support the UK beef industry at all levels by engaging with the Government and Devolved Administrations to defend the interest of beef farmers across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. <https://www.nationalbeefassociation.com/>

**SBA**

The Scottish Beef Association is a membership organisation that lobbies parliament and other appropriate bodies on behalf of Scottish Beef producers.  <https://www.scottishbeefassociation.co.uk/>