



Animal &  
Plant Health  
Agency

## APHA Briefing Note 52/22

# Certification of Unofficial Documents by Official Veterinarians.

**Date issued: 08 December 2022**

### Purpose

To remind OVs that they must not certify unofficial documents in their capacity as an authorised Official Veterinarian (OV) unless specific written permission has been granted by APHA or Defra.

To ask OVs to notify APHA of any requests for certification of commodities for export from GB under certificates which are not officially issued by APHA/Defra, for which they do not have written approval.

To note that for the context of this Briefing Note, 'unofficial' means not issued by APHA or for exports, by APHA or Defra.

### Background

APHA has been made aware of the use of unofficial certificates for the export of some commodities, including for live animals, from GB.

Veterinary Surgeons are not permitted to sign unofficial documents in their capacity as an OV unless APHA has given explicit permission in writing for a specific unofficial document to be used by an OV.

If an OV signs a document that refers to the signatory as being an Official Veterinarian, even if the OV stamp is not used, they are still certifying as an Official Veterinarian.

Any document being certified in a private veterinary capacity must not refer to the signatory being an "Official Veterinarian", either within the content or in the signature block,

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or refer to certification on behalf of the Competent Authority. The OV stamp must not be used. This applies to all documents signed as an OV and not just export certificates.

In the case of export certificates, these are either sent directly by APHA or available on APHA/Defra systems e.g. EHCO/Form Finder, or where specific written approval has been given by APHA for an OV to sign and stamp a non-Defra/non-APHA document. This approval may be in the Notes for Guidance (NFG) or it could be in the form of a letter or email from APHA for a specific case.

OVs must be aware that exports under unofficial certificates not bilaterally agreed by UK and the importing country, carry a risk of rejection of consignments at the point of entry in the importing country, potential reputational damage and animal welfare consequences in the case of live animals.

## Action

OVs must not sign unapproved unofficial documents as an OV.

If OVs are aware of any scenarios where unofficial documents are being certified by OVs and the cessation of this activity may have negative impacts e.g. may result in trade of a particular commodity being halted, they must notify APHA immediately in order that an alternative solution can be investigated.

In the case of export certificates, if an official export health certificate is required but does not exist for the commodity destined for export, this must be raised with APHA Centre for International Trade (CIT) Carlisle so that options can be considered.

## Further Information

APHA OV Team - [CSCOneHealthOVTeam@apha.gov.uk](mailto:CSCOneHealthOVTeam@apha.gov.uk)

Centre for International Trade (CIT), Carlisle – [exports@apha.gov.uk](mailto:exports@apha.gov.uk)