

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Pet smuggling, HC 926

Tuesday 24 November 2020

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Ian Byrne; Geraint Davies; Dave Doogan; Rosie Duffield; Dr Neil Hudson; Mrs Sheryll Murray.

Questions 1- 60

Witnesses

[I:](#) Paula Boyden, Veterinary Director, Dogs Trust; Dr Jennifer Maher, University of South Wales; Daniella Dos Santos, Senior Vice President, British Veterinary Association.

[II:](#) Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park, Minister for the Pacific and the Environment, FCDO & Defra; Marc Casale, Head of Animal Welfare, Defra.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [South Wales University](#)
- [The British Veterinary Association and The British Small Animal Veterinary Association](#)
- [Defra](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Lord Goldsmith and Marc Casale.

Q1 **Chair:** That leads us quite neatly on to our second panel. I see that the Minister has been watching us through part of the session. Welcome, Zac, very much, and also Marc Casale, head of animal welfare at Defra. Zac, do you want to introduce yourself and Marc, very briefly, and then we will go straight into our questions?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: Very briefly, my portfolio in Defra covers animal welfare and trees. Beyond that, most of my other responsibilities are international conservation—that includes animal welfare, incidentally—environment, climate and so on.

On the animal welfare portfolio, there is a determination in Government not only to maintain our position as world leaders in this field, but to go much further. We recognise there are a whole bunch of areas relating to animal welfare where we have not had an upgrade for a significant period of time. I hope at some point, at the appropriate time, I will be able to talk in more detail about what we are looking at. I will simply say that we are really pushing the boundaries of ambition. I am very aware of many of the recommendations that you and your Committee have made over time. Broadly speaking, on most issues, we are in a very similar space and we have a really exciting agenda. I hope soon to be able to talk about that in more detail, to be scrutinised by you and your colleagues and to receive suggestions and ideas.

You asked me to introduce Marc; I might let him do that himself. He is our guru in Defra on animal welfare issues. I am his pain-in-the-backside Minister. We talk far more than he would like to, I am sure. You probably know him; I imagine he has appeared before you a few times.

Marc Casale: Good afternoon, everybody. I am Marc Casale. I am the head of the animal welfare policy team in Defra.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you both very much. Thank you, Zac, for that statement. It leads quite neatly into my first question: what is the Government estimate of the scale of pet smuggling into the UK? Do you actually know how much smuggling is going on?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: I am afraid to say we do not. We have lots of anecdotal evidence, but we do not know how much smuggling is actually happening. We have glimmers and glimpses of the scale of the problem. For example, through the Dover pilot initiative—Marc will correct me if I am wrong—I believe there were around 500 interceptions. That tells us that there has been quite a clear increase on last year, but beyond those snapshots, we do not have reliable data. We are doing what we can to gather that data, through talking to our stakeholders and also those on the front line in helping us clamp down on smuggling.

I do not know if Marc wants to add anything to that. I am not sure there is that much more.

Marc Casale: No, it is quite difficult to get a solid grip of the figures. We have some understanding and we engage closely with all the key stakeholders and our enforcement bodies to get the best possible understanding of the trends.

Q3 **Chair:** I am not firing directly at you at Defra, but one of the major issues is that naturally these are very often criminal gangs or individual criminals, who are going to swap ports, come through late at night and do everything they can to evade being caught. To what extent have we got anybody, first, actually monitoring these ports later on in the evening and, secondly, understanding what they are looking for? In terms of ageing puppies and knowing whether the puppies have come from a particular bitch or whatever, do they know this stuff? To what extent can you as Defra influence Border Force and what is going on at our ports? We have been going round and round in circles on this one. I am not blaming you for it; I just think we have to get to grips with it.

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: I am not going to argue with that point. There is an issue, clearly, here. By its nature, it is difficult to know exactly how much smuggling is happening, because the whole point is that the better the smuggler, the easier it is for them to come in under the radar. We will never have a perfect system. APHA works very collaboratively with Border Force and other operational partners at ports, airports and inland, and shares intelligence across the board to enforce the pet travel scheme, to disrupt the imports and seize non-compliant animals and so on.

I know a point that has been raised before is the hours that APHA teams work. Yes, they have a Monday to Friday core obligation and there is a rotating shift for early, daytime and late, but they also are available to provide out-of-hours response during the peak periods and also when they have been given referrals, so it is more agile than it is sometimes given credit for. That is not to say that the coverage is comprehensive enough, and this is something we are looking very closely at. Of course, any decision we take in relation to ramping up our ability to police the import of illegal pets at the border comes with resource issues. There are other things that can be done, which we are also looking at, which would make it easier. I am sure we will come on to some of those suggestions. Many of them have come directly from you.

Q4 **Chair:** Can I suggest, perhaps, that you set up a hit squad that goes in? What you want with these gangs is to hit them at odd times, when they are not expecting it. They are going to avoid the peak periods and they are going to avoid the times when there are a lot of officials about, so we need to have people who are able to go in at different times of the day and night, understanding what they are looking for. I know it is not easy, but you do not need a resource all the time. What you need is the ability to put fear into these smuggling gangs that they could get caught and then link it to higher sentencing, which I am sure we will talk about later.

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: The only thing I would add is that the APHA approach for commercial imports is risk-based and intelligence-led. As I said, not every single animal that is brought in is evaluated by APHA, but the number is high enough, I would hope, that there is a

deterrent there. This is certainly an area that we are looking at, and I do not think anyone would suggest that we have a bulletproof guard at the border to prevent them coming in.

- Q5 **Chair:** What influence can you have, as a Minister involved in Defra with animal welfare, with the Home Office and Border Force on making smuggling of puppies a priority? Naturally, they have to deal with all sorts of issues. There is people smuggling and all sorts of awful things going on out there, but we also want puppy smuggling and the welfare conditions of these dogs dealt with. How can you make sure that Border Force and others are taking it seriously?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: The answer is really just through pressure, but it is not the only area where I am looking to boost the Home Office response. In my portfolio, I deal with illegal wildlife trade, which is related but a very different issue as well. As the illegal wildlife trade is not seen as a direct threat to our national security in the same way as some of the other issues that the Home Office is dealing with, it does not get the same attention. It is potentially the fourth biggest criminal sector and is destroying communities as well as wildlife, but it does not have that same level of urgency in relation to the security and safety of the realm as many other areas that the Home Office looks at. The answer is pressure, but nothing is ever guaranteed, of course.

- Q6 **Chair:** I want to change the tenor of the questions slightly. You told us in February that Defra was exploring possibilities for further research on the demand for puppies. What progress has been made? Paula from Dogs Trust was telling us earlier that we probably need 600,000 or 700,000 puppies a year to fulfil demand. We are not breeding enough good puppies in this country to fulfil demand, so there is going to be an automatic filling of that, if we are not careful, by smuggled puppies. What can we do and what can you as Defra do to see if we can stimulate breeding good-quality puppies with good breeders? Also, what possibilities are there of making sure that the puppies that we buy are from reputable breeders?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: There are two lines of answers. The first one is specifically in relation to trying to understand the market and understand demand. We know that demand has increased, as your previous panel made clear. Lifestyle changes as a consequence of Covid have meant that people feel better able to own and look after a dog, a cat or another pet. It is a moving field, but although we start from a position of not really understanding the market as well as we would like to, and although we have been knocked sideways since February, for all the obvious reasons—a number of our key animal welfare people were taken away to deal with Covid-related issues—we have a very successful Petfished media campaign. In the course of preparing that campaign and delivering it, we have been able to gather much more information than we thought we would initially. We are better informed about purchasing behaviours through the YouGov surveys and the focus groups that we did for the Petfished campaign, and we have a better feel for where demand is going and what form that demand takes.

You are right that demand domestically exceeds supply. One of the ways in which people are filling that gap, as you say, is through the illegal route.

The priority is probably to make it easier for those people on the front line whose job is to prevent illegal imports to do so. We are looking at some of the recommendations that I believe came from your Committee, around the age of puppies that are allowed to be brought in. It is hard to know, looking at a puppy, how old it is, but you can use your common sense. We are looking at issues around the number of pets that are allowed to come in with an individual on a non-commercial basis. We are looking at how to deal with issues around potentially bogus rescue centres. We have heard anecdotal and slightly more than anecdotal evidence on that point. We are looking at how we might close that potential loophole.

There is a limit to what I can unilaterally say and announce in this session, but if we get our response to this right, it will become harder for the worst or even the bulk of puppy smuggling to continue. It will simply be easier for those on the front line to detect it.

Marc Casale: When it comes to puppy smuggling, we tend to focus more broadly on illegal landings. That could be puppies that are found to be underage or perhaps do not have the right paperwork or the right health vaccinations, or maybe they have arrived and the transportation was no good. It is not necessarily people who are trying to conceal puppies in the boot of their car. Quite often these are openly transported, but they are non-compliant in some way, and that is our broader focus.

Q7 **Chair:** They are coming in under a legal route, are they not, sometimes? The route is legal, but what they are doing is illegal. It is trying to work out when they are acting illegally. That probably is quite an issue for officials to deal with, but is it perhaps something that you at Defra are looking at?

Marc Casale: Yes, and we have close working arrangements with Border Force and other sources of intelligence, to build up an understanding of the flows and what is happening, so that we can pinpoint our resources in the right places at the right times.

Again, on the more technical question about understanding the demand for puppies and the number of puppies, or indeed the number of dogs, we have in our country, we are again working very closely with a number of other stakeholders and partners who are also looking at this for their own reasons. For example, pet services providers and pet food suppliers want to know how many puppies are being produced each year and how many dogs are in circulation also at the main rescue centres, and so on. Some academic studies are also looking into this at the moment. We also have some research relating to how well dog microchipping is working, which is also looking into what the current population of dogs is in our country and relating to that how many puppies are being produced each year. There is quite a lot going on in this space, although it is a bit of a challenge to get an accurate figure.

Chair: When you have those figures, we would really like them.

Q8 **Ian Byrne:** I am going to direct this one to Marc, to give Zac a rest. Marc Abraham, who led the Lucy's law campaign, said that we now have two distinct sets of standards for puppies sold in England, depending on whether they are bred here or abroad. Abroad could also be Scotland or

Wales. Would you accept that Lucy's law has loopholes and, by preventing third-party sales, may actually be encouraging smuggling?

Marc Casale: I do not like the word "loophole". With Lucy's law, we said that if you are the licensed seller, you have to also be the breeder. The evidence you have received from Marc Abraham pointed out that it is indeed technically possible for the breeding to be done outside of England, but we are working very closely with the devolved Administrations. Talking about Scotland or Wales, for example, we are working very closely with them to ensure that we have a consistent and coherent approach to breeding standards applied across GB and indeed the UK more widely. That is how I would answer the point about that anomaly.

Q9 **Ian Byrne:** What about the second point about third-party sales encouraging smuggling?

Marc Casale: I would not say that they encourage smuggling. I would say that with people who bring in dogs and puppies that are found to be non-compliant, quite often we may be talking about sales that are conducted outside of England rather than in England, and the puppy that they have bought in a different country is being transported here. That is a different issue to where someone has bought the puppy in England but the seller happens to have done his or her breeding outside of England. Territoriality applies to sales in England, not to sales abroad delivered here.

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: Lucy's law is a brilliant initiative and the consequence of some phenomenal campaigning, which all colleagues on the call would have been aware of. Led by Marc Abraham and covered by the *Mirror*, it was a really phenomenal exercise in getting the whole country enthused by an animal welfare initiative. The Government share, and clearly I share, that commitment. It is new. It has been around for six months, in effect. That time has been Covid-affected in every conceivable way, so we cannot talk with certainty about how effective it is. I certainly do not want the Government to convey an impression of being in any way complacent. We want it to work, and where it needs strengthening, we will strengthen it. We know that there are certain ways in which it can be strengthened.

I wrote yesterday or a couple of days ago to colleagues in the devolved areas to ask them to look at their own approach to tackling these issues, to see if we can align our interests more closely. Obviously where you have a different approach you always create an opportunity for unscrupulous people to exploit those differences. Clearly that is not an intention of legislation, but the closer we are, the more coherent and robust our approach may be. There are other areas we are going to want to look at as well. While I cannot make commitments now, there are issues that were raised in the previous panel around the age limit of puppies being brought into this country, the number of puppies being brought in by individuals and non-commercial puppies. There are a lot of issues or levers there that have the potential to further strengthen what we have done on Lucy's law. I do not want to convey an impression either that we are complacent or that we are not happy with Lucy's law. It is a great step forward.

Q10 **Ian Byrne:** That is a very comprehensive answer. It leads me on to my

next question. Defra is required to publish a report reviewing the law by 1 October 2023. Blue Cross and Dr Jennifer Maher, who we had on before, have urged Defra to do a review to ensure changes can be made to make the legislation fit for purpose. Given the extent and seriousness of this issue, and some of the witnesses talking about it, would you consider bringing this forward?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: The obligation is, as you said, that we have to publish before the beginning of October 2023. That is a deadline. It does not require us to do so then. Between now and then, I am very keen to gather whatever information already exists. If we need to react on the basis of what we are told, then we will certainly do so. For me, if there is a burning issue that needs to be addressed and a clear legislative solution, we will take that solution. That is why I wrote to the devolved areas yesterday, because I know that would help all of us to tackle a problem that we all care about in a very serious way. Whatever steps we need to take, of course we are willing to take. The commitment I can make to you is I am not going to wait until October 2023 before assessing whether this thing has worked. We are very open in the meantime to having that discussion.

Q11 **Ian Byrne:** That is an excellent answer. Marc, would you like to add anything?

Marc Casale: We are currently engaging with the Canine and Feline Sector Group and other stakeholders in relation to the existing guidance that supports the regulations, to see how that could be reviewed and improved in places. That is already under way. We are also engaging closely with local authorities to get better data. Again, there is this question around whether there are any people who are licensed as sellers but are not doing the breeding in England, just to understand how many people and what quantity of puppies that might apply to. That is already taking place at the moment.

As the Minister was saying, the five-year requirement kicks in in 2023, but we are already actively monitoring how it is going with a view to making improvements before then.

Ian Byrne: Those are good answers.

Chair: Perhaps, Minister, we could have an interim report before we have the main report. That would be a good idea, would it not? It is just an idea for you to take away.

Q12 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you, Zac and Marc, for being before us today. Again, as an MP who is a vet, I am passionate about these issues where we can actually use legislation to enhance animal health and welfare. As one of the previous panellists said, indirectly it will improve human health—public health—as well.

One of the things we heard in the previous session was that, as we move through the transitional period and start to then be able to make our own rules in terms of animal movements coming into the country, there is the opportunity for us as a country to promote animal health and welfare. That will potentially have a knock-on effect of us being a beacon to the rest of

the world; if we are doing it, other people will follow suit. Zac, I am very well aware that you said you could not unilaterally make announcements today, but I would like to push you on some points that you have touched on about numbers and ages of dogs. It would be nice to know, as a Committee, what your thoughts are. Several changes to the rules on bringing animals into the country have already been proposed; we heard some of them in the previous session. What is your view, Minister, on increasing the minimum age to six months, say? We have talked about how younger than that is difficult, but what about six months? Would that be something you could get behind?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: I have to be quite careful how I answer this. Despite being a Minister for 18 months, I have not quite worked out how you convey an answer without giving an answer. The arguments that have been put forward, not least by this Committee, are very compelling. In moving to the six-month limit, there is no doubt that some problems would be solved, or at least it would be easier to solve those problems. We are looking very seriously at this, but as I said—and I apologise for this—I cannot make a commitment here. This is an area we are taking very seriously, and the arguments are compelling. I will keep an open mind as to the arguments against, but this is something where I hope we will be able to provide some kind of solution.

- Q13 **Dr Hudson:** That is very helpful. I am going to carry on further down our shopping list as well, which we have heard from our previous session and from previous reports from this Committee. You mentioned, Zac, as well about the limit on the number of dogs, and we heard Daniella in the previous session saying that one person can bring in five dogs, but you could have two to three people in a van, which is 15 dogs. What about changing the limit? You are probably going to repeat the previous answer, but, in terms of the direction of travel, are you minded that that would be a good suggestion, to have a strong look at changing the number that people can bring in?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: Logically it makes sense that by having the ability for very large numbers, in the scenario you have just described, of apparently non-commercial puppies being brought in under that exemption, you create an opportunity there for criminality, clearly. There are lots of reasons why the Government need to look very seriously at the proposal to reduce the number of non-commercial pets that can accompany people. I can commit to you that we are looking at it and we will take action on the basis of the evidence we have, but I cannot make a stronger commitment than that at this stage.

- Q14 **Dr Hudson:** If I can now push you on to another related issue, we talked about the age of the animals and the number of the animals. One of the things we heard in the previous session is that these dreadful folks who are smuggling animals in are actually bringing in heavily pregnant dogs as well. Some of them are then going to be whelping in the United Kingdom or, potentially, they are of certain breeds that need to have caesarean sections. They are to-ing and fro-ing, giving birth and having operations in this country. Is there anything on your radar to see if we can tighten up the restrictions on that, in terms of the movement of heavily pregnant

dogs? It is illegal in the last 10% of pregnancy, but that is very difficult to assess. Is there anything that Defra can do to improve that significant loophole in the guidelines about welfare?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: It is a particularly grim part of this issue. I fully agree with you on that. There are reports of an increasing number of pregnant bitches being intercepted. You are right: that 10% rule is very hard to police. I would love us to find a way to minimise, if not eradicate, this problem. I do not know what that legislative solution would look like. I am very open to being advised by other experts, either around the Committee table or elsewhere. If you do not mind, I will see if Marc can contribute an answer that is more satisfactory.

Marc Casale: These are three excellent recommendations from the Committee, and we are familiar with these past recommendations too. As the Minister was saying, we are not able to make any commitments today or confirm or deny anything today, but they are very welcome recommendations indeed. That also extends to any future measures that would ban the importation of pregnant bitches or queens. Again, I think there would be a question around how you would tell in the early stages of pregnancy that the mother was indeed carrying. At this point you are not allowed to bring in animals where it is absolutely clear that they are pregnant. There is a practical issue there, but as a matter of principle I think we would say these are excellent recommendations.

Q15 **Dr Hudson:** That is really helpful, Marc and Zac. We understand that you cannot make policy commitments today, but I probably speak for the Committee when I say that we are very encouraged that you are sounding very receptive to suggestions from the Committee and our expert witnesses. It gives us the opportunity to inform legislation in a sensible way. You mentioned cats, and my colleague and friend Sheryll will be very pleased to hear that as well. This is not just about dogs; it is about cats, ferrets and other animals. We will have a broader EFRA Committee inquiry in the new year looking at other animals that are moving across borders.

If I could come back to Zac, I take on board that you probably will not be able to give us a full commitment, but in our previous session we have heard about other health or preventative treatments that are very useful, which we as a country could tighten up on after January. I am talking about reintroducing the mandatory tick treatments, potentially. The vets on the previous panel talked about extending the period after the rabies vaccination. Do you feel that Defra is receptive to that—to introducing preventative health measures and improving health measures that will help the health and welfare of the animals coming in, which will directly help the health and welfare of animals in this country and, as Daniella said, indirectly human health as well? Is that something that you would be receptive to?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: We will continue with our compliance in relation to current EU requirements. That will continue for the foreseeable future. We will have an opportunity to re-evaluate some of the measures that are either required or not required, but perhaps should be required. I can only give you a broad answer, which is that our policy response has to be determined by the science. We are in a fortunate

position in the sense that we are an island, and sometimes our policies do not allow us to fully take advantage of that fact, not just in relation to pets but, as this Committee knows, in relation to tree diseases and a whole bunch of other issues. Where the case is clear scientifically, absolutely the policy will follow that. I have said as much as I am allowed to, but I will see if Mark is able to fill in some of the gaps there.

Marc Casale: I would expect that future reforms would be subject to a full, open consultation. That would be the best means of having a full discussion and debate around exactly what requirements could be applied, including in relation to the health treatment you mentioned and other things too. There are a range of things that can be explored on the health side, separate from the three key measures you mentioned earlier. A consultation period would definitely enable a very full debate to take place.

Q16 **Dr Hudson:** Could I just press you on that final point? That leads me to the final part of this particular question. If we are led by the science, some of the evidence is there. If this is involving animal health and welfare and we want to change things for the better for these animals as soon as we can, yes, you would have a consultation and there would be a period, but how quickly could some of these top-priority changes come in?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: I am going to leave that to Marc, because the truth is I do not know the answer to that. I do not know how quickly we can move.

Chair: I think, Minister, you ought to have some influence over the speed at which we can move, as a Minister. We will let Marc answer that one.

Marc Casale: The answer is that we would need primary legislation, and we cannot talk now about what would be covered in a future Queen's Speech. That is all I can say.

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: As you will know, the parliamentary or legislative timetable is closely guarded by various powers at the centre of our world, but for a whole range of different issues relevant to this discussion we are lobbying hard to have a significant chunk of that time. If we succeed in doing that, there are a lot of things we will be able to do quicker than we otherwise would. It is hard to have that discussion in an open manner, unfortunately.

Q17 **Dr Hudson:** That is really helpful, and that tees me up for the very final part of this question. We have heard that, in trying to police animal welfare across the borders, increased sentencing for perpetrators of these crimes would be a deterrent. There is a Bill that has had its second reading in Parliament now, the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill, which my colleague Chris Loder has introduced. Minister, would you be able to tell the Committee if there would be parliamentary time so that we can get this Bill on the statute book as soon as possible, to improve animal welfare as quickly as possible?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: Yes, we are completely committed to making sure that Bill happens. If that Bill does not happen in its current

form, it will happen in another form. One way or another, it will happen. It is a priority issue and we will make it happen as quickly as possible.

Q18 **Dr Hudson:** Do you have any feel for how quickly "as quickly as possible" is?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: I am going to refer you to my previous answer, because the two are intimately linked.

Dr Hudson: It is on your radar and you will be pushing it.

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: Yes, very much so. I have prepared a speech three times to introduce that piece of legislation; I got knocked off by prorogation and other things. We are very keen for this to happen, and the fact that it has not happened is a reflection of parliamentary chaos more than Government will.

Dr Hudson: We can take it from you that you are on it. That is good to hear.

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: Yes, 100%.

Chair: Thank you very much, Minister, for that assurance. It has been a long time coming, has it not? A bit like the arrival of the Queen of Sheba, it is taking a very long time, but I am sure we will get there. One final point on this question is that, as you look to increase the age of imported puppies from 12 weeks to six months, if you could then have two rabies injections to make sure that the puppies are healthy and will not infect people in this country with rabies, it gives you a good opportunity to extend that, both from an animal welfare point of view and from a human health point of view. I am sure it is not lost on you, but it could give you a real reason for going to six months. We will park that one there because you cannot give us that decision today.

Q19 **Mrs Murray:** Hello, Zac. It is good to see you. When it comes to our leaving the European Union, I have been waiting a lot longer than you and the Chair have been waiting for the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill to come in. Are you close to achieving with the EU a deal on GB's third-country status from 1 January 2021?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: As you know, Defra has submitted the application to allow us to become a part 1 listed third country. We are expecting to be notified soon. I cannot give you an answer yet because there is not one, but we are pushing and are expecting to hear back soon. Clearly, that would be very good news.

Q20 **Mrs Murray:** Have you got any contingencies in place if we do not hear from them by the time we get to New Year's Eve?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: The consequence of us being successful in relation to having part 1 listed status is it means that effectively the arrangement stays the same. We have a passport, but it is more or less the same. It is a British one, but it has the same effect as a European Union one.

Mrs Murray: I hope it is blue.

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: Of course; I am going to make that commitment right now. It is a very good point. I am not sure I am allowed to make that commitment.

If we do not get part 1, then the next likely thing is part 2. If we get a part 2, it would not be the passport system. You would have a single use animal health certificate for every single trip you take, but that certificate would last up to four months. I believe 100% of pets would be checked. It is quite a jump from 1 to 2. I do not think it is catastrophic; it is not what we want, but it is not the end of the world. The answer to your question is that that would be our fall-back position, but we are very confident that we will be successful with our application.

- Q21 **Mrs Murray:** Finally, you said in your written evidence that pet travel between Great Britain and Northern Ireland will be very similar to what it is now. What did you mean by “very similar”? What will change?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: The science tells us—we are very confident on this in Defra—that there is no animal health justification for any significant changes to pet movements between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I am not sure what the correct forensic term is, but it should continue in a very similar way to now. There is nothing we have seen that suggests otherwise. We are very confident that that will be the case.

- Q22 **Mrs Murray:** Do you agree that we should not have different rules between one part of the United Kingdom and the rest of the United Kingdom?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: Yes, absolutely. As I say, we are clear and confident, and my team has gone through this with a toothpick. There is nothing to justify anything other than what you have just suggested.

- Q23 **Chair:** Just before we leave this question, to what extent is the issue with Northern Ireland about the Republic of Ireland saying that puppies are going to come through from the Republic of Ireland and then they are going to find their way through to the rest of Great Britain? I am sorry, but it does not matter which side of the argument you are on with Brexit; the last thing we want to be is dictated to by the EU about what we can and cannot do with Northern Ireland. That gets us all very excited. Can you clear up for us what the issue is?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: The issue is probably the issue you have just raised. All I would say is that clearly there are discussions that are ongoing and are wrapped up in a whole bunch of other discussions. Wherever we end up with those discussions, and whatever the case that is made, we are taking an evidence-based and a science-based approach. I believe, and I think Marc would agree, that our case is bulletproof. How do I put this in a dignified way? We will dig our heels in. We do not think there is any case whatsoever for a change. I am not suggesting that no one is going to make the case for a different system, for the reasons you have just suggested, but that does not change our position.

- Q24 **Chair:** You are confident that if I want to take a dog to Northern Ireland or if I want to buy a puppy in Northern Ireland and bring it home to

Somerset, I am going to be able to do that after 1 January without any different paperwork than if I bought the puppy in Wales or Scotland. Are you confident of that? Can you give me that reassurance, Minister?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: I will give you that reassurance. If I am wrong, you can haul me before the Committee to punish me for having been wrong. I am very confident that the answer is an absolute one.

Chair: Do not worry; we will, Zac, so I hope you are right. I hope you are right anyway, because I do not want that to be the case. Thank you for that answer.

Q25 **Geraint Davies:** It is good to see Zac Goldsmith here. You will know there has been a great rise in the number of people buying puppies, partly because of coronavirus. There are a lot of people who cannot afford to keep those puppies. They are ending up unable to pay for the vets and are wanting to give the puppies to charities. Half of the charities have had their income cut by more than half. The previous witnesses told us that thousands of dogs are being put to sleep as a result. We also have a problem with a possible disorderly Brexit meaning there is a surge of illegal puppies coming in. Can you give an undertaking today that Government will put in the finance to charities to stop the unnecessary putting to sleep of thousands of dogs?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: Clearly this is a concern. In this case, there are many more people buying pets because of the lifestyle changes that have happened, but that combines with economic uncertainty. It would be wrong for me to say that there are no concerns. Having looked very closely across the board, our concerns are not so much relating to cat and dog abandonments. The signs suggest—again, I pray that I am right and this is what happens—that is not where the concerns are. The concerns tend to be much more around other animals, not least horses, where the cost of looking after horses is so high. We are worried about what might happen in relation to horse abandonment. At this stage—trying desperately not to sound complacent, because it is a worry—we are not concerned unduly about dog and cat abandonments.

Q26 **Geraint Davies:** We are in the midst of a pandemic and we are approaching Christmas. It is likely that a lot of people will give people puppies for Christmas. There is a prediction that a lot of people in January and February will not be able to afford the veterinary fees and they will end up wanting to give those puppies to charities. If the charities have not got the money, the local authorities will put those puppies or dogs to sleep. Are you ready and willing to intervene to stop that happening?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: I will answer that in two ways. The first is to say that the surge in demand for pets provides a counter as well. It is potentially a source of problem, but it is also a source of solution. Not everyone wants a puppy. I have had many dogs in my life and I have only once had a puppy; all the others have been rescue dogs. Many people I know make the same choice. The hope is that that surge in demand will ensure that you do not have an oversupply of unwanted dogs. It is hard to use language that makes them sound like animals as opposed to objects,

but I hope that that dynamic is the case. That certainly is the view of the Department at the moment.

In terms of whether or not we would step in, ultimately you are talking about the use of resources. Almost every area within my portfolio is an area that is buckling under the pressure of coronavirus. I have been focusing very heavily on zoos, for example. We have fought very hard to create a package that is there for zoos. It is not going to answer all the problems that zoos have, but it is there as an emergency package. I do not have access to anything like that in relation to rehoming centres, so I cannot make that commitment to you, but I can make the commitment that, as a Minister who cares very much about animal welfare, should needs arise that we cannot fulfil in Defra, I will of course take that discussion to the Treasury and elsewhere. I cannot give you a more specific answer than that, because it would not be an honest statement.

Q27 Geraint Davies: If there is a disorderly Brexit—the British Retail Consortium have raised issues with us about possible food shortages and all those sorts of things—it seems to me that managing the import of puppies will not be the first priority of port management, which will be under great stress. Do you think there is a risk that there will be a surge of illegal puppies and with it problems of criminality and problems for the dogs themselves? What do you plan to do about it?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: It is very hard to answer that, because we just do not know. In the circumstances you describe, which I believe and sincerely hope will not happen, that would be coupled with tremendous additional economic uncertainty—additional in the sense that it builds on the coronavirus uncertainty. Is that the kind of time when people would be looking to acquire new pets? Probably not. The bad news on the one side would not necessarily lead to more bad news on the other. It may be that one cancels the other out. We are speaking in hypotheticals. Of course, none of us wants, and I do not expect, the kind of disruption that you are describing.

Q28 Geraint Davies: Finally, we have heard that there are new initiatives in the EU to try to tackle illegal trade in puppies. Are you willing to comply with them? You did say vis-à-vis Wales and Scotland you wanted to do the same sort of thing. On the same basis, would it be sensible to have a similar regime that we all agreed to?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: One of the commitments that we are making in the Environment Bill is that the Government are obliged—whatever the Government—to review the international response to environmental issues, not just from the European Union but around the world, with a view to magpie-picking the best examples and putting them into UK law, just to ensure that we are always ahead of the class. That has always been our intention in relation to the environment and even more so in relation to animal welfare.

If you can present to me a good idea of something that has happened elsewhere in the world from an animal welfare point of view, for as long as I am an animal welfare Minister I will bite your hand off. In fact, we are doing that. I have had many discussions in relation to animal welfare just

in the last month where I have been trying to dive deeper into policies that have been pursued by other countries, with a view to replicating the best of them here in the UK. The answer is yes, always: if you ask me as an individual or as a Minister, I will always be willing to learn from other countries and take the best.

Q29 Geraint Davies: The EU will continue to have legally enforceable air quality limits, by way of example. Next year, we will not. The concern is that the strength of environmental law in Britain, including in the management of dogs, will be less than in Europe. Are you concerned that the power of the courts will not be fully deployed to deliver the law and protect our environment and our dogs?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park: I cannot think of areas where the UK will fall behind in terms of environmental law. That is not to say there will not be challenges and potentially, in some areas, a gap of a few months between transition period and the enactment of new systems, but our commitment is to be a world leader on environmental laws and in relation to animal welfare. There are many ways we are going to be able to take forward our commitment on animal welfare, after Brexit and after the transition period, that we were not able to before. Those include the things we have discussed today, for example, about reducing the age at which puppies can be imported, reducing the numbers of pets that can accompany an individual and the live export of animals. There are so many areas where we are able to look at things in a way that we were not able to before. I am very confident that our animal welfare world leadership will not just continue but grow. The same is absolutely true in relation to the environment generally.

It is a very broad question. I could spend a whole hour on this. Of course, there are lots of battles to be fought and arguments to be won, but everything suggests to me that in this Government we are committed to making good on all the commitments that we have continuously made over the course of the last four years while Brexit has been a reality.

Geraint Davies: We are relying on you to make that happen.

Chair: Thank you very much, Zac and Marc, for being with us this afternoon. We have great confidence in you as a Minister, because animal welfare is important. We have made big commitments not only in our manifesto but in all party manifestos across Parliament. It is important that we deliver on this. We at this Select Committee—and not just this Committee, because Sheryll and I and many others have been in previous committees—have worked hard on this. We have great expertise now, and we have added a vet to our expertise in Neil Hudson. Cross-party with Geraint, Ian and everybody working hard on this, we look forward to you putting good legislation together.

The point was made by witnesses this afternoon—you were watching some of it—that it is not only about changing the law; it is about enforcing the law. I am sure you will take that on board, because sometimes we do not necessarily need to change the law, but we need to enforce it properly. We look forward to your great ideas. There will be some written evidence you will probably send us from some of our questions we have asked you today.

I am sure it will not be too many more months before you will be back again telling us you have fixed it all. We look forward to that with great excitement. Thank you very much, everybody.