

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Pet Welfare and Abuse, HC 1123

Tuesday 17 October 2023

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Members present: Sir Robert Goodwill (Chair); Steven Bonnar; Rosie Duffield; Barry Gardiner; Dr Neil Hudson; Cat Smith, Derek Thomas.

Questions 202 - 277

Witnesses

[I](#): John Keefe, Chief Corporate and Public Affairs Officer, Getlink Group (Eurotunnel); Gavin Stedman, Director Port Health and Public Protection, Heathrow Animal Reception Centre; Steve Lawrie, Port Operations Manager, Group Pet Travel Co-ordinator, Brittany Ferries; and Tim Reardon, Head of EU Exit and Company Secretary, Port of Dover.

[II](#): David Holdsworth, Chief Executive, Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA); and Nicola Hirst, Director for Service Delivery, APHA.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: John Keefe, Gavin Stedman, Steve Lawrie and Tim Reardon.

Chair: Welcome to this latest session of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, where we are continuing our inquiry into animal welfare and abuse. Focusing on animal imports in particular, which is one of the issues we have been looking at, we have made a number of visits to the Port of Dover and to APHA, the Animal and Plant Health Agency, looking at some of the challenges. We are very pleased in this first session to have people who are really at the cutting edge of the problem and who have to deal with it in practical ways. Could I ask our witnesses to introduce themselves and what they do, starting on my left with Mr Reardon?

Tim Reardon: I am company secretary and head of EU exit at Dover Harbour Board, the owner and operator of the Port of Dover. I am delighted to see some of you again, having had the opportunity to welcome you down at the port earlier in the year.

Steve Lawrie: I am port operations manager at Brittany Ferries in Plymouth, but part of my remit is the group pet travel co-ordinator.

Gavin Stedman: I am the director of port health and public protection for the City of London. We run the Heathrow Animal Reception Centre, which is a point of entry and a BCP at Heathrow Airport. We are also responsible for licensing across Greater London.

John Keefe: I am chief corporate and public affairs officer for Getlink Group. That is the group that owns and runs the channel tunnel. We are probably the biggest importer of pets into the country and exporter of pets temporarily as well, having just reached over 4 million pets through the pet travel scheme and its successors since it opened in 2004.

Q202 **Chair:** Thank you. You are all very welcome, particularly John who is an old friend from my times as Shipping Minister and as Immigration Minister. Welcome.

I will open the questioning and start with Tim Reardon. What is considered to be the greatest operational challenges for you associated with importing companion animals into the UK?

Tim Reardon: For us, as the port operator in the UK, almost none because the regime is implemented and managed by our ferry operator customers, and the processes that they undertake to identify and to check the health status of companion animals are all undertaken at their check-in operations in the ports of Calais and Dunkirk. By the time the animals arrive in Dover, all the checks have been undertaken and the animals—like the passengers themselves—are free to be driven home to their destination.

Chair: You wave them through. Given the space constraints at Dover, I



can understand why you would need to do that.

Tim Reardon: Indeed, Chairman.

Steve Lawrie: Very similar to Tim, through our five French ports and two Spanish ports, all our checks are done 100% as per our agreement with APHA. Then we are audited on arrival for a certain percentage to ensure that those checks have been completed correctly.

Gavin Stedman: In terms of operational challenges, one of the risks that we face is about the balancing of capacity with routes into the UK. While we are focused on Heathrow Airport, looking forward into the future of this it is around managing that strategically across the UK. We are okay at Heathrow but I think there is a bigger picture to be looked at across the UK about balancing capacity and resource to protect.

John Keefe: Operating the channel tunnel, we have a terminal on each side of the channel. We conduct the pet checks on the French side on behalf of APHA and in an average year that is 200,000 pets per year. There can be a peak of up to 2,000 pets per day coming through the French terminal that require to be checked and validated before they travel to the UK.

Q203 **Chair:** Obviously, the majority of animals coming through are family pets. People have gone on holiday to their villa in France and they are returning home. However, as part of this inquiry, we have had evidence in the past about animals being smuggled—pregnant bitches, so-called rescue dogs—from places like Serbia, and dogs with mutilations, tail docking, ear cropping, or cats with claws removed. Are you picking up more of that illegal trade that needs to be identified and drawn to the attention of the authorities or is it almost impossible given the volumes?

John Keefe: Not at all impossible given the volumes. However, there has been a peak in that activity that we have seen. During 2020 and 2021 in particular there was a dramatic increase in the number of animals being transported in large batches, so 20 animals at a time in a vehicle commercially, supposedly, and often with a charitable name or association attached, many coming from eastern Europe. That caused some consternation because there were times when the conditions of the animals were, as far as we could see, not suitable for transport.

On the pet side, we limit our customers to five animals per person except in unusual circumstances—or fairly usual circumstances for pet owners—if they are going to a show or a commercial event, in which case they can apply for permission to carry more. That peak in commercial movement of 20 animals at a time has almost disappeared back to pre-covid levels again.

Chair: This was people during the pandemic thinking, “We are at home. We will have a dog and we will take a rescue dog from Serbia”, even though it may have just been swept up on the street or stolen from a



family there?

John Keefe: We did not do the research to find out exactly who was ordering the dogs, but there was a noticeable increase in the movement of young dogs and charitable dogs into the UK, which has disappeared since the end of the covid lockdowns.

Chair: Gavin, do you have a similar—

Gavin Stedman: Indeed. In 2022 we had 75 rescue dogs that came through Heathrow and just over 1,600 rescue cats. We would say that in some cases the conditions and welfare of them have been questionable. We have certainly had cats that have given birth on flights before and their health in some cases is not the best, particularly those rescue animals that come in. We also have concerns with some of these animals around how they are then housed with families when they get to the UK because that is an important part of that process, not only that onward bit and rehoming.

I would agree that we are seeing some of that. It has been affected by where we are currently and what has historically happened, but there are still concerns out there around welfare.

Steve Lawrie: Very similar to our friends at Eurotunnel, we have the same checks, although being based further west our ships are limited in the number of pets that they can carry with the agreement, so a maximum of 110 pets on one of our vessels from Spain. We do not carry pets commercially at all. We have not taken rescue pets or anything like that on board.

When you mentioned the puppies and the smuggling, we do have 100% security in our French and Spanish ports. For instance, two years ago we had a vehicle go through our port in Ouistreham. It was security searched and they found 17 puppies distributed around the vehicle. That vehicle was then refused. We passed that information to APHA and our colleagues further up the channel just to be wary of that particular vehicle. We are most definitely against the puppy smuggling and the—

Chair: Had the vehicle actually got on the ship before you spotted this?

Steve Lawrie: No. This was prior to boarding, so in the checks by the port authorities in Ouistreham.

Tim Reardon: For us, the activities that Brittany Ferries and the channel tunnel have mentioned would be mirrored by the experience of our ferry operators in Calais and Dunkirk. As the port authority in Dover, we tend to get involved only in circumstances where an illegal animal has been seized by Border Force or by APHA and it needs transporting to kennels. That is where our involvement is. It happens every now and again and there is no pattern to it.

Q204 **Barry Gardiner:** Mr Keefe, can I come back to you? You said that the



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figures had gone down, but would that not have been because in 2022 there was the precautionary ban because of a rabies outbreak?

John Keefe: That has probably contributed but the graph starts to decline in 2021. The net result of both those things is that we are now down to figures that, in terms of the numbers, we have not seen since before 2018 and the peaks were very significantly above that. We were probably three times as high during the peak in 2020 as we are back to now.

Q205 **Barry Gardiner:** Could I ask you all to set out the numbers but also the types of animal that enter the UK annually on your carriers or operating routes, to give us a sense of how that has changed over time, and, if you can—as you have just done, Mr Keefe—why?

John Keefe: As to the types of animals, dogs, cats and ferrets is the core business. In that core business, ferrets do not figure very highly. Cats are occasional but by a huge majority it is dogs. The most frequent is one or two dogs, typically family pets going on holiday, leaving the UK as their first leg and then returning to the UK after a holiday period—a weekend or a summer holiday, or sometimes a lengthier stay.

Going back to the start point, in the early years we were carrying perhaps 10,000 to 20,000 animals per year. At peak in 2018-19 we were carrying 350,000 to 360,000 animals. We would call that single-leg crossings—180,000 in one direction, let's say. We are now slightly below that in the early 300,000s. Those are the values. Of those, 95% or 96% or more are dogs. The number of ferrets coming through is very rare. There are occasionally special consignments of other types of animals for zoo breeding programmes, but they figure as a minute portion.

Gavin Stedman: We have billions of animals come in each year. Of course, a lot of them are invertebrates, pupae and beneficial insects. If we are getting down to the pets and commercial animals that come in, we have somewhere around 21 million fish that come in through Heathrow and 14,000 cats and dogs. We have 140,000 amphibians that come through, as well as 800 birds, 400 horses and 50 zoo animals, so quite a variety come through either as a pet checker or as a commercial BCP.

In terms of numbers and how that has fluctuated over recent times, during the peak, which was during the covid year where there was a lot of repatriations into the country—people moving back with their pets and at the same time everybody wanting a pet dog or a kitten—we saw some of those figures for cats and dogs reach up to around 22,000 per year. That has dropped a little bit now. We are talking around 19,000 coming through based on current levels. We do see those numbers fluctuate each year, but particularly during those covid years, it did really spike for us. It is now broadly back down to 2019 levels.



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Steve Lawrie: Since March of this year, we have brought approximately 25,000 dogs and cats, two ferrets and 25 assistance dogs into the country. As others have said, outwith the pet travel scheme we also bring in anacondas, budgerigars, and rats, which you do not particularly want on a ship, and similar sorts of pets that our passengers wish to bring in.

Chair: It is when the rats leave the ship that you have to worry, isn't it?

Steve Lawrie: As long as they jump and as long as they have bought a ticket beforehand, of course, most definitely. The majority are dogs and, as my friend at Eurotunnel said, the majority are one and two per vehicle. That is Mr and Mrs Bloggs going on holiday with their pets.

Tim Reardon: If we start with pet travel, my own time in the ferry industry has seen it grow from almost nothing—one of the first projects I worked on was the introduction of the pet passport scheme back in the 1990s at a time when virtually no pets were brought across the channel because it was so difficult to do—through to what it is now. It is an increasingly popular activity. As the port, a few years ago we laid on and created enclosed rest and run-around spaces for dogs. We now see our ferry operators, when they are renewing their tonnage, making special provision on board for lounges that are pet friendly rather than requiring dogs and cats to remain in the car or be locked away in a separate area of the vessel.

Currently, about 50,000 pet movements a year occur through the Port of Dover. The overwhelming majority of those are dogs and a handful of cats. We have not counted the ferrets. It grows as an activity and it mirrors the tourist travel patterns across the short straits of the channel, predominantly a lot of family travel; where the pet is part of the family the pet goes, too. Alongside that, there is a fair bit of commercial traffic, particularly of racehorses. If you are visiting Dover, it is not at all unusual to see horse boxes going through the port, and there are a handful of other shipments of the kind that Mr Keefe has described at the tunnel.

Q206 **Barry Gardiner:** Dr Roberts, the director of feline welfare at Cats Protection, told us that, although the official figure for last year was 40,000 cats, a survey that they did—the “Cats and Their Stats” survey—put that at about 80,000. How much smuggling do you think is going on? If it is of that proportion—double what is recorded—then it is coming through your vectors, isn't it? It is coming through your operations?

John Keefe: The trouble with smuggling is that it is undercover. People who are declaring their animals will come through the official channels, will have been to a vet, will have spent the money on getting all the veterinary checks and the various protections they need—

Barry Gardiner: A lock will keep out an honest man, Mr Keefe.

John Keefe: Absolutely. That is the point I am making. If one chooses to travel with one's cat under the seat and not declare it, that might very



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well completely bypass the process that we have in place for the checking of the valid animals.

Barry Gardiner: That is a problem, isn't it?

John Keefe: Where we do see animals that cause us to raise a question mark, we can alert the authorities on the terminal to intervene or to intervene on arrival in the UK. You are absolutely right. The issue is how you detect that hidden animal.

Q207 **Barry Gardiner:** Does anybody else want to jump in on that one about how good you are at spotting when animals are being smuggled? As I say, if it is of that order of magnitude, you are missing quite a lot. Can you be sure that you are not just turning a blind eye to quite a lot?

Gavin Stedman: In terms of imports via air, it is done in a slightly different way where all animals are manifested. That does help. I am not saying it is infallible, but it is an extra protection in there. They have to be manifested as cargo to ensure that they are transported in an effective and appropriate way. For example, when it arrives at Heathrow my teams will go out and collect anything that is on the aeroplane and take it back to our facility for it to be checked, either as a pet checker or within the BCP elements of it. Again, it may still happen but I think that there are many more controls in the airport process that assist us. Those figures are obviously quite staggering—40,000 to 80,000.

Steve Lawrie: Based on all our pets being pre-booked, the length of crossings and the fact that we have security in all seven ports that come into the UK, into Portsmouth, Plymouth and Poole, I would be very surprised if many would get through that shield. I am very concerned—

Barry Gardiner: Those 40,000 cats did not come on your ferries, is that it?

Steve Lawrie: Some of them would have but not that figure, no.

Tim Reardon: It is very much a similar picture. Virtually everybody who comes through our port comes through in a vehicle. There is no immediate visibility of what they may have with them or they may have hidden somewhere within the vehicle, whatever that might be.

Like other ports, like our sister ports in France, we have an operator regime of security screening, searching of vehicles prior to embarkation to ensure that nothing is taken on board the vessel that could cause harm during the sailing, either to the ship itself or to anyone on board. That process does pick up things that are not supposed to be in the vehicle, but clearly that is an outbound process.

Q208 **Barry Gardiner:** You have a pressure of time, don't you? Doing all that, you have a pressure. You have your sailing time. You have to load people within a very short space of time. It is quite a bit of hassle to say, "That cat asleep on the mat, have you checked it in? What is the score?" It is



going to be a cumbersome process. It is going to disrupt your operation, isn't it?

Tim Reardon: The security screening process is an integral part of it and it is completely built into the flow. In our port it occurs prior to the check-in, so nobody is committed to a particular sailing by the time they go through our security screening process. That particular dynamic does not arise on our site. I appreciate that what I am describing is an outbound process that might pick up stuff that is going to France, but we are absolutely confident that something equivalent is taking place in France before something comes here.

Q209 **Barry Gardiner:** What about the change in spotting of any low welfare practices? In the checks that you have made, when you do turn things up have you noticed that there are more or less animals that are—I am thinking particularly of dogs here that have been docked or cropped or cats that have been declawed. Is that something that you have any visibility of on how things have gone up and down?

Tim Reardon: The short answer is no.

Gavin Stedman: We do see some. We hear some of the stories. Some of my team sit on national panels around this topic and chair some of the expert panels. Some of it is discussed; sometimes it is seen in there. Sometimes it is hidden through the pet passport scheme. It is also fair to say, and we have evidence that, some of the pets have blank passports associated with a household that we have been into, so it looks like some of these procedures have happened abroad but the suspicion is that they probably have happened in the UK. Gathering evidence is very challenging in those environments for the officers in there, as I am sure you can imagine.

In terms of numbers, no. We have asked the panel that sits and discusses this topic to see whether there are any numbers that come up. I will certainly pass them on to this Committee because it would be interesting for you to see them if we can do that. That will be across the UK. We will pass that on when we have those details.

John Keefe: In the training of our staff who operate our pet reception area, one of the things they are instructed to look for specifically is docking and cropping of ears and looking for proscribed breeds coming into the UK. If they identify such an animal, they refuse entry to the customer and refer them back to a vet, who should have already told them that this is not permissible for access to the UK. If the customer comes back to check in and simply buys a ticket to go through and we are aware of that, we will notify APHA, Kent police and Border Force on site as well that there is a suspicion about a particular animal.

In the process that we run, we have to separate the responsibilities quite clearly between our job—which is checking the identity of the animal and comparing it to its medical history as certified by a vet from the EU—and



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the role of border control, which sits with the two authorities: the French first and then the British. After going through our identity control, they will then go through French outbound controls and the vehicles are regularly checked. Very high numbers of vehicles are checked and checked thoroughly. Then they will go through the UK inbound controls before they leave France. All those combined, and the alerting when we are made aware of something that we suspect ourselves, serves to put layers between the smuggler and the opportunity.

Q210 Barry Gardiner: That is helpful that you do those alerts. Do you have a record? If you are reporting docking and cropping and so on, could you provide the record of how that has varied over time to the Committee?

John Keefe: I will provide whatever information we have. I cannot guarantee that it will be very detailed over time.

Barry Gardiner: Thank you very much. Sorry, could I just give my apologies? I have to leave early because I am leading another debate later on, but I will not leave just yet.

Q211 Chair: Following on from that, do you ever receive intelligence from police forces or maybe pick up vehicles that are regular customers who are bringing numbers of animals across that might raise concerns?

John Keefe: We have taken part in joint exercises by the authorities when they are either reacting to some intelligence that they have had or simply conducting an operation to determine what the scale of the risk might be. In situations like that we have had overnight exercises where a number of vehicles have been inspected and a number of people have been interviewed about the way that they are travelling.

Of course, we only take part in the sense that it happens on our terminal and we are alert to it. Our role is in showing that there is a pattern of movement. Perhaps going back to the years 2020-21, there was a pattern of movement that was late bookings—last-minute bookings—and then travel very early in the morning, in those dark hours before dawn, which you would imagine was on the suspicion that that would be a softer touch. We were involved in a number of exercises at that time to intercept and interview and discover what those people were doing.

Chair: Neil has a short point.

Q212 Dr Hudson: Further to the Chair's question on that, in terms of suspicion—and I guess people moving in and out, people coming under suspicion in the same vehicle—we have had evidence given to us, and we have discussed this as well, about heavily pregnant dogs being brought in and those dogs then whelping in this country and fuelling the puppy-smuggling trade in this country, and then the dogs being shipped back out and then coming back in. Is there any intelligence that you are picking up in your various networks of that traffic, of dogs coming in and out? If an animal is coming in, it should be coming in; it should not be going in and out, in and out. Are you picking that up at all?



Gavin Stedman: I can say from Heathrow reception centre's point of view that we do base a lot of our work on intelligence. We hear it from a variety of sources. In terms of the sea ports and how things work there, it is not quite the same. We also have a role across Greater London. Certainly we do see welfare issues in general, including we have had a cat that has come in 90% through gestation, had a litter but unfortunately—due to the ill health of the cat in question—all of the kittens passed away. We do see this regularly so this is what we see in terms of undertaking our duties.

We find the same with dogs. We have had dachshunds that have come in at around 90% of gestation. Usually what you find is they are not only coming in that way but the health of the dog, or the cat in this case, is usually pretty poor as well. There is a real welfare concern and a real welfare risk.

I have some case studies, which I am happy to share with the Committee, of actions and situations that we have seen and been involved in because I think that shines a light on some of the practices that you see.

Q213 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you. That is helpful. I will pass it to the others for the sea links, but are you getting any evidence of those particular animals going the other way as well? That is what we are picking up in some of our discussions. A heavily pregnant dog comes in, whelps, and then they take the dog back out to breed it again and bring it back in.

John Keefe: You would have to go into numbers here so the answer will have to come subsequently. In general terms, the flow of those high volume 2019, 2020 and 2021 trips were all from Calais to Folkstone. The return level of those commercial activities was tiny. That seems to indicate that the vast majority were coming in and not going back out again, but I will look to see if we have any information about that.

Q214 **Dr Hudson:** Do you have anything to add at all on those?

Steve Lawrie: Not particularly. The majority of our pets travelling are second home owners in France and Spain so they travel a couple of times a year. I do spot checks on our inbound manifests to see whether there are multiple animals in one particular vehicle. If it spikes my interest, I will search that vehicle registration and check the microchip numbers that travelled the first time to see if they match the second time. Invariably they do. If they don't I usually contact APHA to advise that I have a suspicion of multiple pets going backwards and forwards and also to our customer services to say, "Can you send them a quick warning letter?"

Tim Reardon: We don't, but then as the port authority we wouldn't. I know that our ferry operators have experience very similar to the one described by Brittany Ferries, and their traffic profile is not too dissimilar either.

Q215 **Cat Smith:** I have some questions around import processes and illegal



importation. To start with, could each of you outline the process by which an individual would move a companion animal through the border in each of your businesses? How do you ensure that animals are entering under the correct regime? John, do you wish to start on this one?

John Keefe: Sure. If we take the typical pet, the first movement would have been to the continent under an export health certificate and then, coming into the country, if it is a UK dog, either a UK passport or an EU passport. The process starts with a visit to the vet. The vet signs off on the general health of the dog and then signs off on all of the treatments that that animal has and the detail of that: the time, the place and the hour. It has to be absolutely precise. The owner and the animal then move to our pet reception area, which is in front of our check-in, so prior to entering the terminal. Our staff will scan the chip on the animal, compare that number to the number on the passport, verify that all of the veterinary checks have been completed and filled in correctly. They will ensure that there is only that one animal brought in. They will ask, "Is this the only animal travelling with you?"

We have a two-step process. You can either bring your pet into the pet reception area, in which case the animal will walk in on a lead, or perhaps if it is a cat and there are a lot of dogs around it will be in a carrier. For some customers—mainly customers with mobility issues—we will go to their car and check the animal shown to us in the boot or on the back seat or, in some cases, in the footwell. If there is any suspicion about the animal's welfare, the state it is being conveyed in, at that point we will refer that to APHA and to the police authorities.

If there is any issue with the behaviour of the individual we will refer that to the French police locally. However, in general terms, we are receiving those animals, checking the paperwork, and passing them straight through. They are issued with a sticker that goes onto their windscreen saying, "This vehicle is carrying animals" and a number would be noted on the sticker. Then they go through the check-in process and are allocated to a departure.

If the process is less than five animals it is under a pet movement. If it is above five under a special dispensation for a pet that is going to a show or whatever, it is still under a pet movement. If it is between 10 and 20—20 is our limit—it will be a commercial movement. To be a commercial movement, the operator must have a contract with us on our commercial freight service. In order to get a contract, they must go through a financial check to ensure that they are a valid business.

Then we check them against the export health certificate issued by the vet in the country of departure. Also in that should be the conditions for travel, certified by the vet to be suitable. Then we are looking at an observable condition. At this point we get into a clarification. Our staff are not veterinary experts. They are not veterinary trained. Their job is to check paperwork and identify the animal by the chip to the paperwork that is being carried.



Q216 **Cat Smith:** How frequently would Eurotunnel find that there was non-compliance with the pet travel arrangements?

John Keefe: Regularly. Almost every day we will have a number of animals that present with their owners where there is an error in the paperwork or there is a misidentification, something isn't right. In that case we simply refuse because the animal has not gone through our check-in. There is no problem with turning them around and we send them back to a local vet to have the paperwork corrected, if possible. If it is a minor issue and it needs to be confirmed by the vet who completed the paperwork, we will contact that vet. Until we have the response from the vet, the owners will be waiting to travel. We only allow travel once everything is confirmed as correct.

Gavin Stedman: It is slightly different with air travel. I did allude to it a little bit earlier on. Essentially, if we are looking at pets that come through—a companion animal say—they must be manifested as freight to start with. It is a requirement for that to happen. The owners or agents book the animal on as cargo. Again, that is just about making sure that there is a set number per airline per flight, depending on what airline, what flight, what part of the country it comes from or part of the world it comes from. They must also hold an animal transport authorisation with an approved carrier, so that is making sure that there are processes and procedures in place, and an SLA signed off by APHA.

When an aircraft arrives at Heathrow, my team will go out and collect that animal and they will take it back to the facility. Assuming it is a companion animal and it falls within that regime, we will carry out the work very similarly in terms of the pet checker process: ensuring that the paperwork is in place and looking at the welfare of the animal.

We have a variety of specialisms within our team, mainly because we have a variety of animals that come through. They are very specialist in their own nature. They look at the welfare part of it—not only that, but making sure the paperwork is in place and compliant. Very similarly, there are non-compliances. A lot of that we try to resolve prior to the animal arriving at Heathrow. We offer a pre-check service to stop any of those small issues occurring.

Cat Smith: Could you give us an idea of how many issues do occur, though?

Gavin Stedman: I don't know off the top of my head. They do occur reasonably regularly, particularly the paperwork discrepancies. I can certainly provide that for you. The pre-checking is an important part of the process because it just streamlines everything in that quick turnaround environment. Some of the challenges that we have is whether it is a companion animal or a commercial consignment.

We have to be very strict around what that looks like, particularly the difference between those. Whether the animal comes in more than five



days before or five days after is key to some of those things—as well as to whether you need a passport or a health certificate or, depending on what country you come from, whether you need blood tests and that sort of thing, which is all prescribed.

We do find that there are some inconsistencies, where you find rescue animals coming through that are actually being brought through as companion animals—pet animals—rather than commercial consignments. Equally, it is as challenging for someone who is bringing a genuine pet through that has a delayed flight to then have their animal come in as a commercial consignment rather than as a pet, which they genuinely are. I think there is probably something that could reasonably be done to ensure that that process is more efficient and better, whether that is to extend the days or look at some other way of defining what an owner is in that case.

There are other challenges related to it not having to be the owner; it just has to be a designated person. There is no way of knowing this but you could have a similar situation to vehicles coming backwards and forwards. Is this the same person that is accompanying these animals backwards and forwards? I don't have the data, and I don't think we would be able to find it but it is a bit of a challenge that comes with this.

We are very clear around which stream it goes down. Clearly, if it is a commercial import, there are different provisions. We have APHA vets who are on site with us all the time. They have office facilities there and they check the commercial consignments that come through. They do that and we work together with them on the welfare side of things.

Q217 Cat Smith: What kind of facilities and processes do you have at Heathrow for the welfare and security of pets and companion animals?

Gavin Stedman: We have a reasonably large site. We have 55 staff there and we run 24/7, 365 days a year. We have numerous kennels and quarantine areas for all types of animals—we have such a variety—including areas that we can convert from, say, kennelling into a wet room, should we have animals that need quarantining as well, and bird wings. That will do a variety of things. We have a good capacity for holding, but it is not an unlimited capacity and that is probably one of the challenges that we have moving forward: do we have enough capacity to quarantine animals in the UK?

That comes to light when we have animals that come particularly from some areas; I am thinking of Ukraine in this case. There are some challenges that we have. We have managed to address those, to work quite efficiently around that and be reasonably pragmatic and manage the risk. There is pressure in making sure there are enough quarantine facilities, particularly for birds. We have concerns about whether there is enough quarantine and holding capacity for those.

Q218 Cat Smith: Thank you. Steven, would you be able to outline the



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processes by which individuals would bring a pet or companion animal through the ports?

Steve Lawrie: Very similar to Eurotunnel because obviously we work under the same regulations as they do with our agreement with APHA. All our pets are pre-booked. We do not accept bookings on the day. We refuse. Pets are brought in mostly in vehicles on the French channel, but we do have some pet-friendly cabins and kennels. We don't accept pets in vehicles on our Spanish crossings. They are checked at the French or Spanish ports by our staff who have training every year on the updated PT44 issued by APHA. We are document checkers; we are not trained vets at all. We will check the microchip against the document presented. The majority of ours are EU pet passports, because they are mostly second home owners who have the benefit of still being able to use pet passports.

We do have the animal health certificates that are issued in the UK and on their return journey, so we have already done a 100% check on that document outbound. Aside from dogs with the tapeworm requirements, we know that document is correct if they have travelled with us. We have recently introduced an electronic pet check, so 96 hours prior to departure the pet owner will receive an email from us inviting them to check their documents for the regulations 21-days prior for rabies, the microchip date prior to rabies vaccination date and so on. If it fails that, they will be advised that their dog will not be able to travel.

Q219 **Cat Smith:** What percentage of travellers do you find fail at that point, in terms of non-compliance with the regulations, either advertently or inadvertently?

Steve Lawrie: At the start of using animal health certificates, we were looking at 30% to 50% refusals because of the UK vets' inexperience in completion thereof. Obviously, prior to Brexit we were able to use the UK pet passports. They were not as used to completing sometimes a 15 to 16-page document and the requirements of that document as well.

We are now seeing less than 5%, because they are given the option to pre-check. We also have a dedicated mailbox. Unfortunately, that is mostly me and one of my colleagues. If a passenger wishes to scan and email their document to us we will check it prior to them turning up at the port.

We are seeing fewer and fewer document refusals turning up in France or Spain to come back to the UK. Our staff will check that document, input it into our computer system, which will then tell them whether that document is also compliant, based on the information that is inputted into it. They are then given a sticker. They are either in the garage, in a kennel or a pet-friendly cabin, and they get loaded onto the ship in the relevant spaces.



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All our pets are 100% checked in both directions by our staff. That is the reason why we only get a percentage check for APHA on arrival into the UK.

Q220 Cat Smith: You have touched on this a little bit: are there any other facilities or processes for ensuring the animals' welfare when they are with your business?

Steve Lawrie: As I explained, we are document checkers. We are not vets. We cannot tell if a pet has been abused and so on.

Q221 Cat Smith: We will move to Tim to wrap up on the processes by which an individual would move a companion animal through the ports and any issues of non-compliance. How does that get picked up on?

Tim Reardon: My contribution will be brief, because the three ferry operators who carry tourist traffic and passenger companion animals through the Port of Dover all have exactly the same processes as Brittany Ferries and Eurotunnel. They are subject to the same regulatory regime and their passengers are subject to the same compliance obligations as my colleagues today.

The only element that is different in Dover—different from the channel tunnel but similar to the ports where Brittany Ferries arrive—is that there is the UK customs process carried out by Border Force, which is located on disembarkation at the end of the voyage into the UK rather than in advance of it, juxtaposed alongside the French outbound process. That provides a final backstop where, if Border Force has suspicions that something is not well or there is something dodgy about a particular vehicle coming through, they will pull that vehicle and, supported by APHA, they will take such action as may be necessary, if they find non-compliant or unwell companion animals in it.

Chair: We are going to have to make a little bit faster progress if we are going to get through. We are coming up to a hard stop at the very end at 5 o'clock when there are lots of votes so we will not be able to break there. If I could ask for concise answers. If you agree with your colleagues just say, "I agree with my colleague" and that will work.

Q222 Dr Hudson: A lot of the checks are done at check-in on the continent and a lot of you have said that it is not veterinary checks, it is paperwork checks. Are those animals visualised or is it purely the paperwork? Is there any attempt at all to scan the microchips? Is that done on all the animals?

Steve Lawrie: We scan them.

Dr Hudson: You scan them and you check every single animal coming in?

Steve Lawrie: It is the document that is proof.

Q223 Dr Hudson: Steve, in one of your earlier answers you said that you have



a percentage where you audit them. On another answer you talked about if you were worried about a certain vehicle or evidence. What percentage of cases would get that additional audit and where does that take place? Does that take place on the continent or do you do that subsequent check on arrival in Britain?

Steve Lawrie: When the ship sails from the continental ports, I get a manifest with every pet that is on that vessel. I will scan through on an ad hoc basis, just to see if there are multiple pets travelling under one vehicle. Then, if it spikes an interest, I will check on the registration number to see how often that vehicle has travelled and whether it has been carrying the same pets.

Q224 **Dr Hudson:** I guess you are doing that from a distance, so virtually you are checking something that is coming in. If you have any suspicions, does that consignment get pulled over at Dover or what happens then?

Steve Lawrie: No. I just pass that information as intelligence through to APHA.

Q225 **Dr Hudson:** To APHA, and APHA makes the decision to do that. Okay. That comes on to my main question here. I will start with Tim, focusing on the Port of Dover—and we saw this on our visit—you are very much trying to balance the through flow at the port with checks on animal welfare and biosecurity, and there is a balancing act. How is that done to ensure that we are biosecure but also getting your proper throughput in and out of the port?

Tim Reardon: Of course, there are two very distinct traffic flows. One is tourist traffic with pets in cars, which we have spoken about. The other is commercial traffic: live animals, animal product, plants and plant product and so forth. The regime of animal and plant health controls on arrivals, commercial shipments arriving from the EU, is yet to be imposed. It is the very end of the long tail of Brexit-related follow-up activity that that has yet to happen.

We are in discussions with DEFRA about how it should happen. Again, there are two elements to that. First, there is information flow to ensure that the necessary declarations are made to the appropriate control agencies, and there is a separate discussion about where any physical interventions should take place. It is those physical interventions that are relevant to traffic flow because, clearly, the electronic exchange of data does not delay or get in the way of a movement of a vehicle.

Q226 **Dr Hudson:** Further to that, on our visit to your port we were very much made aware of the physical constraints that you have on your site. What impact does that have on these discussions and plans that you are making for monitoring biosecurity and animal health and welfare moving forward? Are you still in dialogue as to how you are going to do that with the finite space that you have?



Tim Reardon: We are indeed. Space in the terminal is finite and the principle that has been adopted across all official controls is that control space in the port is at an absolute premium and is to be reserved for things that cause immediate high risk of harm: in a customs context, guns and drugs; in an animal and plant health context, other concerns.

That routine second line examination—things to check, for example, that what is declared is the same thing as what is actually travelling—would be deferred to an inland site where that can be done away from the traffic flow with all the space and facilities necessary, so that the control agencies can do everything they need to do without interrupting the flow of vital supplies to keep supermarket shelves full.

Q227 **Dr Hudson:** Again, it is that tension between flow and trying to get it right biosecurity-wise. On our visit, we discussed this and we raised concerns about the process whereby animals would subsequently be moved to an inland facility for checking when these issues were identified or if your intelligence, Steve, suggests that there is a consignment that needs to be looked at. What is your current understanding of where the animals will be examined once identified as a risk? Is it the Sevington facility?

What associated risks are there when you have an inland site away from the port? How do you ensure that unscrupulous people, who are potentially trying to smuggle animals in, are not going to divert or unload their puppies or whatever on the way in? Where are we going with this? What I am basically trying to say is that we have concerns.

Tim Reardon: Of course, Sevington is the only inland checking site that is in operation at the moment. There is discussion about whether there should be others. We advanced the view that there should be one on each of the two main roads leading out of Dover, for resilience purposes and to ensure that there is no disincentive created for a driver who wants to do the right thing and actually call in.

For all practical purposes, the vehicles that are carrying commercial shipments are sealed units so it is not loose cargo. There isn't the immediate, obvious risk of contamination but Border Force is there in the port to identify anything that might pose that immediate risk. Equally, as you saw when you came down to east Kent, none of the sites that are being looked at is very far inland and the route to them is a main road, a dual carriageway, or at least a trunk road that gets there. It is not trundling through urban areas or indeed farms. It is a very direct, very easy route there.

The biggest incentive to ensure that people do what they are supposed to do—clearly, an incentive for people who want to be compliant but none the less it is an incentive—is that if you are called for examination you are required to go to the inland check site. You won't be cleared for importation until you have been inspected. If you are not cleared for importation you cannot release those products lawfully onto the home



market. There is a built-in enforcement mechanism to that for people who wish to operate within the law.

Q228 Dr Hudson: Thank you. The second half of our session today is going to be with the APHA, so I won't cover that too much. Obviously, there has to be a good relationship between the operators and APHA. We have heard around APHA resourcing at some of the ports—potentially at Dover—that on weekends and bank holidays it is potentially on a more on-call basis. Does that pose an issue for you at the ports with what that means for your staff? Is this potentially a loophole that smugglers could be trying to exploit if they thought, "Well, this will be the time that we could smuggle our animals through"? This one is a bit of a hot potato.

Tim Reardon: It does not pose an operational challenge for us. Clearly, all the control agencies on our site—whether it is APHA, Border Force, Kent police or anyone else—will resource according to what they have and they will deploy as they see fit. Personally, I would not point to any particular time of day when you are more or less likely to encounter a control. The control is there for the whole time the terminal is operating and it is resourced to whatever dynamic and matrix they work to.

Q229 Dr Hudson: A final question on this section. A lot of our focus today has been on import around biosecurity. There is also a parallel issue of horses being exported from the United Kingdom to the continent of Europe. Many, many horses—potentially, at the level of thousands—are transported illegally for slaughter. They are not transported with that on their documentation; they are transported under the guises of breeding or sport. Is that something that you are picking up at all? Is there any change in the movement of horses? What we can do to try to stop this illegal practice is something that has been raised with our Committee on a number of occasions.

Steve Lawrie: Not at all. We carry racehorses that are mostly going to Normandy, and they are only authorised on one route.

Q230 Dr Hudson: They would be the high-performance elite horses that formerly would have been transported under the tripartite agreement. What we are talking about now is a different category of horses that are being shipped and ultimately not ending up in races.

Steve Lawrie: No, we would only accept horses through that one route. Passports are all checked prior to, and they are only accepted by those transporters who have been authorised by us to carry horses.

Dr Hudson: That is your particular operator. What about Eurotunnel and the port itself?

Steve Lawrie: Not at all. Again, it is high-level animals with very high levels of veterinary care—competition horses. They are not only inspected by us but they are systematically inspected by the veterinary authorities on arrival. Every equine booked through the channel tunnel has to first



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clear our process but is then inspected automatically by the veterinary authorities in the equivalent to the border control post in Coquelles.

Tim Reardon: Our experience is the same.

Q231 **Steven Bonnar:** I would like to probe a wee bit further on the visual and documentation checks that are required. It would be helpful to know what documentation is currently required for an animal entering the UK border. Is this consistent across all of our entry points? Are there any exceptions to that?

Steve Lawrie: No. For us coming into the UK, it would either be an animal health certificate issued by a UK vet on its return; a GB pet health certificate that was issued within the EU for entry into the UK, very similar to the AHC; a UK pet passport that is compliant; or an EU pet passport issued by a current member state.

Gavin Stedman: It is similar. I have already said some of the concerns we have around pet passports and how it can be used in other ways, but in terms of a good process, it is the same process.

John Keefe: Identical.

Q232 **Steven Bonnar:** With that in mind, what percentage of pet consignments are being checked at your respective ports of entry to what basis would that check be being made? How often would you notify the APHA of that, and do you record that data for yourselves?

Gavin Stedman: I can start with that. We check 100% that come through. It depends whether it is a companion animal or whether it is commercial obviously. Because if it is commercial, it would go to APHA and their vets would undertake those checks. Every animal that comes in, all the documentation is checked, they are microchipped, scanned and read. They have a welfare check.

If it is a dog, they are let out into kennels to enhance that welfare check. Subject to everything being okay, they move on to the next stage of that process—and if we have all of the records—and that would be included in the numbers that I gave earlier for those individuals.

John Keefe: All animals coming through—100%—are declared either as pets accompanying their owners, or commercial consignments are checked.

Q233 **Steven Bonnar:** In relation to falsified documentation, for example, what evidence have any of you seen of veterinary documentation being falsified: proof of rabies vaccination, for example, or being underdosed—perhaps forged in foreign countries? What tools do you have available to you to safeguard against that?

Mr Keefe, you mentioned that a lot of the staff are not getting retrained, they are simply port staff and boat staff, so what checks do we have in place?



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John Keefe: They are trained to follow the APHA guidance on what is acceptable and what is not. They will check the chip or, in the case of some animals still, the tattoo for the identity. Then they will check the passport for completion of the various different information, which is recorded on the passport for precision. Is it dated and in date? Is it dated to the hour of the day? The compliance with the documentation is there first and foremost role.

The only time that they would step out of that is if there is an obvious case of a dog, as we were talking earlier with Mr Gardiner, docking or cropping. They would refer that back to a vet in the country to request that that be verified. Also, if that animal were to go through, they would inform the APHA and the police in Kent.

It is 100% documentary check all the way through and then observable to a non-veterinary trained individual is referred.

Q234 **Chair:** I have a fairly good picture in my mind of the visual checks and scanning the chips that goes on, on all these animals. When we were at one of the dog rescue charities in Kent, we saw examples of how smugglers were trying to evade that. One example we saw was that they had put the chip in the dog but just held it in with a stitch so it could be removed very quickly. There was another one where they had incorporated the chip into the collar, so scanning the animal it would appear that it had the right chip. Is there any way that some of these ways that can be used to evade the rules can be detected? Or do you pick these up? Or is it more difficult?

John Keefe: It is very difficult to pick up planned smuggling. We operate a system for animal health and importation for compliant pet owners. That is the aim of the whole process. The majority of what we see is compliant. It is genuine pet owners with mistakes. We will identify those mistakes and we will send them to get them corrected.

Identifying a chip that has been falsely placed is not an obvious observable fact. If it is stitched into the skin and then fur is brushed across it, to a non-veterinary-trained person that is going to be incredibly difficult.

Gavin Stedman: The chips will move around as well. Sometimes it is not always easy to find it. Sometimes the animals that come in can be very nervous or more aggressive in there, even with well-trained staff that are used to handling those animals, so we have to think about their safety as well. It is not uncommon to find two chips. We found that before as well.

The staff that undertake this work will undertake those checks. But anything that is unusual will often be flagged up and we will do a little bit of research around it, because having two chips in there could be for a very genuine reason: a misfire potentially on one and so they put another one in there, and then the information does not align. There is always a little bit of investigation that goes on with the officers in the teams.



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It is very similar to the passports. I alluded to the issue with passports that we have had around mutilations and claiming that they were brought into the country like that, because that is not an offence. We have to remember that with some of these, there is high profit to be made for some individuals, and quite low penalties in there. I think adjusting that perhaps moving forward may help the situation that we are in and make it easier.

It is also very difficult to gather the evidence in many of these cases in a regulatory framework, where we need a certain burden of proof. That can be a challenging environment to work in and gather that right evidence.

Q235 Rosie Duffield: We want to cover responsibility for checks in this section. Mostly to Steve and John: which staff members conduct checks and what training do they receive? We have touched on this a bit. You have said mostly it is paperwork, Steve, and obviously not vets and things. Is that the main bulk of the training? Does experience teach them other things?

Steve Lawrie: The majority of our teams in both France and Spain have been with the company for many years. I have been with Brittany Ferries for 33 years. Yes, it is documentary. They get training between one in two every year or every two years. That is only for face to face. If there are any changes made by APHA then I will usually have a Teams meeting with them to explain.

But it is our check-in staff who do this. We have a latest check-in of 90 minutes before departure time, so it gives them plenty of time to check even the 100 pets on one of our vessels.

John Keefe: Very similarly, I think the start point here is that all of our pet reception staff are volunteers. They are not rostered in on a "Your turn, so over you go" basis. They are largely animal lovers who want to do this because they see an interest in helping people getting their animals from one side to the other. They are trained before they start the job. They have an extensive training programme lasting nearly a week, and then they move on to updates, depending on changes to legislation. A fairly major update was when the UK pet passport was no longer acceptable in the EU, and we started using the animal health certificates.

Any changes to the legislation are briefed in specific team meetings before a shift begins: "There is a change. Here is the document that goes with that change and here is what it means to your work." It is an evolving situation.

There is now a pool of very experienced people working in that field and they feel very comfortable in highlighting anomalies when they see them, and contacting APHA and Kent police if needs be.

Q236 Rosie Duffield: That sounds good but what would Eurotunnel do without those volunteers? Would the Government have to provide you with more



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money for staff because presumably they rely on you doing those checks?

John Keefe: The Government rely on us doing those checks. Our customers rely on us doing those checks. As a business, which is strongly focused on customer service, we would always find a way to do the checks that will help our customers move their animals. We are fortunate in that we have always had competition to get into that role, and long may it last.

Q237 **Rosie Duffield:** That sounds good. All of you the next question: should responsibility for checking pets at the border be shifted from carriers to a Government agency, and if so, who do you think is best equipped to undertake this? Should I start with Tim?

Tim Reardon: It is not something we have looked at and we do not have a view on it. The critical thing from a port operations perspective is that whoever does the checks should do them in a place and in a way that is consistent with the vehicle moving through without interruption, and specifically without interruption to other vehicles following them.

Q238 **Rosie Duffield:** You mentioned to us on our visit that even one minute would make a dramatic amount of difference to the traffic flow.

Tim Reardon: Absolutely. The exit from the Port of Dover is a two-lane road. If one of those lanes is blocked, then it is extra pressure on the other. If they are both blocked, then nothing gets out. Clearly there is a very strong interest in ensuring that everything flows smoothly.

Experience shows that the least disruptive place to carry out any control is when the vehicle is already stopped. The only place where every vehicle reliably stops on our route is prior to embarkation, either at the Border Force passport checkpoint, which I suggest probably is not the right place, or the ferry operators check-in, where there is more space.

Steve Lawrie: Similarly to Tim, it is not something that we have probably looked at. It is an agreement that we have with APHA commercially. Therefore, as far as we are concerned, the checks that we do that are required by APHA and UK Government to come into the UK are what we do, and we will continue to do so. Yes, we do, as Tim said, 100% checks on the continental side.

Gavin Stedman: I have a slightly different take on this through experience elsewhere. What we are finding at the moment, if you look at all live animal imports—I know this is focusing on companion animals—is that we are finding some moves into some of the markets by commercial enterprises that target the high-volume, high-profit elements of this work.

That means, if we are not careful, we get overcapacity in some areas or undercapacity. There is a real danger that a focus on those high profitability areas means that not all live animals will have a point of



entry into the UK through a BCP, because there are not the facilities in the right place at the right time.

I go back to one of the original points that I made. There needs to be a strategy around this for the UK, and it looks at points of entry. Who undertakes the checks to ensure there is the right capacity in the right place? I think that would ensure a consistent approach. I have given an example of where there are inconsistencies already built in, and that is not great for anyone that is importing, whether that is a pet or a commercial operation.

I think there are some things that could be done better. The emphasis of a Government body, whatever that looks like, has the benefit of animal welfare and animal health being right at the top priority for how they are operating, as well as ensuring that consistency, as well as ensuring that there is a right capacity—not only facilities but also capacity of individuals in the right place at the right time.

John Keefe: The first thing is we enjoy providing the service to our customers. It is a welcoming and safe environment for them to come and be helped with any issues before going into a formal Government-controlled environment.

At the same time, we think there is a very good argument for doing what has been done in the commercial freight world at the short straits in separating the reliance on high traffic throughput—so that high volume flow that we have, which is all about speed and frequency and moving goods and people very quickly, which tends to give rise to this concern that controls can be left to the side—we separate transport from control and inspection.

That has been done with the inland border facilities at Sevington, and in Coquelles on the other side of the channel, so that the traffic moves through the transport system. If it requires inspection by using pre-declared information at our passport reception in France, that control can be done away from the hustle bustle of the traffic, calmly, collectively, and with all the time that is needed to conduct it thoroughly. You separate the fast flow of traffic from the time needed to conduct the proper controls.

Q239 **Rosie Duffield:** Tim, what impact could a change of responsibility for checks have on the Port of Dover? We have touched on that; it is time, isn't it?

Tim Reardon: Absolutely. The critical thing to port operation in Dover is that everything should pass through quickly. All routine inbound control processes are undertaken in France so that when the vehicles arrive in Dover, they are free to go.

From a pet perspective, that means that they are out of the—as John describes—the hustle and bustle of the transport point as quickly as



possible, and the family can take the pet to wherever they choose to allow it to relax and recover from whatever stress it may have encountered. For the commercial traffic, it can get on its way to delivery destination as quickly as possible.

Q240 **Rosie Duffield:** Chair, can you just indulge me? Steve, in one of your first answers did you genuinely tell us that an anaconda or anacondas had been put through?

Steve Lawrie: Yes.

Rosie Duffield: Are we saying there are anacondas in the UK? Because that is a fairly horrific—

Steve Lawrie: As a pet, yes. With the correct documentation, they can travel.

Rosie Duffield: Oh my gosh, thank you. I just needed to check that.

Steve Lawrie: They would travel in a pet-friendly cabin, of course.

Chair: Thank you very much, gentlemen. I think it would be easy to fall into the trap—given that, as a Committee, we have been focusing on puppy smuggling, organised criminals, mutilations and animals with diseases—and forget that the vast majority of animals that travel through our ports are people's pets who are being cared for. They are healthy, they have not been mutilated, and you facilitate that ability for people to take their pets on holiday and enjoy the holidays even more.

I appreciate you coming and giving your time and hope that we can continue to allow—despite Brexit, as I say—people to take their pets on holiday, but at the same time ensure that illegal activity is properly policed. Thank you very much indeed, we will move on to the next session. Thank you.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: David Holdsworth and Nicola Hirst.

Chair: Welcome, Nicola Hirst and David Holdsworth, who made us very welcome at Weybridge when we visited. We were blown away by all the activity that goes on there in terms of animal and plant health. Would you like to introduce yourself for the record, starting with Nicola, and then we will go on to the questions?

Nicola Hirst: Good afternoon, I am Nicola Hirst. I am the service delivery director for APHA, which is the Animal and Plant Health Agency. I am responsible for the operational activities that happen in the agency.

David Holdsworth: Good to see you again, I am David Holdsworth. I am the chief executive of the Animal and Plant Health Agency.

Q241 **Chair:** I suppose the most important question is: what are the most significant biosecurity and zoonotic disease risks associated with



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importing companion animals into the UK?

David Holdsworth: There is an assessment undertaken by our epidemiologists and by our veterinary experts; over time it is complex. That can change. We monitor disease movement across the world. We monitor disease movement across Europe. At the moment, in companion animals, the main area we are concerned about is *Brucella canis* because we have seen an increase in that disease in pets, within dogs, within the UK.

Q242 **Chair:** If you encounter *Brucella canis*, what action needs to be taken?

David Holdsworth: There is a reporting procedure. Testing will be undertaken. We have communicated and put guidance out there for the veterinary profession in the private sector. If they suspect a case they will refer through for testing. APHA is one of the bodies that can undertake that testing and sampling. We will either confirm or negate. If it is confirmed, our advice to the private veterinary profession is that euthanasia should be—

Chair: It can be transferred to human beings and I think it has been once in the UK.

David Holdsworth: Yes, we have had a human case. There has been a recent HAIRS risk assessment. HAIRS is a multi-agency group of specialists. It considers human and animal infection risks and surveillance, and that informs public health. There has been a recent published assessment on *Brucella canis* by that group; it includes UKHSA experts and APHA experts. While it is considered a low risk to humans in terms of how pathogenic and how easy it is for a human to catch it, there is that risk still.

Q243 **Chair:** Which countries do we see levels of *Brucella canis* that raise concerns?

David Holdsworth: Mainly some eastern European countries is the main route we are seeing. Romania is one of the key countries where we are seeing that route through to the UK.

Q244 **Chair:** Do you have sufficient resources at your disposal to deal with the problem when it occurs, and are you confident that in terms of funding and staff and expertise, you are up to this particular challenge?

David Holdsworth: I think, like most public sector departments, we have to balance with competing demands. In this particular case, we have the resources we need at present. We have a clear plan in place to handle this but it does need partnership with the private sector. It does need partnership with those on the frontline in the borders, like we have just heard from the port operators and the ferry operators, because it is a collaborative effort.



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It also needs the general public to be aware of this and to understand the risks that they are also undertaking through some of these importation routes and purchase of companion animals.

Q245 Chair: In terms of mutilations—tail docking, ear cropping and cats with their claws removed—are you picking up more of that? We understand that animals are being brought in sometimes by organised criminals posing as rescue organisations, where these activities have been carried out. These cruel practices have been imposed on the dogs, in particular.

Sometimes, for example, dogs are coming in maybe sourced from Serbia or other Balkan countries, but coming in through Bulgaria, which of course is an EU country. Is this something you are finding more of?

David Holdsworth: I will bring Ms Hirst in on some of the detail. We have to point out that it is not illegal to bring a cropped animal in or out of the UK. It is the practice within the UK that is illegal. That makes it very difficult for us because at the border there is no requirement for us to check. It is not illegal. We will not have the data around that because it is not a legal requirement.

Nicola Hirst: You are right. We do not have that level of detail. Our intelligence from our colleagues in Dover and other places is that we do see a steady stream of these animals coming through the ports. There is a direct correlation between popularity of certain celebrities who have some of these animals who make it popular. There is something about public education, about the impact of this on the animal, so that we can try to deter people from bringing them through.

Q246 Chair: In that case, would it help if the UK imposed a ban on importation of these dogs, where these mutilations are being carried out? I suppose that is a political question, which I should not be asking. That may be one of the things this Committee will look at in terms of its recommendations in this area.

How are you addressing concerns regarding animals that have either been identified at the border or have evaded detection and are now in the domestic population—where they have slipped through the net? Is there any surveillance in that regard or you rely on vets and owners?

David Holdsworth: It is a system that relies on all parties to play their role. We do have the approved import scheme. We do have requirements on ferry operators and on port operators. There is a first line of checks, which is the paperwork that is issued is required to be checked and assessed by those carrying the animals.

The second line is at our border control points, such as Dover and Heathrow, where there will be APHA staff also supporting the private sector in undertaking those checks. It is very much targeted. One of the things post EU is that we can undertake a risk-based assessment. There is a risk-based regime in place. Whereas previously we could not



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undertake checks at the border with EU, we now have the ability to direct different levels of checks in place, based on the risk that we see.

Q247 **Rosie Duffield:** You have done this a little bit, David, but could you please outline the processes by which animals are imported into the UK and the role of APHA and other Government bodies at each stage of that?

David Holdsworth: I will direct this to Ms Hirst, who is our operational expert.

Rosie Duffield: Yes, that makes more sense.

Nicola Hirst: If we are talking about animals, we have already heard that pets come in through the pet travel scheme. For importing animals coming in they can either come in on the certificate that they went out on, which is issued in the UK, which is the animal health certificate, or they can come in on certificates issued in the EU, which is a pet health certificate. They could also come in on a pet passport, which is also issued in the EU.

If you are importing commercial animals—if they are commercial animals they are coming in from the four countries that are under the import approval scheme, which is Ukraine, Poland, Belarus and Romania—you are required to pre-notify us of that import and we will approve you to bring those animals in.

It requires you to tell us when you are travelling, and you are only allowed to travel within a certain timeframe, which allows us to check people coming in but also be there to intervene if we think there is suspicious activity happening. That has been in place since October last year following the ban from the impact of Ukraine, where there was a ban initially after that happened, and then it turned into the importer scheme, which has proved fairly successful.

Beyond that, we expect for commercial animals that they will have an export health certificate from the origin country, and that is used to transport those animals into the UK. That will have been vet-checked to ensure that they have all of the correct health attestations that require the animal to enter the UK.

Q248 **Rosie Duffield:** So at each stage you have quite a good idea of who is where, by the sounds of it. That is quite reassuring. Thank you. I know you have both just said there is not enough data or hardly any data, but what is your assessment of the current scale of pet smuggling in the UK, if you had to guess on your experience?

David Holdsworth: I do not think civil servants do well when they guess at statistics. What I would say is we are undertaking some analysis at the moment. For example, when we introduced the ban on the back of the rabies risk, on the back of the movement of animals from Ukraine across Europe, we did see a reduction in the commercial importation of around



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45%. We then saw a corresponding increase in use of the pet travel scheme of around 40%.

Headline data are that there perhaps is some movement between the schemes, which should not happen, and perhaps there has been a route there. But we are undertaking a detailed analysis at the moment. We monitor the high level and then we flow that through into detailed intelligence analysis.

Q249 Rosie Duffield: On an average day, how many vehicles are checked at the border for potentially non-compliant companion animal importation?

Nicola Hirst: It varies. It could be one or two; it could be 10. It depends on the intelligence that we are getting through, both from the port health authorities and our intelligence team that we have based at Dover about familiarity of consignments—transporters we know of. It really varies.

Between January and now, we identified 6,195 non-compliances going through that route: 364 animals were detained following checks at Dover; 225 were identified under welfare compliance; 125 were detained under the rabies order, which meant their rabies vaccinations were not correct; 182 were detained for other health reasons, so they did not have tapeworm treatment; there were 19 pregnant dogs detained, including two basset hounds that had 19 puppies between them; and there were 146 commercial consignments that were disguised as travelling under the pet scheme. Of those, 96 animals were abandoned in the UK with us, and then we worked with the Dogs Trust and other welfare groups to resolve that issue.

Q250 Rosie Duffield: That is a lot, isn't it? The official number of cats imported into the UK is 40,000. Barry Gardiner asked this question of the first panel. Cats Protection surveys estimate that the number is closer to 80,000. How on earth do you account for that disparity, if you can? Do you feel that it is the same disparity for dogs as well?

David Holdsworth: We would have to understand the methodology used in the survey and the source of the data and if that was submitted to us we would be happy to undertake that assessment. Any smuggling activity is very difficult to quantify because of how it operates but we are seeing the effective use at the border of all the parties involved: the ferry operators, the carriers and the port. Border Force officials are crucial to this as well as the Animal and Plant Health Agency. It is about ensuring that we have the lines of defence that we need to make it more and more difficult to get smuggled animals into the UK.

Nicola Hirst: Operationally, we have seen a slight increase in cats coming through, specifically Persian cats and the long-haired type. It is not significant enough to think that it is the estimate that you are talking about but we are also seeing an increase in smuggled birds coming through. We see trends vary by different demands and different restrictions that are happening elsewhere.



Q251 **Dr Hudson:** On the question of non-compliant checks, when they are intelligence-led and you are suspicious, where are they done, say, at Dover? Are they done on the port or are they done on the inland facility?

Nicola Hirst: We have five intelligence officers, some of whom are based in Dover and some around the country. They look at the data that is coming through, from the paperwork checks that the team in Carlisle is undertaking on what commercial consignments are coming in.

Dr Hudson: If a vehicle is coming in that you want to check, where is that check taking place physically?

Nicola Hirst: At Dover.

Dr Hudson: In the port or in the inland facility?

Nicola Hirst: In the port.

David Holdsworth: At the moment it is at the port, pending the opening of the Sevington facility.

Dr Hudson: Nicola, you said it could be anything from two vehicles a day to potentially 10 vehicles depending on intelligence?

Nicola Hirst: Yes.

Q252 **Chair:** Following on from that, if vehicles are diverted to Sevington, they are not escorted there, are they? They are expected to go under their own steam. Is there a concern that a smuggler or a person with dogs that are illegal might speed up the M20 and not drop in at Sevington? Does it happen?

David Holdsworth: We are not operating at Sevington yet but, yes, and we have undertaken some pre-work in assessments on how we mitigate against that. The details of the owners and so on will be on the paperwork, so it is not that there is not a traceability, but then we have also started exploring technology and how you can track them. There is technology in use in other countries where they say to this vehicle, "You need to go here, please hold this" or a mobile phone number is taken that can be tracked en route and there is an alert system if it deviates. The use of technologies as well as the traceability in the paperwork gives us options in that space and we are exploring that at the moment.

Q253 **Derek Thomas:** We heard that there is no requirement for visual checks of an animal against its records or documentation. What kind of risk does that present to you for identifying potentially illegally imported animals or even pets with welfare issues?

David Holdsworth: I will bring in Ms Hirst on the physical checks. The regime that we operate at the moment ensures that we can undertake the physical checks that will ensure that what is on the paperwork, what is on the chip matches the animal in front of us. That is why we have specialised teams at APHA who also have a specialised veterinary resource on call. If our frontline animal health officers are not satisfied or



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do not feel they are qualified, they have access to qualified vets in the locality as well as within APHA centrally.

Nicola Hirst: The identification check has already been done by the port authorities who check that the animal against the paperwork is identifiable. APHA then looks for non-compliances beyond that check. We could have some intelligence that we have seen a transporter three times that week taking a level of pets through. They are pulling them out on a risk base to do a physical check, but the physical check is really the identification of the animal because once they are identified we know we can match the paperwork up against that requirement.

Q254 **Derek Thomas:** Am I right in saying that at the port there is no requirement for a physical check to take place, or is there?

Nicola Hirst: There is a requirement for a microchip check to take place, so the animal has to be physically presented.

Q255 **Derek Thomas:** On the Committee visit to your Weybridge site, the Committee was informed that false veterinary documentation has been used by international organised criminals to export vehicles to the UK. How frequently are you aware of that happening?

Nicola Hirst: We have seen a few false documents, false pet passports, fraudulent export health certificates. We have seen vets in other countries who are consistently certifying animals that they should not be certifying. In that instance, through our policy colleagues, we have written to the countries involved and made them aware that this happening so that they put some mitigations in place. For the vets who have been involved in consistently certifying, our chief veterinary officer, Christine Middlemiss, has taken direct action and done CVO-to-CVO correspondence. That has seen a reduction in the cases where we knew that was happening.

Q256 **Derek Thomas:** We have already heard—I think from you, David—that it is not possible to find out all those that have been smuggled but where they are trying to navigate the system, trying to be as close to accurate as possible, is it potentially easier to pick up the ones that should not be coming through?

Nicola Hirst: It is very difficult to find something that is not presented at all but once you have something presented and you have some documents, at least you have something to try to check against.

Q257 **Derek Thomas:** The Chairman was more diplomatic than usual in his question about the import of dogs with cropped ears. The SCPA has said that a ban on importing these dogs would be a great help. I am going to ask you: do you support that recommendation? I think the Chairman has been far too diplomatic.

Chair: I am always nervous about asking civil servants political questions.



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Derek Thomas: Is it political if it is about the animal welfare?

David Holdsworth: I think the Chair is right. In this space, the correct civil servant to ask is the chief veterinary officer, Dr Middlemiss, who advises Government Ministers on that.

Derek Thomas: Okay. But do you agree with the Scottish SCPA?

David Holdsworth: I would not like to comment on an area of expertise that is beyond my qualification. That is definitely a Dr Middlemiss question.

Derek Thomas: Nicola, obviously off the record? *[Laughter.]*

Chair: Of course officials take direction from Ministers, so it may be something we can ask the Secretary of State when she comes to give evidence to us next week.

Q258 **Cat Smith:** Talking about the responsibility for checks, how confident are you in the capacity of the carriers to manage checks on companion animals?

Nicola Hirst: We have a close working relationship with the carriers and there have not been any issues flagged through to APHA that capacity is an issue as far as I am aware.

Q259 **Cat Smith:** Do you have confidence that they have the capacity to do the relevant checks?

David Holdsworth: As we have said earlier, the system we operate, in partnership with the carriers and Border Force, is designed to be a proportionate system that protects UK biosecurity but also allows the flow of traffic and safe transport of animals across the border. The scheme we operate ensures that there is a quality assurance audit and check from us on the pet carriers. We undertake quality audits to ensure that they are complying. Again, it is in their interest to ensure that they have high standards of compliance and quality. If we were to remove their ability to do that because of non-compliance, it reduces their flow of traffic and their commercial viability in that space and people going through. We constantly review the scheme and have it under assessment.

Q260 **Cat Smith:** My colleague Rosie asked the earlier panel this question that I am going to ask you: if the carriers were not doing the compliance checks, what kind of organisation do you think it should be and what are the resource implications of that?

David Holdsworth: I will bring in Nicola on the resource implications. As I said, the reason we operate the current scheme is because it is complex and you are trying to balance the proportionality of the flow of traffic, the flow of goods and the flow of animals with the biosecurity check. At the moment, our view is that the best way to do that is for those who understand their operation and those who are trying to manage the flow



of traffic to be a key part of that system, but with clear audit and assurance checks around their operation of that system.

Nicola Hirst: I think we would need to understand what value added a separate organisation would bring. Would it improve compliance levels? Would it reduce smuggling? Would it reduce any issues that are found? We do not have the evidence to say from the levels of checks that happen whether it would or would not. From a resourcing point of view, we would need to stand up teams of people but it would be the estates and infrastructure logistics because we would need a space at the port to do this piece of work as well, so it is adding another layer of complexity in a fast-moving environment.

Q261 **Cat Smith:** What would reduce smuggling, in your opinion?

David Holdsworth: That is the \$60 million question. We constantly adopt tactics and we change. The increase of staff at Dover was a direct result of what we saw in the data and the intelligence coming through. There are definitely opportunities for us to use data in an improved way. A bit like Dr Hudson was saying earlier, where we are seeing constant, persistent movement between borders, are we picking that up using the latest technology and saying, "Why is that person going backwards and forwards across that border and are there animal health movements tied to that person?" I think that technology is a key part of that going forward.

There is also the work that we are doing with Border Force to join us at some of our high-volume, high-risk places like Dover. An example of that is about six weeks ago, in a joint operation, where Border Force was able to stop 900 birds that were in contravention of the import rules and regulations. They were seized. We were able to take those birds into APHA and look after them and then ensure they were moved on. We denied the revenue to the smugglers and there was a consequence of that to the smugglers. That was a joint operation with Border Force and APHA.

Q262 **Cat Smith:** Throughout our looking into this, it is quite clear that it is intelligence-led and that is what you were saying about using data, David. Where does the intelligence come from that allows you to do intelligence-led? How do you act upon it? We have heard a lot about Dover. What about other ports in the UK?

David Holdsworth: I will bring in Ms Hirst on some of the detail. This is an area that APHA is growing into, to be frank. It is an area where we are increasing our resources and we are looking at how we can improve intelligence.

The current routes can be multiple sources. It can be from our staff who are based at the ports where they notice regular travellers going through. It will be from the paperwork, where we find anomalies in the paperwork. It will be from Border Force officers who refer through to APHA. It can



also come in from the likes of the third sector, animal charities who will refer matters through to us.

Q263 **Chair:** You say you have not yet made a decision on whether Sevington is going to open. I think there is an alternative site at Bastion Point that could also be pressed into service. When is that decision going to be made and what is the timescale for bringing either of those into action? In the meantime, where is that work being carried out?

David Holdsworth: Apologies, Chair, if it was in my language. Sevington is not operational at the moment. It is there. The decision has been taken; we will use Sevington. Bastion Point remains as a standby facility. In terms of when it will become operational, I turn to Ms Hirst.

Nicola Hirst: October 2025 is the current timeframe.

Q264 **Chair:** Where is the activity and compliance work that will be done at Sevington being done now? Is it being done in the ports themselves?

David Holdsworth: It is a mix. The likes of plant health import checks are being done at place of destination, PODs. Our staff will attend the point of destination and will check at those: garden centres and horticultural import yards.

For the animal regime, the policy and operation of the border operating model is not yet live, apart from where we have already been operating at the border at Dover. The post-EU border operating model for animals will be done at Sevington once we go live.

Nicola Hirst: We also do risk-based checks at destination for some live animals, specifically livestock, but there is risk-based for all live animals.

Q265 **Chair:** When Sevington is in action, is that going to be much improved and as you would wish to see it? We are a bit suboptimal now but we are making the best of a bad job?

David Holdsworth: At the moment, we are seeing that on the back of EU exit we have the ability to apply more controls than we did before. That is what we will be seeing at Sevington—that ability to apply increased controls for those coming through, especially our highest-volume port, Dover, for those animal movements in our highest-risk areas.

We already have a risk-based regime where we will undertake targeted checks both at ports and at point of destination.

Q266 **Dr Hudson:** Just to follow up that line of questioning, currently it is done in the Port of Dover but if there is intelligence that you need to deploy staff up to Harwich or somewhere, can you do that? Is that the same in other ports across the United Kingdom? You can deploy staff on an intelligence-led basis to make ad hoc inspections—is that right?



Nicola Hirst: By far our most sophisticated operation is at Dover but, depending on the intelligence coming through, we have deployed staff at a number of different ports. We have worked with the RSPCA in operations at Anglesey Port as well. We have also done targeted checks, working with local authorities, on animals that have gone into the general population where they think non-compliances have happened. We have worked with local authorities in order to seize those animals and look at the compliance of those. Depending on what intelligence we have and the strength of that intelligence, we can deploy as needed.

Q267 **Dr Hudson:** It is intelligence-led. David, in one of your answers you talked about how there is a flipping between commercial movement and movement under the pet scheme, and perhaps larger numbers than should be changing between the two. That is potentially people flipping between the two schemes. At that level, you are looking at that. I raised a question in the earlier session about horses. Are you seeing a change in patterns, moving maybe in and out of Ireland with different operators and that sort of thing? Is the APHA taking a holistic view and saying, "Look, we are seeing changes in behaviour and movement of animals, and we can act"? Is that what you are doing?

David Holdsworth: It is fair to say we are developing our capability in that space. We have some capability now, and that is part of the investment that we have received from DEFRA and the devolved Administrations. We are building on that capability. We can do it to some extent now. We can also ensure that where data is available already, we are providing that to DEFRA policy teams so that they can do the assessment and the analysis to see whether there needs to be any policy shift on the back of the data and intelligence.

Nicola Hirst: On the horses specifically, World Horse Welfare has a very sophisticated intelligence model and we have worked quite closely with them in the past to target some consignments coming through, specifically through Killingholme—that tends to be one of the routes where horses are coming in—and sometimes Newcastle as well. When we have intelligence we will work with partners on that basis.

Q268 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you. We have taken evidence from World Horse Welfare, who have raised the numbers with us, and it is reassuring that the Government agency is aware of that. When I asked the port operators it was perhaps, "We are just seeing elite animals going in and out, and there is not a problem". I think that you are agreeing with World Horse Welfare that there is an issue and we need to work out the best way of addressing that.

I will go on to my final question, looking at resourcing and funding. To preface my comments, our line of questioning is often looking at the stresses and strains in the system and it does not mean that our Committee is critical. On behalf of the Committee, I would just say thank you to the APHA for what you do: keeping our country safe in terms of our biosecurity, whether it is movement of animals and plants or



managing disease outbreaks. We have discussed in the past things like avian influenza. Thank you, to you and your teams, for all that you do.

Forgive me, I am now going to talk a bit more about the pressures on you as well. How prepared do you feel APHA facilities are for monitoring and assessing potential biosecurity risks or low animal welfare practices that are associated with movement of animals into our country? How well do you think you are doing there, as the slip cordon looking at that?

David Holdsworth: We are extremely lucky in the Animal and Plant Health Agency with the world-class expertise we have. Genuinely, one of the first things that I discovered when I came into the agency just over a year ago was the brilliant team that we have, working with colleagues within DEFRA, who are horizon-scanning.

The chief veterinary officer, the chief veterinary officers for Wales and Scotland, and I, regularly get reports telling us about disease movement across the globe, near and far, and what that disease movement could mean in terms of risk to the UK border. There are structures within DEFRA and APHA that allow us to have those conversations, to say, "What does that mean? Should we look again at our policy? Should we look again at our operational readiness?" There is a very strong and world-class horizon-scanning capability.

Chair: When I was a Minister I would receive those reports. Some of the diseases in other parts of the world were quite frightening—not least African swine fever, which could decimate our pig herds if it arrives.

David Holdsworth: I have discovered the risk is knowing when not to worry and knowing when to worry, and relying on the experts.

Q269 **Dr Hudson:** David, I was a guest at the Public Accounts Committee when we were looking at the APHA resourcing, and you and Christine Middlemiss gave us very good evidence on that. There are stresses and strains when you are dealing with avian influenza or, heaven forbid, when something like African swine fever came in. In your view, does the APHA Weybridge site currently have suitable staff capability and resource capacity to effectively manage the risks of potential infectious disease outbreaks, whether they are zoonotic or otherwise?

David Holdsworth: We have the capability and the capacity to manage now. We have already shown we are managing the avian influenza outbreak, which is the world's biggest and the UK's largest.

The challenge we have, as we explored at the Public Accounts Committee, is that we are on the precipice now of the need for investment into that Weybridge site because a lot of the buildings are at the end of their life cycle. That risk of failure in buildings is only going to increase as we move forward. That is why we have been working on the SCAH programme, with Treasury colleagues and Ministers, to ensure that there is investment to ensure that site is there for us.



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Q270 **Dr Hudson:** Can you give us a snapshot update? There was perhaps £1.2 billion allocated for that. There is an additional £1.6 billion needed. Are you encouraged, with your dialogue with DEFRA and the Treasury, that that resilience is factored into the long-term spending of the Government?

David Holdsworth: We are clear that we have the commitment for this spending review for what we need. Next year will be critical, with the next phase of the business case that requires decisions on further investment. There are going to be challenges. We are competing with the rest of the public sector for call on public funds. We will be going through that process next year.

Q271 **Dr Hudson:** As a Committee, on our visit we were very impressed that deliberations had been made at your end, plans are being made, and that your staff are planning as if it is going ahead. Is that right?

David Holdsworth: Yes.

Q272 **Dr Hudson:** Good. I think we have covered Sevington in detail. Nicola, it will be up and running in October 2025, did you say?

Nicola Hirst: Yes. I should have said 2024.

Q273 **Dr Hudson:** In 2024. That helps, thank you. I just wanted to clarify that. Between now and then, those checks are being done within the Port of Dover, largely, or on an ad hoc basis in other ports if you get that intelligence. Are you comfortable that that arrangement is working okay?

Nicola Hirst: We have quite a sophisticated team down there. One of the things we will need to explore, when Sevington does become fully operational, is what that team's role looks like. In theory, the checks should be done away, before the animal has even set foot on a train or a ferry, and they then get diverted to that route. There is a lot to work out from our target operating model about how we are going to effectively do that.

Q274 **Dr Hudson:** Just coming on to staffing, David, you said that the number of staff had been increased at Dover. In answer to a written Parliamentary Question, we received information that there are currently 12 APHA staff based at the Port of Dover, working in a shift way, and weekends, bank holidays and nights are covered on an on-call capacity. Is that the figure you recognise, with the increase, and are you comfortable that that extent of staffing is adequate?

David Holdsworth: We also have staff who are not physically based at Dover but support the Dover operation. There are another five staff who are located nationally but support, through intelligence, the team at Dover.

Dr Hudson: Can they be deployed elsewhere or are they physically based in London, for example?



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David Holdsworth: All of our animal health officers can be deployed across Great Britain.

Dr Hudson: On a need basis?

David Holdsworth: Yes. We have that capability, and that is what happens in outbreak and that is what we do with the Port of Dover. We went through a period this year with Dover where we found recruitment challenging, so they did go through a period where they had a number of vacancies within that team.

Q275 **Dr Hudson:** In terms of the monitoring, we talked about if you get intelligence and there is a change in behaviour. If unscrupulous people trying to bring animals in are saying, "Right, we will do it on an Easter weekend", or whatever, are you looking at that and can you deploy staff to mitigate and prevent bad things happening?

David Holdsworth: Yes, is the short answer.

Nicola Hirst: Yes. If we find that we have a high-risk consignment that we think is coming in, we have staff who are able to deploy and look at that consignment.

The introduction of the Approved Importer scheme means that people can only come in at certain times. That has helped us have the right people in the right place at the right time because that has condensed the window in which people can bring consignments through.

Q276 **Dr Hudson:** Even though it could potentially be on-call staffing, could those staff be deployed because of the arrangements that have been put in place?

Nicola Hirst: Yes, and we flex our resource. Sometimes we will operate on a Saturday or a Saturday night because we are trying to surprise the people who are coming through. They do not expect us to be there at different times. We will do that in order to try to break some of the cycles.

Q277 **Dr Hudson:** You keep that under review? If you felt you needed increased resource, you would make that case to the powers that be at DEFRA and then, ultimately, Treasury?

David Holdsworth: Yes.

Dr Hudson: Great.

David Holdsworth: We do have competing demands. It is harder to cross-deploy or redeploy during a period of outbreak than it is without the outbreak, but we constantly have conversations with our colleagues on DEFRA on the requirement for resourcing.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. The Minister is on her feet and the votes will be before too long. That is good timing. Thank you very much



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indeed for your evidence, and I echo Neil's words about the important work you do. As a farmer myself, we did not get foot and mouth but, my goodness, we were petrified, and sadly a lot of farmers did get that. When there is an outbreak of disease, it is only the surveillance and the work that you do down at Weybridge and around the country that keeps our farms secure, so thank you very much indeed.