

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Moving animals across borders, HC 1155

[Tuesday 20 April 2021](#)

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Watch the meeting

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

Questions 1 - 53

Witnesses

I: James Russell, President, British Veterinary Association; Victor Chestnutt, President, Ulster Farmers' Union; Stuart Roberts, Deputy President, National Farmers' Union.

II: Professor Tim Morris, Special Professor of Laboratory Animal Welfare and Science, University of Nottingham; James West, Senior Policy Manager, Compassion in World Farming; Professor Malcolm Mitchell, Professor of Physiology and Animal Welfare, Scotland's Rural College.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [National Farmers' Union](#)
- [Compassion in World Farming](#)

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: James Russell, Victor Chestnutt and Stuart Roberts.

Q1 Chair: Welcome, everybody, to the EFRA Select Committee. We are looking at animal movement. Today we have our first panel. I am going to ask them to introduce themselves.

James Russell: My name is James Russell. I am the current British Veterinary Association president.

Victor Chestnutt: My name is Victor Chestnutt. I farm up here on the North Antrim coast, looking over at Scotland and Northern Ireland, and I am currently president of the Ulster Farmers' Union.

Stuart Roberts: I am Stuart Roberts, deputy president of the National Farmers' Union. I am a mixed farmer up here in Hertfordshire.

Chair: Thank you very much for joining us. What has been the impact of the trade and co-operation agreement and the SPS checks on the movement of live animals between the EU and the UK? I will ask Stuart to start off with that one, and then bring in James. We will then start to talk about the Northern Ireland situation, I suspect, Victor, in a minute, but you are welcome to answer the first question if you want to.

Stuart Roberts: I am sure there are many issues that we will cover off this afternoon but, in some ways, you have asked the easiest question first, which is about what the impact has been on trade. There has been no trade in live animals between the UK and mainland Europe because there are no border control posts approved at the moment. The very simple answer to that one is that, as we sit here at the moment, since 1 January there have been no movements.

Q2 Chair: I am not going to let you get away with quite that simple an answer. What would have been the normal amount of trade? What was roughly the trade in the previous year? I imagine it would not be a massive amount of movement at this time of year but we need to be able to compare it. Do you have any figures for that?

Stuart Roberts: For this time of year, no, I do not have the monthly data. I would be very happy to provide that to the Committee afterwards. I will do that. In terms of consignments in any one year, we could be looking at somewhere between, say, 25,000 and 30,000 animals in a year. At this time of year, there is a bit less than normal.

The other issue here—and it is going to be important that we separate this out—is that there are arguably two sets of movements. One is the animals that go for slaughter, and I suspect we will be having a discussion about that point later in the agenda. There is also the importance of the breeding stock, which actually is extremely important in terms of trade as well as in terms of our own productivity and pushing productivity and helping others around Europe in terms of improving their



stock. It is an important trade in terms of value on the breeding side. In relative numbers, these are not huge numbers, but they are important in terms of value and in terms of what we are trying to achieve with our genetics and our breeding stock where we really lead the world.

Q3 Chair: I imagine that at this time of year you would still get quite a lot of breeding pigs being imported and exported normally, and I imagine that has been brought to a halt, has it?

Stuart Roberts: It has. The one area where there has been some movement—I was slightly remiss to miss it earlier on—is when it comes to chicks. There has been some movement of chicks that has been able to take place, albeit a limited number so far.

James Russell: I would echo what Stuart has just said about the challenges of the lack of border control points on the other side of the short straits, meaning that there has effectively been no live animal transports of livestock over those straits. That raises in and of itself some particular challenges. We would anticipate that livestock, particularly moving from the island of Ireland on to mainland Europe, is now perhaps more likely to make that crossing along the much longer routes of crossing from Cork down into north-western France or possibly even down into Spain rather than just those short straits crossings. It goes without saying that we would be concerned about the welfare implications of extending those journey times.

The other thing that is perhaps worth noting is that, as the British Veterinary Association, I have the joy of trying to represent all species great and small. Of course, both equine and pet animals have been travelling under new regulations since the beginning of this year. We are aware, of course, that the pet travel is not what we might expect it to be in a normal year given that humans are not moving around as much as we might do. We are also aware that there has been a particular challenge with sport horses, and we attend the regular briefings chaired by Defra to try to overcome some of those problems with the OV's who are carrying out that export work.

While we welcome the existence of that opportunity to speak with them, both that meeting and the product-of-animal-origin equivalent meeting raise some concerns for us about the smaller operators in this area. It is fantastic that the larger exporters are able to meet on that very regular basis and in quite an intimate manner with representatives from Defra, but others are left trying to use the call centre at Carlisle, which, with the best will in the world of their staff—and I am sure those staff have the best will in the world—is a limited resource. We are concerned that is producing a system where smaller exporters find this disproportionately difficult.

Q4 Chair: Naturally, when animals are travelling, it is one thing to be travelling in a lorry; it is quite something else to be travelling in a lorry and then on to the sea on a boat. You really want to keep those journeys



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as short as possible. If it becomes more complicated to come through Wales and the UK and out again the other side when going to the continent, as you quite rightly say, they will be much longer sea journeys from Cork to France and Spain. This is an issue that we need to settle with the EU because otherwise it will do the cause of animal welfare a great deal of harm.

James Russell: We were disappointed to see that Portsmouth has had to pull the plug altogether on producing its border control point because of the reductions in funding made available. Others have scaled back but the one at Portsmouth has gone altogether. Yes, there is a need to remedy this from the EU side but we need to recognise that we do not have the infrastructure in place yet either on our side in all cases.

Q5 Chair: Is the border control post capacity that the UK is planning to build sufficient? If not, where are the gaps?

James Russell: If I may, I would like to answer that through thinking about the people involved in those border control points because I do not really feel qualified to talk about the physical structures. Running into this, we know that Defra's best estimate was for a 300% increase in the amount of export health certification work. We believe from the industry that that may be an underestimate in terms of what they anticipate delivering through this year.

I deliberately stayed away from transport into Northern Ireland in the first part of my answer but if I may just come on to that as well. We know that, coming towards the end of the grace period, an estimate has been put in place of 70 full-time-equivalent veterinary surgeons being required to undertake the OV certification work for that route of travel as well, with up to 150,000 certificates a year. I would just draw your attention to the fact that those 70 full-time equivalents are unlikely to be 70 individuals. The average time spent on delivering this sort of OV work by an official veterinarian ranges between 10% and 30%. That might represent somewhere between 230 and 700 vets needing to be qualified and needing to be in the right place at the right time and being able to deliver that work.

As I have said to you before, we welcome the support that has been given in terms of funding for training. We have tried to put out the consistent message that we need to take that training up and make sure that we are in a position of having vets in place to be able to deliver this work. We remain concerned when we continue to hear some messages suggesting that there is no problem with veterinary capacity, particularly with the veterinary capacity that fills in behind those people who are signing export certificates.

Q6 Chair: Sorry to interrupt you. We are going to talk about the veterinary capacity in a later question, so we will deal with that side of it then. Victor, we are going to talk a bit more about Northern Ireland, but what is your situation about these border control points?



Victor Chestnutt: Northern Ireland always had that border control point in Larne. We are still working out of the same. We have some other temporary facilities there but there was some building work going on on a stop-start basis. Community tension is rising in Northern Ireland due to the issues that the protocol has forced on us.

Our chief vet says that 20% of Europe's certificates may need to take place at these two crossings, from Belfast and Larne, and it is just crazy. There is no way that there are enough vets in place to do that certification work. I will leave it there and we will come on to Northern Ireland and how it is affecting our trade in a minute.

Q7 **Chair:** Stuart, what is your consideration of our border control points and where we are?

Stuart Roberts: First of all, we will miss the original 1 July 2021 deadline for border control posts, but it is absolutely vital that we hit the new 1 March 2022 deadline. Our understanding at the moment is that there are plans to have those border control posts at Sevington for the Eurotunnel and Dover White Cliffs for the short straits. We also firmly believe that there is real merit in looking at further facilities that go outside of Kent. There was a lot of talk—and James mentioned this earlier—about Portsmouth, which we would be very supportive of. It is very well placed geographically.

The other one I would like to bring in, which is actually being talked about quite a lot at the moment and which we are picking up through our contacts with livestock companies in France, is the potential for a border control post near Calais. It does not need to be in the port facility itself; it can be within a reasonable distance. There is good progress going on there but it is absolutely vital that that gets approved. In order to get approval, it needs to be given a political priority and it needs to be raised up the political agenda. It would be really good to see the UK Government in talks directly with the French Government to help push that border control post on just outside Calais.

We certainly think that there is opportunity for further planned facilities inside the UK beyond the two that are planned in Kent and Portsmouth, which, as I say, is the one that gets talked about a lot. Then there is that interesting one around at Calais at the moment; it would be good to see some priority given to that as well, just to get that up and running as soon as possible.

Q8 **Chair:** With these border points, are they considering layerage? Are some already being proposed? Is it enough?

Stuart Roberts: To some extent, it will depend on what the scale of the trade is, and that may well come in to questions later on. I certainly see very exciting opportunities, as I said earlier, in terms of breeding stocks and in terms of our genetics. That is why we need to look beyond just those two facilities that are currently being talked about in one county.



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There needs to be at least one elsewhere geographically, maybe on the south coast, and possibly even beyond that. There certainly needs to be something more than just the two that are currently being talked about.

Q9 Geraint Davies: Stuart Roberts, I just want to know how well you think the UK Government are working with the EU to put together the infrastructure and the arrangements to get a move on here. From what you are saying, and from what I understand, exports are something like two-thirds down since last December. We were hoping to have import controls in place by July and now it will not be until next March. There has been a major cut in the amount of investment available for border control posts. What is your take on this?

Stuart Roberts: You pull out some extremely interesting points there. My starting point in all of this is that, on both sides of the border, we started with exactly the same regulatory regime. We started off, by and large, in many cases, with exactly the same disease status, and immediately the UK has been treated as a third country, which has impacted our exports. When it comes to trade the other way, on imports, I believe we have taken a very pragmatic and sensible approach by effectively carrying out many of those checks on the destination arrival, et cetera. There need to be more discussions in this area. I touched on a specific one where some direct further contact with the French Government is important, just to make sure that that Calais facility is put up their priority list and gets Commission approval.

Also, in the agreement, there was lots of talk about future co-operation and collaboration around sanitary and phytosanitary controls. I am sure James will say it if I do not but I will get in first: animal diseases, for example, do not comply with political boundaries. Epidemiological areas are not the same as political areas, and it is vital that we work with our European neighbours on this issue going forward, because we need access to their market for our exciting and world-leading genetics, and their farming industry needs access to our genetics if they are to improve their productivity and push on the things that are important to them. It is very much a win-win, and I see no reason why we should not be seeing more work across both sides of the border to get trade up and running in as smooth a way and as frictionless a way as possible.

Q10 Geraint Davies: In terms of the capacity to get back to previous levels and the risk that businesses will close down, do you agree with me that it is important to have enough of these border control posts as soon as possible, rather than thinking we might have a few down in a few years' time? Businesses will close down. I know there is an attempt in Cairnryan in south Wales, as well as Portsmouth and the others you mentioned, to get the investment in early to keep the business going. If we wait, is there a risk that there will be a permanent reduction in the amount of trade that we are able to do from Britain?

Stuart Roberts: I do. Quite often we set a deadline and the deadline ends up becoming the target. Let us remember that the March 2022



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deadline is a deadline. The sooner we can get facilities up and running, the sooner we can open trade up and start to trade on our excellent genetics.

Part of it is not just about investment, facilities and resources but also about messaging. One of the unfortunate things with the Government's consultation around banning live exports for slaughter was that a number of commercial parties read that as a ban on all live animals full stop, or that that was what was being proposed. That actually is not the case as we understand it—we very much hope that is not the case—and breeding stock, for example, has a very vibrant and a very exciting future.

We found that some of those parties that were looking excitedly at setting up facilities—you have mentioned some as well as those I mentioned earlier—all of a sudden have slightly cold feet because they misinterpreted. We need a very clear statement from Government around the future of breeding stock and the role they could play in taking forward our footprint, if you like, on the rest of the world. At the moment, that probably has not helped. It certainly has not helped some commercial operators who got very nervous.

Q11 Geraint Davies: Victor Chestnutt, from the Ulster and Scotland point of view, do you agree that the consultation on live exports, for example, has put off investment and that the Government have not put in enough investment to enable enough trade, and that there is a real risk that there will be permanent reduction in the amount of livestock being traded, not least for genetic productivity reasons?

Victor Chestnutt: Yes. Northern Ireland is a region with very small family farms, so we do focus on pedigree breeding, for one instance. Our market is the GB market, where we exchange genetics. I will just go over a few figures. The Stirling bull sales are well known as being the top for many breeds throughout the UK. In 2017, there were 107 bulls left from 45 exhibitors. In 2018, there were 109 from 43. In 2019, 120 from 37 exhibitors. This year, there were four bulls that travelled from three exhibitors. That trade has been wiped out. Yes, we had covid but this was not covid-related; this was because, if we take a bull over and do not sell, it is six months' residency in the UK before it can come back. That is what stopped our stock men heading over.

You should not outline a problem without having a solution. The solution that we would like to see is an immediate temporary reinstatement of the show licence whereby we could take an animal to the UK mainland and, if it was not sold, it could then come back to Northern Ireland and do its residency on-farm in Northern Ireland. We have a database in Northern Ireland. We could put a marker on that beast that it could not go on down into the south and into Europe, so we do not see how this could affect the European single market.



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I will move on to H&H in Carlisle. They have reported that their trade with Northern Ireland, to and from Northern Ireland, since 1 January is down over 90%. That is the effect of the protocol there.

Chair: Victor, sorry to interrupt you. We will deal with this in another question, when we go into all the details of Northern Ireland and you can wax lyrical.

- Q12 **Geraint Davies:** I do not want to draw you into where the Chair says we should not go but, in short, in terms of the reduction of bulls from 120 to four, would you agree with me that these things need to be sorted out very quickly in terms of the infrastructure and co-operation with the EU? If you are in this sort of business, you cannot wait years and years with your bulls; people may exit the market and the business altogether.

Victor Chestnutt: You are exactly right. I could not have put that much clearer myself. This business is in danger of being lost for good.

There is just another thing. We are talking to politicians. I know politics in Northern Ireland can be one side or the other, green or orange. Both sides support the need for this to be sorted out.

- Q13 **Geraint Davies:** James, Stuart mentioned the need for animal disease control as well as having infrastructure on the borders to have proper checks quickly enough to bring back trade. We know that the exports to the EU in live animals for genetics and other reasons is down 64% but exports to non-EU countries is down only 13%, due to the pandemic, I guess. Do you think that there is now an urgent need to make change and preparation? What particularly would you point to?

James Russell: Yes, absolutely. What we would point to at the moment is similar to what Stuart said about the uncertainty around the ban on live exports for fattening and slaughter. I would extend that to say that I wonder whether there is concern from a commercial viewpoint if all you are going to be importing—I am thinking about those border control points in northern France perhaps—is live animals. We heard from Stuart earlier that that is significant in terms of UK agriculture but a relatively minor part of the cross-Channel trade. Whether that justifies the investment that needs to be made in it, that is a potential unforeseen consequence of a potential ban on live export for fattening and slaughter.

We also remain concerned about the capacity of the UK to recognise the disease threat in and around its borders. As a member of the European Union, we benefitted from being around the table in the surveillance network discussions around diseases that were coming into the EU and also where they were in the EU once they got there. African swine fever is the big one that is in all of our minds at the moment. We are not around that table anymore.

We have reassurance from the UK chief veterinary officer, Christine Middlemiss, that she maintains those bipartite discussions and understands where those disease risks are. Of course, we have absolute



faith in her ability to make a risk judgment on that as a veterinary surgeon, but it places a huge onus on her shoulders and we need to be ready to be very responsive to any comments that she might make about the alteration in risk profile of disease states across the Channel.

The last couple of farm diseases that have come into the United Kingdom have been vector-borne. They have been midge-borne. I am thinking about bluetongue and Schmallenberg. If our first point of inspecting these animals is a long way from their point of entry into the United Kingdom, then, with a vector-borne disease, we have missed the opportunity to keep that disease out of the country. There are a number of levels as to why we are concerned that this infrastructure is not being invested in at the moment, both in terms of import and export.

Geraint Davies: In other words, even though we have Brexited, it is clearly in our own self-interest to have very close co-operation with the EU in terms of disease control management and risk management of incoming diseases. It only has to cross the Channel to get to us. If we do not have that very close co-operation and goodwill, we put all our interests at risk. Is that right?

Chair: James, can you make a brief answer to that, because we will be dealing with a lot of that in a later question.

Q14 **Geraint Davies:** The question was about working with the EU to re-open trade, Chair. I am going to end here. As you interrupted me, can I just ask again: is it in our interest that we co-operate fully on disease management and risk management to avoid problems in the future?

James Russell: It is in our interest that we engage as fully as we can with any of our trading partners and that we use the expertise within the United Kingdom veterinary profession when we are undertaking that engagement to make the right risk judgments on it.

Q15 **Mrs Murray:** I know you touched on some of this in your answers to Mr Davies, but what impact has the trade and co-operation agreement had on the movement of animals between GB and Northern Ireland and, in particular of course, the Northern Ireland protocol?

Victor Chestnutt: I did mention the bull sale that was down from 120 to four. H&H in Carlisle would probably be down by a similar number. These were high-value bulls. These bulls would probably be worth at least a couple of thousand a piece less back home in Northern Ireland. That trade has more or less ended as we stand, unless we can get some relaxations. I started saying that we needed a reinstatement of the show licence, where the animal could come back and do the residency in Northern Ireland where our database can put a flag on it and it could not move into the south. Basically, we would like our farms to be treated as dead-end hosts, where stuff could come over here, stay on that farm and not move away to cause the Europeans any issues with their single market.



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The sheep issue is another one. I will bring this right down to a personal level with a local farmer here who I was talking to just last week. For the last 37 years, this has been one of the enterprises on his farm. It is a small family-run farm and he has just brought his son into the business along with him. They bought roughly around 400 blackface ewe rams every year in September in Scotland. This year, they were not told that there would be any difference so they went ahead and bought their ewe lambs. The procedure for that is that they stay in winter keep in Scotland because they have to be a year old to be tested for maedi visna to come to Northern Ireland.

There are roughly 9,000 of these that happen every year, in terms of trade from Scotland to NI. These ewe lambs stay in winter keep until the end of March, they are tested for MV and then they get put over to Northern Ireland. Because of the protocol now, there was a requirement for these sheep to be scrapie-monitored. Because there was no grace period, because the deal was not done until the very last days and we were straight into implementation, these sheep from Northern Ireland flock owners are stuck in Scotland. The man that rents the grass out wants the grass for his cattle or whatever else, so he is on the phone saying, "I want rid of these sheep", and the man is completely stuck. They are breeding sheep—they are not sheep for slaughter—and this is a huge problem at the minute.

This man told me he is reconsidering whether he will have to send his son off to get off-farm employment because this is one string that has been removed from his bow. If he does not get these over, he will lose money on them this year and it may very well mean that he goes down to a one-man band instead of a two-person farm business. That is the drastic effect that it is having on farm businesses in Northern Ireland.

What would we like to see on the scrapie monitor? We agree that this should be a long-term objective but we would like to see a derogation—a grace period, basically—because those animals were bought last year with those flock owners not being told. We then would like to see a modification on the export certificates so that we can have a lead-in period. These sheep have to be seven years on a scrapie-monitored farm to reach their full status but they can move after three years. We need a lead-in period to allow this trade to continue rather than just bouncing these things on people straightaway. He will be set to lose a lot of money if he has to re-sell those sheep for maybe slaughter at this time of year over in Scotland. It is quite drastic on the movement between Northern Ireland and UK mainland, and indeed UK mainland and Northern Ireland.

- Q16 **Mrs Murray:** If anything was introduced like the dead-end deal that you have talked about, would that have implications in any movement or trade between Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland? You are talking about the perspective between GB and Northern Ireland, which is what I asked, but would there be implications on other farmers if we introduced, or if we saw introduced, any of the things that you are asking for?



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Victor Chestnutt: No, because we have an APHIS system here where all animals are registered on APHIS and flags can be put on those animals that those animals could not move on, into or away. By putting a flag to their number, they could not move, so we think there should be no risk for trade from north to south because of that. Those animals would never be allowed to move, so it should not affect the risk.

Stuart Roberts: Victor's knowledge in this area is way superior to mine, and he touched on residency and ID challenges. There is one area where there is some merit in exploring. Victor talked about the scrapie monitoring. One of the possibilities when it comes to that check is to do a scrapie genotype check. It costs about £30; on a sheep that is about £150 or £200, it is cost-prohibitive. We have the trader support scheme and the movement assistance scheme, which have been really helpful in helping other movements across that border where there is additional paperwork, et cetera. I see no reason why there is not some merit in exploring whether scrapie genotyping costs could be included in that movement assistance scheme. That is one that would be well worth looking at.

Victor Chestnutt: The problem there, Stuart, is that, on the blackface breed, less than 10% will be genotype 1. Therefore, if you do 100 you might get 10 that are able to come in under that genotype. We think that a lead-in period to the scrapie monitoring scheme, and indeed the movement assistance scheme to cover the cost of that scrapie monitoring to allow trade to continue, would be useful.

Stuart Roberts: Yes, absolutely.

Q17 **Derek Thomas:** Victor, you referred to what changes might be needed, and presumably the system as it is now impacts the value of livestock from Northern Ireland farmers. How do you see farmers in Northern Ireland adapting to the new rules in the longer term if you do not see the kind of changes that you are asking for?

Victor Chestnutt: If we do not see the kind of changes that I am asking for, the pedigree sector in Northern Ireland will contract. There is no doubt about that. It will just contract and our genetic base will be lost. We are able to compete right at the top of the tree. For instance, of those four bulls that went over last year, two of those took breed championships, one of those a Limousin—it was top prize anyway; I think it was champion as well—and the other was the single Charolais entry, which took the Charolais top prize in Stirling. We can compete right at the top of the tree. We will lose that effectiveness in our genetics.

There are also the smaller breeds, the minority breeds and the rare breeds that need that flow of genetics back and forward to keep their breeds alive, which will be severely impacted. On the cattle side, I would see that being severely restricted and us losing a useful string to our bow in Northern Ireland.



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On the sheep issue, the Scottish landscape and the Northern Ireland landscape is quite similar, and that is why a lot of the sheep come from Scotland to Northern Ireland. They probably would eventually start to breed some of those of their own, but for that farmer, that one case I was telling you about who has a farm in Ballycastle beside me, he may even lose his son out of the business because he has lost a string to his bow and his farming enterprises. It is difficult.

Q18 Derek Thomas: It is not just about the movement but also about the ear-tagging. How does that confuse the issue?

Victor Chestnutt: Yes, that was the third part we were coming to. I will make myself clear. I will make myself clear: the ear-tagging does not stop trade but farmers cannot understand it. We have come from a position where all our tags were EU-compliant and now, if we buy a UK animal, it has to get a GB tag in it to denote it was from GB mainland on the mainland side. When it appears in Northern Ireland, we have 20 days to put that animal in, cut the three tags out and tag it with your next number in sequence in your own herd. This makes absolutely no sense at all. When the Government are talking about from farm to fork, the traceability goes out of the window. There has to be somewhere where you can go in and try to follow through but it loses at a glance that it is a UK animal. It loses its pedigree, its animal health status and its beef value or milk value or whatever those genetic values are.

You probably can do a manual trail and go in and cross-match, but why the need? It beggars belief. I have always found that, if you ask a farmer to do something that is sensible and there is a reason for it, there is no problem, but you should not ask them to do something that is as crazy as this; I use the word "crazy" knowing the word I am using, because this is a crazy rule. Health and safety and the other things with tagging and all the rest of it comes into it, but it absolutely makes no sense whatsoever.

Derek Thomas: Thank you, Victor; that sheds a lot of light on it.

Q19 Chair: Before we leave you on this one, Victor, cutting out a tag is an animal welfare issue as well, so it really is a nonsense. Before we leave the sheep situation in Northern Ireland, I imagine that in July, August and September, when a lot of ewes come from Scotland to Northern Ireland, that must be a very big trade. Do you have any idea how many would come across and how many would go from Northern Ireland to Scotland?

Victor Chestnutt: The trade from Scotland to Northern Ireland is mainly breeding sheep. If they are over a year old, you are right that they come in the autumn. If they are ewe lambs or under a year old, they stay for winter keep and then they come at this time of the year, and those are the sheep that are effectively stuck. We reckon it is somewhere around 11,000 in total.

There is a lot of trade with pedigree sheep back and forth across that isle in high-value sheep. Indeed, in the breed that I was involved in, the Texel



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breed, some extremely big prices have crossed the Irish Sea. If we lose that, our small farms and many of our part-time farms lose the ability to keep farming profitability.

Q20 Chair: Having kept a lot of sheep in my time, in terms of the quality of sheep from Scotland and especially those in Northern Ireland that are reared at quite a high altitude, they are always really good stock, are they not? It is important that we realise this, and we will try to get this through to Government.

Stuart Roberts: I just have a very quick point. I do not need to talk much about it; it was in our evidence at paragraph 32. It is also worth flagging the challenges that are happening in the pullet sector between GB and Northern Ireland, where we have been seeing some impacts as well in the poultry sector. It is there in our evidence so I do not need to go into it, but I just wanted to flag that one so we do not forget the chicken industry.

Chair: What it shows, Stuart, is how integrated the whole poultry, pig, cattle and sheep sectors are. We expect to be able to trade freely between Scotland and the rest of the UK along with Northern Ireland. The evidence we are taking this afternoon is really useful, which we will put back to Government very strongly, so thank you for that.

Q21 Rosie Duffield: My question is mostly directed to James Russell. I support the Compassion in World Farming and RSPCA campaigns, as do the vast majority of constituents who get in touch about animal welfare. Until we see an outright ban on live animal exports, the welfare of those animals has to be the top priority. We have mentioned this before but maybe we can drill down on it a bit. Will there be sufficient veterinary capacity in the EU to facilitate exports to the EU when they start again? We did talk about the numbers and you were saying the equivalent of 70 vets were needed. Do you think we are going to have that capacity?

James Russell: Those 70 were in Northern Ireland where we are talking about import controls into Northern Ireland. If you are thinking about that movement there, that probably represents between 200 and 700 actual vets. We have a number of questions there about where those people are coming from. I know that our own royal college, our own regulator, takes that seriously enough that, at their last council meeting a few weeks ago, they were asked to approve the reduction in English language qualifications for temporarily registered OVAs, not necessarily to carry out that export health certification work but to backfill the positions in slaughterhouses and carrying out official controls that were being left vacant by people moving into that export health certification work. We remain concerned about veterinary capacity within the United Kingdom and that would of course include Northern Ireland.

You were asking about the continent. I do not have those figures to hand but what I can say is that we meet regularly with a representative—a vet from the French Embassy—who assures us that they have been in the



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process for a period of time now of ramping up the number of people employed by the state in France in order to undertake that work. I am afraid I could not give you any assurance or lack of assurance on whether that was adequate. We simply know that it is occurring.

- Q22 **Rosie Duffield:** Thank you; that was really helpful. I had not thought about where it is all going to spread around, and of course that is a real practical problem. Obviously you do not know for sure but, in your opinion, will there be sufficient capacity in the UK when the physical checks start again in March 2022? If not, what can you recommend that the Government do about it?

James Russell: The fact that the chief veterinary officer and the lead vet for the Food Standards Agency approached RCVS council to ask for a derogation to be able to bring people into the country to help support the existing veterinary workforce at a lower level of English qualification than was expected by the RCVS points to just how concerned they are. If they are concerned to that extent, I remain concerned to that extent.

At the moment, there is not a single case that we are aware of where a lack of veterinary capacity means that products have not been exported or that checks have not been carried out on live animals. However, as I say, what that is disguising is the vacuum that that is placing behind that work on other work that needs to take place, for really good reason. This is disease control and real front-line monitoring of animals as part of our ability to continue exporting. If the European Union lost faith in that system—for example, in terms of the regionalisation that we are seeing of avian influenza restrictions through this outbreak during the winter, where the country as a whole has been able to continue to export meat but just not from those 10km zones—and if the European Union lost confidence in our ability to undertake that surveillance work, that would be damaging and could have a really dramatic impact not just on economic output in terms of exports but also on animal welfare and the potential huge animal losses brought about by being unable to undertake that export.

- Q23 **Rosie Duffield:** I just wondered if Stuart wanted to come in from the NFU point of view about how that could impact our farmers.

Stuart Roberts: Thank you for giving me the opportunity on this one. If the chief vet is concerned and the president of the BVA is concerned about veterinary capacity, then I am definitely concerned, because it is ultimately our products that are going to be caught up in that.

We said earlier in the session that the export trade has been significantly down so far, so we have not tested the system fully. Tomorrow we have new products coming on to the list of things that need export health certificates. We have changes coming. It is not just the big changes with the deadline of March next year on border control posts; it is the export health certificate. It is something that we are watching very closely at the moment and it would be a concern. So far, it has not caused any



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challenges, as far as we have seen, but it is one that could do so very easily as we start to see more trade and as we start to see a wider range of products. I would fully support everything James has said.

Q24 Dr Hudson: Thank you, James, Victor and Stuart for being before us today. James, you have touched on this in previous answers and we now have on record your concerns in terms of veterinary capacity moving forward. I want to focus on the potential disease surveillance and control aspects of that. From your veterinary viewpoint, how well do you feel that the UK currently monitors animal disease at its borders? You have some thoughts about capacity and things like that, but how well do we do it now and what could we do to make it more effective if you have any concerns with that?

James Russell: You have also heard me say today that we have absolute confidence in Christine Middlemiss, the chief veterinary officer, her team and of course the chief veterinary officers across our devolved nations in terms of their relationships and their ability to understand the regional disease risks; I am thinking of Europe as a region there.

It is of course the case that we are not undertaking checks on animals coming into the United Kingdom and that is not a new thing. What is new is that we are not sitting around the table, taking in the conversations about where those diseases are up to and where those risks lie. I have already mentioned African swine fever. That surveillance network is crucial. Let us not forget that, when the foot-and-mouth outbreak first began in 2001, that disease was picked up by a private vet examining an animal in an abattoir and recognising that there was something amiss. There was something different about what they were seeing with that animal. That absolute front-line of surveillance is hugely important in protecting the integrity of the country.

The United Kingdom, or GB anyway, is not beholden to the EU single market rules here, and so there is an opportunity for us to think about what the specific biosecurity needs are of GB and to implement the checks and measures that are proportionate to the disease risks of animals coming in. We can also consider how to use new technology better. I do not know what that new technology is—by definition it is not out there yet—but I would suggest an opportunity to invest in considering what the diseases are that we are concerned about and how we can best identify those outside of BCP checks. I would emphasise that those checks at the moment need to be in BCPs.

Apologies for the slightly stuck record on this one, but we need to make sure that we engage veterinary expertise in developing any trade deals, equivalence deals or alignment deals when it comes to recognising risks from third countries. It is hugely important and it is not occurring yet at the level that we would like to see it. We are not being engaged in those conversations.

Q25 Dr Hudson: Thank you; that is really helpful. It is about more



engagement of the veterinary sector in some of these discussions moving forward. It was good to hear you putting on record confidence in the chief vet, Christine Middlemiss, and her dialogue with the devolved Administrations but also with our European partners and friends.

You touched earlier on the EU's animal disease notification system. There is a question mark as to whether we are going to have full access to that. Could you clarify for the record what the BVA and the UK veterinary profession feel would be the impact on UK animal disease surveillance if we were not able to regain that access to that notification system?

James Russell: We would just be fighting to keep diseases away from our borders in a fog; that would be my analogy. We would not be able to see what is there, what it is that we need to be concerned about and what it is that we need to be uplifting our levels of concern about, whether that is African swine fever, a resurgence of bluetongue or something completely new and novel. If we are not in there having those conversations, how can we know what it is that we are on the lookout for?

I should highlight that that is not necessarily just about saying that we need to guard against somebody, through ill will or illegality, exporting product without appropriately declaring its risk status; it is recognising, as Stuart said earlier, that diseases do not recognise political and national borders, especially when we talk about those that are vector-borne. They can get here quite happily on their own and we need to know where those diseases are up to.

Q26 **Dr Hudson:** That is a very strong recommendation for us as a Committee, which we can put forward. Yes, we have left the political union of the European Union and there are challenges and opportunities for us as we move forward but, as you say, diseases do not respect borders, especially vector-borne diseases. A push for the Government to see if we can be at that table, sharing veterinary intelligence, would be a strong recommendation coming forward.

As we have left the EU, there are challenges but there are also opportunities, as you have mentioned, for us potentially to promote animal welfare and disease status and health status in our own country by tightening up some of the regulations of animals and products coming into the United Kingdom. James, do you have any thoughts? I know we are focusing today a lot on livestock, but do you have some broad overarching veterinary comments in terms of disease control recommendations moving forward, where we could seize the moment to improve animal health and welfare within our own shores?

James Russell: Perhaps the best way I can answer that at the moment is to say, "Please engage those with the expertise in this system". Somebody put it to me like this the other day, which I thought was an absolutely lovely way of phrasing this: at the moment, we are thinking about altering the way that we undertake open heart surgery, and we have consulted with the patients but we have not consulted with the



doctors. That is where we are at. Please bring the veterinary expertise into and around that table so that we can be part of that discussion. What you are describing is a dynamic situation that varies by the season, by the year and over time, in terms of what the disease risks are and how we need to be monitoring for them.

Chair: Thank you, James, for that last comment; it was very well made. You are also right about bluetongue. There are lots of diseases on the continent that could come in and we have had them in the past, so that is something we need to be really aware of. Thank you very much for that.

Q27 **Robbie Moore:** Thank you to everyone so far. It has been a good session for the first panel. My question focuses on the impact of ending live animal exports on farmers. Stuart, what impact will the Government's proposals on animal welfare in transport have on farmers?

Stuart Roberts: If I get a chance, I would quite like to come back on one of Neil Hudson's points later on, but I will take Robbie's point first and then come back.

For different farmers it has different impacts and in different parts of the country it has different impacts. Animal welfare and animal welfare in transport is an absolute priority. We have said ourselves on many occasions that our high standards are our big selling point as the UK. We are very proud of those standards and rightly so.

We need to have a look at how we do transport. One of the things we have developed is an assurance scheme going forward, which we would like to engage with Defra on, rather than just a blanket ban. There is real merit in exploring that. For some people in some parts of the country, if you are not a million miles from me in the south-east of England, your closest abattoirs may well be on the other side of a piece of water. Equally, we understand the issues around this.

The biggest issue around this at the moment, going back to the very first question, has been the need for Government to make a very clear statement around what it is they are looking to ban. They talk about animals to slaughter and that is actually quite clear but, if you are a commercial operator or you are looking to invest in this area, they have not made that clarity between that and breeding stock. It is very difficult to put real numbers on it.

We do not have BCPs, which means there is not any trade. Equally, there are not many commercial operators that have been in this area for some time. We think there are some that would like to get into this area, albeit we would be very keen to ensure that that is done at the highest levels against our assurance scheme. It is very difficult to put real numbers on it but it does have an impact for certain farms in certain parts of the country for whom the transport could be shorter but it just so happens it may have to cross water or cross a boundary.

Q28 **Robbie Moore:** I just want to dig a bit deeper to understand the NFU's



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position on this and their strong recommendation to Defra. When it comes to banning live animal exports, what is the NFU's position?

Stuart Roberts: We do not support the proposal to ban live exports but what we do support, and are pushing very hard for, is that any live exports going forward should be done in compliance with an assurance scheme that we have developed that we would like to engage others in.

Q29 **Robbie Moore:** Over the last few months, when the Agriculture Bill was going through the Houses of Parliament, there was a lot of emphasis placed by the NFU on food standards and animal welfare, et cetera, to the extent that a petition was launched, which was signed by over a million people, all conscious about food standards and improving high animal welfare. What do you think the reaction of over a million people signing that petition and signing up to high animal welfare will be to the NFU's position to not ban live animal exports?

Stuart Roberts: The NFU's position is that we want to improve the conditions of those exports and those animals regardless of whether those movements are happening within the UK borders or beyond. One of the issues we need to be focusing on here is not the specifics around live export but rather compliance and enforcement, which is something we highlighted in our response to Defra in terms of all transport issues, because there is no room in this area to cut corners in any way. I believe that the standards we have in this country are ones that we should be proud of. We should be looking to export those standards so that we do not just drive animal welfare improvements in this country but around the world as well.

Victor Chestnutt: Northern Ireland could be really affected if this ban came in. There are 18 miles of water between where I farm here and Scotland, which is not a huge amount. Northern Ireland farmers pride ourselves on delivering high animal welfare standards. Our policies are driven by sound science and there is no difference to that in our exports. The livestock industry works to some of the highest standards in the world and our farmers are proud to uphold that.

We do not see any reason to introduce additional controls or suddenly ban the live export of farmed animals. We would go along with Stuart. We want to improve the conditions for the animals and we want to do that from a scientific base. For instance, one of our calf exporters was doing trials where he put heat-monitoring collars on to the calves that were exported and followed them right through their days to finish in another country to see that no stress was being putting on them.

As small family farms in Northern Ireland, we pride ourselves in how we value our stock. A blanket ban would do a lot of harm. We need to keep raising our standards. Many of our standards are around the vehicles that we transport these animals in. They are first-class and, when I say that, I mean it is like traveling first-class. I cannot help drawing an analogy



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every time I go to London and jump on the Tube. We would be put in jail if we treated our animals the way people are treated.

We are ahead and we need to continually advance. We are all on for that but we want to do so from a scientific basis.

Stuart Roberts: I just want to come back on one point, Robbie, which you did not touch on but which is something I have spoken to the Committee about in years gone by and which the Committee has taken an interest in. Part of my first bit depends on geography and where you are and the network of abattoir infrastructure, where we are seeing further consolidation in this country with that network being stretched further. That is something that you need to bring into the discussion here as well because that is part of the challenge here. Depending on where you are in the country, in order to get your species slaughtered in an appropriate facility for that species, you may have to travel significantly further distances than if you were able to move them overseas. That is where you cannot look at this ban in isolation without also looking at the infrastructure of the slaughter capacity in the country as well.

James Russell: I want to back up what has been said and to perhaps think about this from a veterinary point of view as well. Rosie Duffield asked me earlier about abattoir capacity in the UK. We do not see any evidence that this survey has been undertaken yet to see whether we have the capacity that would be required to increase our slaughterhouse capacity if there was not any live export for slaughter and fattening.

It remains the view of the British Veterinary Association that animals should be slaughtered as close to their point of production as possible and that, where transport occurs, we would prefer to see it on the hook and not on the hoof. However, as has been said very clearly already, crossing an international border is not in and of itself a welfare harm.

This can only be helpful if it is well policed as well. I would ask questions about how it will be regulated that those animals that have been taken across to France, for example, as breeding animals do not end up being slaughtered within six months. As a farm vet, I am very well aware of the accidents that can befall animals in that period of time as well. What is going to happen to a producer if they have bought an animal in good faith and it suffers an injury but could be fit for human consumption at that point if it was slaughtered on-farm? Does that make that producer fall foul of the rules?

There are all sorts of things here. On the face of it, it looks like a very good headline that we have prevented live animal exports but, behind it, we see some unintended consequences for animal health and welfare that we continue to have concerns about.

Q30 **Dave Doogan:** There has been really excellent evidence from these questions. I wanted to pursue a little bit with Stuart. He has very rightly identified that the nub of this issue rests in large part on where you are



on this island. I wanted to tease out if he recognises my belief that your concern about what might flow from this type of review and subsequent legislation or banning will be determined on how far north on this island you are. It is important in terms of what side of the border you are on but it is not just a Scottish issue.

Stuart Roberts: I would agree in terms of geography. I am nearly as far south as others are north and we have real problems with capacity or availability in this part of the world. You are absolutely right that it gets to the heart of the issue here. I know that the Chair of the Committee and I—I cannot remember how many years ago—have started discussions on this and have spoken about it on many occasions.

When people talk about slaughter capacity, they basically add up total slaughter capacity of the country, divide by the animals and therefore we have slaughter capacity. Supply chains are actually far more complicated than that. Certain animals will only fit certain specifications for certain retailers who are tied to certain abattoirs. Certain abattoirs will only be able to kill for certain supply chains. It is something that I have quite a bit of historical experience in.

As James said, there is arguably a simple discussion that could be had around live exports. The real issue is not that; the real issue is the supply chains that sit behind it and making sure that we have the right capacity in the right place for the right animals for the right customers that can enable every farmer in the country to maximise the opportunities they have commercially but, more importantly, maximise the welfare outcomes for those animals by taking them to the most appropriate facility in the most appropriate conditions in the most timely manner.

It is therefore a much wider issue, as you have said, than probably this inquiry. I would be delighted to see the Committee return to this. You have touched on it in previous inquiries. I remember one that I spoke at about beef prices that had caused the issue at the time. We often touch on the issue but we do not actually have a proper discussion. Quite often, this is because there is quite a bit of fog around this issue, which is not created by the farmers.

Q31 **Dave Doogan:** James, you touched on the critical element of slaughter capacity. As Stuart said, with relation to exports, not all animals transiting south in GB are heading for slaughter, and that is particularly true in the Highlands and islands context in Scotland, where a lot of product is heading south for fattening. Is it not incumbent on Defra to make sure that they are right underneath that dynamic of, as Stuart says, slaughterhouse availability and abattoir availability, but also the underlying complexities of the supply chain, and to really understand why these journeys are taking place and what the consequences will be if they are banned?

James Russell: I absolutely agree with that. A really nice example of where those consequences come into play is if we picked out the Beaufort



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scale 5 recommendation for any sea transport for animals. I know that colleagues in the Orkney Islands looked at what the impact of that would have been on being able to move sheep from the Orkney Islands to the Scottish mainland. They move in on a Sunday afternoon for a sale on a Monday. In the last calendar year, there would have been four Sunday afternoons on which they would have been able to move sheep into the Scottish mainland.

I do not say that lightly and think that we have visions of sheep being tossed about at sea in very high winds. There needs to be a technological solution that ensures we can provide high animal welfare during that transport and still allow that supply chain to that very important part of the Orkney Islands economy to continue. That is just one example that I hope highlights the question that you are asking.

Q32 Chair: I want to comment and ask a question to all of you about where we started off from. The Government proposal is to ban the movement of animals to slaughter and the point has been well made now, as we go on to our next panel, that we need to provide more slaughterhouses if we are going to stop animals having to be transported for slaughter.

When you started off, Stuart, you said that breeding animals are the exceptions. We have genetics in this country and there is an animal welfare issue to make sure that we keep our populations of sheep, cattle and pigs as diverse as possible, so we cannot stop the export of breeding stock. What I would like you to emphasise for this Committee is a system where we can bring in good-quality and even better-quality transport than we have already to transport breeding stock because we want that breeding stock to be in excellent condition so that they can breed and prosper. Could you emphasise that, and, from Victor's point of view, in terms of the Northern Ireland situation as well? That needs to be emphasised before we leave you this afternoon.

Stuart Roberts: I cannot emphasise enough how important our breeding stock is. We genuinely lead the world when it comes to genetics in dairy, pigs, poultry, sheep and cattle. That gives us a huge opportunity. As we look to export markets all around the world, we have a huge opportunity for our breeding stock. That breeding stock needs to be transported in the highest possible conditions.

James highlighted Orkney. I remember seeing some new containers that were designed after the Orkney abattoir had closed at one stage or was in trouble. We can do this but we cannot allow ourselves to miss out on that opportunity to lead the world even further, in terms of the stock and the genetics that we want to have access to. As we look to drive our productivity, our quality and our aspiration towards net zero, we need to have access to the best genetics and we need to be able to give others access, commercially, to our genetics.

The Government have to make a clear public statement on the future of exports of live animals for breeding. At the moment, the fact that there



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has not been that really clear statement has got in the way of some of the challenges that we faced earlier on. Where decisions get to on movements for slaughter are decisions for politicians but, ultimately, we need to have that clear statement. Otherwise, UK farmers will miss out on an opportunity to get the best in the world, but also miss out on an opportunity for us to sell the best in the world to the rest of the world. I genuinely think it is something we can lead any species anywhere in the world on.

Victor Chestnutt: From a Northern Ireland point of view, we are no different than a lot of the islands that Dave was talking about in Scotland. Some of our species and our animals simply do not have the slaughter capacity in Northern Ireland. For instance, there is no pig line in Northern Ireland that can handle the weight of the culled sows, so they go over to the UK mainland. That is just one example.

I am all for increasing animal welfare but a blanket ban is the wrong way to do this. I fully stand behind Stuart and what he says about animal genetics. Northern Ireland is to the fore in that and we do lead the world in many things. Surely this is about the conditions of transport rather than just a blanket ban, which would not achieve what it was set out to do. I would be very concerned if the Government do not use a bit of science to look at how these animals are transported. We have plenty of technology to measure stress on animals right the way through and to work towards getting the best-quality transport we can get. Just putting a ban in place will not achieve the purpose.

Q33 **Chair:** I will turn to James from a veterinary point of view. Are there not ways and means that we can transport breeding stock that you as a veterinarian would be happy to sign up to, or am I putting too many words in your mouth?

James Russell: I am more than happy to take those words. There are two issues here. One is about the export of live animals who are standing there as animals today. Indeed, one of my own neighbours related the struggle of exporting some Guernsey cattle worth £360,000 to the farming enterprise and the fact that they just could not go anywhere now. As Stuart has said, the excellent genetics that that farmer has built up cannot be capitalised on and exported for further development.

There is an opportunity to think about how we can both export and import as germinal products as well. That is very important as part of this conversation and could arguably work towards our net zero contributions and so many other aspects of what we have discussed today if things were going into and out of the country in that way. The certification around that and the process of doing it is something that still needs clarification and greater understanding for all those involved. That would be an area where we would encourage further investigation in addition to, rather than instead of, being able to move breeding animals.

Chair: Thank you, James, Victor and Stuart, for a really good session this



afternoon.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Tim Morris, James West and Professor Malcolm Mitchell.

Q34 **Chair:** We have Professor Tim Morris, James West and Malcolm Mitchell. Tim, would you like to introduce yourself for the record, please?

Professor Morris: Thank you, Chair. I might just actually answer some of the questions briefly in my introduction to save time later. I am appearing in a personal capacity, but I will highlight three areas of expertise. One is equine, where I have been heavily involved with the thoroughbred industry, but also as a trustee of the British Horse Society. We should remember that the equine movements are about 30,000 to 40,000 a year in and out of the country, and of anything from £300 million to £500 million. We do not know the precise numbers because the thoroughbred numbers are well known, but there used to be free movement, before we left the EU, between Ireland. That is a massive issue where live animal movement will continue.

The second area is I am vice-chair of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust. We do not only interest ourselves in rare breeds; it is also native breeds. Coming back to what Victor said about Northern Ireland, all British pig breeds are either priority or at risk. One of the prime centres for their development export is in Northern Ireland, which is now cut off, to a certain extent, from resupplying the genetics back to GB. Maintaining our unique gene bank that contributed to British agriculture, both rare and commercial, such as your very fine red Devon cattle, is very important, as has been raised by others.

Although I would like to make clear I am acting in a personal capacity, the third area is that I am also a non-executive board member of Defra's Animal Health and Welfare Board for England. In that respect, there are three areas to highlight. The first is the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare's report on abattoirs, which led us to facilitate the establishment of the Abattoir Sector Group, which you will no doubt be coming on to. To tick off a couple of the points raised, I am also working on the new livestock identification system, where it is hoped that the visible numbers are replaced by a digital system that makes a lot of these GB, NI and EU visible numbers rather superfluous.

Finally, on disease surveillance, coming back to Northern Ireland again, with that very fine Northern Irishman, Graeme Cooke, the former deputy chief veterinary officer, one thing to remember is we are also members of the World Organisation for Animal Health. It is important to remember that all countries feed into that. We have to rebuild our international relationships, but even the EU has to feed into those. That is an area where investment, not only in money but in expertise and time on the ground, is really important for future disease security.



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Q35 **Chair:** Thank you, Tim. We will get on to quite a lot of points that you have made in a minute. I had better declare my Devon red cows, had I not, at this stage? Can I ask the other witnesses to introduce themselves, please?

James West: I am James West, senior policy manager at Compassion in World Farming. Thank you for inviting me to be on the panel.

Professor Mitchell: Until my recent retirement I held the chair of physiology in animal welfare at SRUC, in Edinburgh. I have worked in animal welfare for over 40 years. My main focus throughout has been animal transport, which is perhaps quite pertinent to today's proceedings. In 2018, I also was the lead author on the Defra-commissioned systematic review of welfare in animal transport, which led and contributed very significantly to the FAWC opinion and report, which in turn has prompted much of the current proceedings, the recent consultations and the proposals that we might amend and change legislation. You might consider that I am responsible for a lot of the things we are discussing today.

Q36 **Chair:** We will make sure we are quite kind to you on some of these proposals. Thank you very much. The first question I will start off with is what your view is of the proposals put forward by the Government in December's 2020 consultation on improvements to animal welfare in transport? I have looked at quite a lot of this myself. What are the good parts of it and what are the parts that are not so good or should be taken out?

Professor Morris: It is interesting. I am staring at Malcolm on the screen, whose scientific report underpinned this. As a scientist you can always find something to argue with—I am a fellow scientist—but that is not really the issue. The issue is in its execution.

I will give you two examples, in the interest of brevity. When talking about temperatures, a little bit of forward-thinking in terms of the consultation would have helped. There is lots of agricultural examples, and we have already had some on movement, with cold temperatures not allowing movement if the proposals went forward. Just for example, from an equine point of view, of the 80 race meetings held in January, in the example given in evidence to you, 43 would have been cancelled because the outside temperature would have five degrees or lower. These are from horses that arrive fully rugged up. If they are not performing because it is cold, that is in no one's interest. There was a certain lack of planning and underestimation across all the different species.

I also would point out that the actual EU law talks about temperatures inside the vehicle, not outside in the environment. The proposals take very little account of how animals are acclimatised, both to outside temperatures and to when they are then put in a vehicle with very little ventilation. A fully woolled sheep is very different from a clipped horse with a rug on it.



The second thing is that if you want something abstruse to talk about it is allometric scaling in terms of spaces. We are all experts on exponential now, after covid, but it is a complex concept. The proposals were to sign up to an equation where one of the factors was undesigned, which is the constant, and the second one, which is the exponent, has some scientific controversy. It is a lot to ask stakeholders to buy into that without real examples. We should always challenge ourselves on standards and the science base, but the consultation could have benefitted from what Defra has done well in many other areas, such as livestock identification, which is some pre-discussions and preliminary co-design. That would have made it work a lot better.

Chair: That is a really good point. It is the practicalities of how the new system would work in practice. It is very much about the inside temperature of a trailer or a lorry, not the outside temperature. That was missed. I think Victoria Prentis and George Eustice are looking at this again, so it will be interesting to see what they come back with.

James West: The short version is that Compassion in World Farming is really pleased that the Government have taken this approach towards live exports. It is one of the manifesto commitments of the Government, and we hope that it leads to a ban on live exports for slaughter and fattening. I stress fattening because there was a discussion in the previous panel about slaughtering and brooding. We consider that there are exports for slaughter, fattening and brooding, and we are not opposed to exports for brooding, but we are opposed to exports for slaughtering and fattening.

This is the culmination of 40 years of work. A number of bodies have made the suggestion that animals should be reared and slaughtered as close as possible to the point of production, and this would go a long way to delivering on that proposal. We are pleased that the issue of fattening is in there. Whilst, at first glance, that may appear to be not related to English farm animals—or Welsh, because the policy would also apply there—that is not actually the case. Although calf exports originate from Scotland, we know that some of the calves exported are coming from farms in the north of England. That came to light in court documents the Scottish Government submitted in relation to a judicial review launched by Compassion in World Farming a year or so ago. Those animals go from Scotland to Spain via Ramsgate, so that does relate to English animals.

Also, around 50% of the sheep exported in 2019 were exported for fattening, whereas the reality is that these animals would actually have been slaughtered very close to the time that they arrived in the destination country. Without fattening being included in the proposals, both the calf exports and those 50% or more of sheep would continue to be permitted to be exported.

The one area we have a particular concern around on the live export side of the proposal is the recommendation that fattening exports are permitted where an animal would be slaughtered more than six months after the journey has occurred. That creates a problematic loophole,



which we do not think was the intention of Defra. The intention was probably to close that loophole on sheep being exported for fattening, and then shortly slaughtered, rather than the ones that are listed for slaughter, because they are going direct to slaughter. It potentially means that calf exports would be able to continue uninterrupted, because calves exported to Spain tend to be reared for veal, which may be eight or 12 months, or for beef, which could be for over a year. It is those beef animals that are particularly at risk of further export to the Middle East and north Africa, where Spain has a large trade.

Our preference would be that the proposal that the Government finally settles on is that slaughter and fattening exports are banned, with no time limit on the gap between exports and slaughter, but that breeding exports, where there is a genuine case that those animals are for breeding, are still permitted.

Chair: You are right that we have to make clear what are breeding stock and they are genuinely going to be for breeding stock. I take your point on that. We will talk about slaughterhouses, local ones and mobile ones later on in the questions.

Professor Mitchell: Thank you for the opportunity to provide some evidence today. As I have indicated, I am pretty close to the foundation documents of all this. The consultation was the result of a number of processes, including the systematic review and the FAWC opinion. The FAWC opinion contained suggestions and proposed amendments over and above what the systematic review revealed. A systematic review will often describe conflicting information. Eventually, someone has to arrive at a consensus, and it was clearly felt by Defra that it had arrived on a consensus of an important issue, and it suggested a number of potential proposals.

However, as the previous witnesses have said, there are some anomalies in there. Some of those anomalies exist between the FAWC opinion and our systematic review. This does not mean to say that anything is particularly in so much conflict that it debases any taking forward of legalisation, but it suggests that we may need to focus on some other issue. One purpose of the systematic review was to bring forward all the new scientific evidence and compare it with the existing legislation and where we stood. I would emphasise the existing legalisation, WATO 2006, based on EC 1/205, is a wonderful and successful piece of welfare legislation. Some people would suggest that a lot of it is not broke, so do not fix it. That is a key issue.

Secondly, if we improved enforcement of those issues, it would get rid of a lot of the problems that have been suggested that we require answers to. More specifically, and relating to the consultation document, there are a number of issues that we should draw attention. First of all, I would agree with the suggestion that the temperature limits are not fully backed up by all the scientific evidence. In the review we tried to identify gaps in knowledge and areas that required more research, and the temperature



limits, particularly for young stock, should benefit from more research. At the moment, we want to take forward improvements in legislation by making those amendments, but they are not always consistent with the scientific evidence that is currently available.

Secondly, I would agree that the temperature limits, as they have been suggested, are going to place restrictions on transportation that would be economically unviable. Somebody mentioned earlier the transport from Orkney and from the isles by sea. If you introduce the same temperature limits, over and above the 4-6 limit, hardly any journeys for cattle, sheep, et cetera, would go.

The proposals in the consultation did not cover other poultry, but the suggestion for broilers is a temperature limit of between five and 25 degrees. Bear in mind, again, as has already been pointed out, that is measured outside the vehicle, so it has no relation to the thermal environment experienced by the animals on board.

You then add in the time limit that has been proposed, which is four hours. I would hasten to add that in the review we suggested that four hours and above should constitute a long journey and would require higher-standard vehicles, but all journeys below four hours would be carried on as normal. The proposal in the consultation is that those limits would apply to all journeys, and all vehicles for all transport should be a higher standard. I know we are going to discuss this later, but the economic impact of that would be enormous.

These are simply a couple of examples of how the information and the data sets that have come through from the systematic review process have been passed on and interpreted at each level, and a consensus has been arrived at, but very often scientific fact does not support some of the proposals that have been put forward.

Q37 Chair: Your point, and my view, is that species by species you really have to perhaps treat them slightly differently. Any criticism of what the Government are proposing is that they seem to have lumped everything together, with perhaps some specific poultry. We probably need to consider whether we need to separate out some of the species, especially poultry, in the proposals, so that we can perhaps have even tighter still proposals for some laying hens at end of lay. There are things that need dealing with there, are there not?

Professor Mitchell: Yes, absolutely. Someone pointed out earlier that a fully fleeced sheep is a very different animal to a one-day-old chick. Similarly, we know that spent laying hens are very vulnerable to thermal stress, and, because of economic pressures, tend to undertake longer journeys.

I would also stress that if you are going to have thermal limits, it should be a dose. It should not be a point measure of temperature taken somewhat strangely outside the vehicle. We need to know the



temperature and humidity inside the vehicle and its distribution. We have published many research papers indicating that it is possible, for example, on a broiler transport to have herds dying of heat stress at the front of the vehicle and cold stress at the rear. The distribution within the load is what is critical.

As has previously been suggested today, when we develop technology, we need to develop it to measure those things in the vehicle, and then, exactly as we do with a tachometer to monitor what the driver is doing, we have a recording system on the vehicle through which you can enforce and police. That is completely different from taking a single-point measure outside the vehicle. It would prohibit so many journeys. In the days when we were within the EU and we debated this at our various EFSA meetings, the Scandinavians basically said, "We will just stop transporting animals then, because if you are going to take a single-point measure, we will never load in the winter".

Chair: Thank you very much. Those are good points.

Q38 Dave Doogan: I want to build on those points. It is a separate question, but it is really an extension of what we have been discussing for the last 20 minutes. It is about our witnesses' views of the proposals put forward by the Government in their consultation and how well they balance animal welfare and commercial interests.

I am paraphrasing here, but we have just heard from Professor Mitchell about using the almost slightly abstract temperature outside the vehicle at the beginning of the journey, as opposed to the ambient humidity temperature throughout the vehicle, throughout the journey, and also to mandate four hours and mandate the highest-quality vehicles. Professor Mitchell has envisaged that this would cause very significant and very costly improvements to the producers. I actually believe that it would not, because, like the evidence he gave us about the Scandinavians, these transportations would just stop for certain parts of the country. I wonder what our witnesses think of that scenario.

Professor Mitchell: I am obviously based in Scotland, so the geographical location is very dear to my heart. I am the first to recognise that the industries on the Shetlands, Orkney and even the Hebrides would be profoundly affected by a lot of the suggestion, and specifically the journey times, the sea conditions and the thermal limit. We all know that, as part of this potential discussion today, we were going to look at slaughterhouses. We all know that Orkney lost a slaughterhouse and that there are slaughterhouses, some of which I visited, on some of the isles. I visited them all, and I own a slaughterhouse. It would mean that journeys would not take place. They would not be able to utilise the very limited facilities. Ironically, that would put pressure on people to move animals much further to get them slaughtered, and that would become uneconomic.



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From the Scottish perspective, it causes huge issues. Sadly, I probably agree with you that it is probably easier to stop producing and to just bring foodstuffs on to your island rather than, in the long term, trying to maintain production, transport and slaughter.

Professor Morris: I would answer your question in two ways. The first is that, when you are worrying about temperatures, measurements, and all the rest of it, there are two ways of looking at welfare. It is not quite binary, but it is useful to make the point that you can also look at welfare outcomes. If I give a very simplistic example, if a horseracing trainer thought that resting a horse for 48 hours after its travel for a certain period would help it win a race, they would do that, and they are not. Welfare outcomes is a very good test of arbitrary numbers without a good scientific base.

The other point you raise is really interesting. I will take a slightly contrary view on Orkney. When I went there it was stuffed full of cattle and sheep, with an empty slaughterhouse. The question I asked when I went into that—you will find a case study in the all-party report on abattoirs—was, “Why is it not being used?” There are good reasons why it was not being used: it was probably over-specified. There are also bad reasons, i.e. the choice was not made to preserve that. I would say, in simplistic terms, it is very like the community shop, the community petrol station, the community bank: use it or lose it. One of the big gaps in the proposals put forward out of the study by Professor Mitchell was that there should be a well-distributed network of abattoirs. That would solve a lot of this problem, particularly when animals are going for slaughter.

Chair: Tim, I am sorry to interrupt you, but we are going to deal with the slaughterhouses in another question. We will get there.

Professor Morris: That is fine. That was my advert for that answer.

James West: I agree with some of the points that Professor Mitchell made on measuring the temperatures. These need to be measured inside the vehicle, which is complicated to do. Those measurements then need to be monitored. I suppose monitoring an external temperature is far more straightforward because you check the weather forecast. How you enforce the internal temperature is much more complex, but it is probably a much more accurate indicator of the conditions in which the animals are transporting. I know some of the vehicles will be set up to monitor the temperatures internally, but that will not necessarily be the case with all of them, particularly older stock.

Just on the point made previously about temperatures, for some of the species the issue will actually be high temperatures rather than low temperatures. For example, pigs are unable to thermoregulate, so 25 degrees in a truck for a pig might be a very high temperature and might be too high, whereas the lower temperature may be less of an issue.



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We will come on to abattoirs later, but there is a significant role for mobile abattoirs and significant Government funding of a better network of local abattoirs.

Professor Mitchell: I will just point out that most animals are more than capable of thermoregulating. It is just the challenges that they are faced with may overwhelm their thermoregulatory capacity if conditions do not allow them the full repertoire of behaviours and physiological responses. This is what we exploit when we design good vehicles for animal transport. We do it by species. We look at the thermal limits that should be imposed and we design ventilation systems that allow them to exploit the maximum efficiency of their thermoregulatory capacity. There is the simple example of pigs where, if you look at higher-standard vehicles, they are given drinkers. They actually cool by evaporative cooling, and if you give them water, thus avoiding dehydration, they do it pretty well at relatively high temperatures. We have published several papers on this.

Dr Hudson: I have a question for Tim. In your introductory comments you have said that you have come with more than one hat on, and in some of your answers you have covered horses. I know that the focus of a lot of what we are talking about today is livestock, slaughter movement and that side of things, but I just wanted to come back to horses. We have an equine session coming up in a few weeks, but while we have you here, for the record, in terms of animal health and welfare we are talking about movement of animals across borders. Specifically with horses, we know that many horses are moved, such as elite horses, for breeding and athletics, but also a significant number are moved to the European Union for slaughter, unofficially. Could you very briefly put on record any overarching comments you have in terms of the equine sector that we need to take forward?

Professor Morris: You have divided it into two, and you will hear no doubt in the session on equines about the issues with thoroughbreds and high-value equestrian horses, where it is a question of digitising it, reducing the friction and stopping messing around with pages of superfluous paper.

If you bring it back to slaughter and livestock, you raise a really interesting point on equines for slaughter. The first point is that there are no records of equines being sent for slaughter. The second point is that there is very good intelligence from groups such World Horse Welfare, but also from the thoroughbred industry—I will tell you why in a moment—that animals are moving de facto to slaughter.

Here is the core of the issue. We have an experienced person as our chair. Within European member states there is usually reasonable enforcement of welfare in transport legislation. It is variable: it is not good in some, but it is not bad in many. Where they are really bad is cross-border. It just is not joined up. Forget electronic identification. Every horse must have a passport; every thoroughbred has one. For



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example, when older thoroughbreds were going over to Europe, we never got the passport back from slaughterhouses, as we knew the law was.

I really make two points: first, generally enforcing this cross-border is very tough; secondly, now we are not even a member of the EU that rather undermines this six-month proposal in the consultation, to put it bluntly.

Dr Hudson: Thank you. That succinctly puts on record for us some issues that we can perhaps follow up on in subsequent sessions.

Q39 Derek Thomas: We have touched on this briefly, but we would like to understand much more about the impacts that a live export ban would actually have on our farmers, processors and other businesses. What actual impact would stopping slaughtering and fattening have on farmers and processors across the UK? Malcolm, did you want to start, given that you touched on it briefly in relation to Scotland?

Professor Mitchell: I do not have the figures available. The last time I looked, I have to admit that I thought the overall income to the UK economy from exporting for slaughter was relatively low compared to the general productivity of the industry. However, when you reduce that to individual farms or specific areas, there are some very viable alternatives for people producing dairy male calves that would improve welfare, but as long as they are produced in the present system and their value is what they are, then it was extremely economically useful to be able to move animals out of Scotland, through Ireland and down to Spain. As we heard earlier today, that has fallen to zero, and I believe it has had a very significant impact.

On individual concerns, to individual farmers and individual concerns rather than to UK plc, it can have a huge impact.

Q40 Derek Thomas: Could any of the other witnesses talk about how the sector might actually change? Would people just come out of the sector altogether, or would they find other ways to raise and deal with their livestock?

James West: Just on the numbers exported, under a freedom of information request, we asked the Animal and Plant Health Agency for the numbers exported each year. The latest figures we have are for 2019, and to the continent we are talking somewhere around 3,500 calves and 16,000 sheep. I agree with the previous witness that, although that may benefit a small number of farmers, it is hard to suggest that it provides buoyancy to UK plc and the farming sector as a whole.

Back in the 1990s, when we were talking about 2 million sheep and 500,000 calves going every year, that would have had an impact on the entire industry because the market price would have been higher across the sector, just because the numbers being sold at the market would have kept the price up for domestic sales as well.



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In terms of alternatives to live exports, our view on slaughter, as some of the previous panel have said, is that they should be slaughtered and exported in the form of meat. The dairy calf sector is the most problematic, but there are a number of initiatives there that seem to be having an effect. One of the obvious ones is the growing use of sexed semen, so that you can ensure that the calf born is female rather than male. There is also the use of dairy beef crosses, and we are increasingly seeing retailers use or commit to using British beef.

I have a couple of examples. M&S, Waitrose, Co-op and Morrisons have schemes in place to ensure that rearing dairy bull calves is economically possible. The Arla UK 360 programme announced that, from January 2021, no healthy calf would be killed before eight weeks of age. There are responsible breeding programmes in place to ensure that no calves are born for which there is no market. From this coming autumn, the Red Tractor dairy scheme standards require that breeding programmes are in place and that there is no routine euthanasia of calves.

In terms of dairy calves being used for beef, Britain is roughly 75% self-sufficient in beef. There must be a market for these calves because there is a 25% gap between what we are producing and what we are consuming. These dairy calves are not going to be used for prime steak, but most of the sales in the UK tend not to be for prime steak anyway. They might make up 30% or 40%. It is a huge market for ready meals, pies and so on, where these calves could be used domestically rather than exporting them to systems where we have no control over their welfare.

Professor Morris: James went through all the points on dairy calves that the dairy industry passed to me, and that is a very positive point. There is a common view. There is an issue, potentially, with a route through Ireland, and that is the subject of a judicial review, which I am sure they can inform you on, but actually there is huge progress being made on surplus dairy calves.

The numbers on sheep speak for themselves. They are now a much smaller proportion, and I will simply refer you to my future answer on abattoirs.

Chair: Before I ask Sheryll to make her point, what is interesting with the calf trade is that, because there is less beef cattle and less calves around at the moment, the trade for rearing them here in the UK, and even the dairy bull calves, is much better. This is good. This is an opportunity that we can take to stop exports, so in that respect, it could work. We will see.

Q41 **Mrs Murray:** Gentlemen, I know we have heard a lot on this already, but what could any unintended consequences of ending export for slaughter have on the situation? Could there be unintended consequences if this was to happen?



Professor Mitchell: I am not certain. Being so close to the production of the consultation document, I think that there are very few unintended consequences. There is a number that we would accept, and we have just discussed some of them in quite considerable detail. I am not certain that there are any terrible surprises lurking around the corner.

Generally, in this situation, one of the unintended consequences is the provision to fill a gap by export of animals from another country into another market, which are all low-welfare standards. That is the kind of standard response: that if we do not fulfil this market with our high-welfare animals, high-welfare systems and high-welfare transport, then someone else will do it. I am not entirely convinced, however, that that is the case. It would be a glib answer. Above that generalisation, I cannot really think of any major unintentional consequences.

Q42 **Mrs Murray:** James, do you think there could be any unintended consequences?

James West: No, I would agree with Malcolm. I am not sure there are that many unintended consequences, and the consequences of not acting are possibly more extreme. As I said, the number of sheep exported in 2019 for slaughter or fattening was around 16,000. We are talking about a relatively small number of animals. Around 4,000 of those went to France, and in 2016 the French Assemblée nationale published a report into deficiencies in slaughterhouses in the country, where I think the quote was they revealed indisputable dysfunction, and they visited something like 260 slaughterhouses.

The unintended consequences of acting are few; the consequences of not acting are probably significantly more.

Professor Morris: The point to be made is that this is probably localised, but it could, without planning and thinking ahead, not be trivial. It was something Victor said that really prompted me to say this, which is that a lot of the reason for doing this is not direct to slaughter but for fattening, and because of the situation—and I have declared my interest as a native breed person—we produce meat from grass, and there are many environmental benefits from that. I know us soft southerners always complain about the weather, but we actually have a drought now in the south, and grass is not growing. That is one of the reasons that there is a lack of grass. You can plan to a certain extent but not on all soils. That is unlike feedlot, where you can store grain and other hard feed. If you have relied on grass and built your system around that, and you cannot grow grass from nothing instantly, yes, it could be a problem. Planning will reduce it most of the time, but not always.

Chair: You make an interesting point there, Tim. It was only a few months ago that we were virtually underwater, and now we have dried right up. The consequences of the grass drying up and then having to move animals is one I had not really thought of. That is a very good point. I will bring Ian Byrne in. Ian, you had better let Professor Tim in;



otherwise he will burst a blood vessel on this question.

- Q43 **Ian Byrne:** Chair, you have read my mind; Tim is at the top of the list. Tim, this one is directed at you, as directed to me by the Chair. Does the UK have sufficient capacity to slaughter and process animals that are currently exported? If not, what could be improved?

Professor Morris: Far be it for me to criticise the august Secretary of State, when he came before you and said we do have capacity.

Ian Byrne: Do, Tim.

Professor Morris: No. I have every respect for him, as he was the person who put in the native breed requirements in the Agriculture Bill. He is right, but they are not all in the right places and do not provide the right services. We have talked about the local effect.

Let me just give you the two examples. In 2008 there were about 20 million animals slaughtered in 250 abattoirs, but 32 abattoirs in England slaughtered 80% of all the sheep, while just 19 abattoirs slaughtered 73% of the cattle. I do not want to oversimplify this, but it is a bit like the large retail unit moving in and the small suppliers going; you lose flexibility and choice. We have seen that in covid, and that is not a good thing.

There is a poorly service for some locations. We have already heard about the far south-east. There are native breeds. I am not just saying that; some have horns, for example. There is private kill, where the farmer takes his own animals and then gets them back and adds value directly, rather than selling to a third party. There are culled cows, emergency or casualty slaughter, outdoor pigs, and providing, for example, a cutting service to further add value. One size does not fit all.

That has negative consequences, such as travel time, carbon footprint, a lower producer value and unsustainable business models. The core of this is that in the past nobody has treated the abattoirs—and the abattoirs are basically a network—as a strategic national issue. That might seem a bit grand, but it is like any network of distribution, such as water or power. If we are farming our land and it stops as soon as you try to take the protein convertors off the grass, and there is nowhere to go or there are miles to go, it is not going to work.

I will go just go into the solutions for the three parties involved. For farmers, the theme in all of this is investment; I do not just mean money, but in terms of resources, support and time. “Use it or lose it” is a hard fact, and the Orkney abattoir, as I have said, is a good case study of that. If farmers want the choice, they have to use it. It is about the lowest contract price. It is just like going and only getting supermarket petrol and then your local petrol station closes; that is what happens. They need to invest in that. They could actually invest with money: for example, upgrading facilities to return more value to them. For example, for abattoirs, they could cut space so that actually they can share the value.



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That is how the business model of the Mull abattoir works, and you will see that in the report.

There is one specific area. I am sure, as the EFRA Committee, you are aware that the levy payers are revolting in terms of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board in some sectors. They are not so far in livestock, but one of the initiatives that perhaps you could encourage is a mapping exercise so farmers can go and see their local abattoir, what it provides and where the nearest one is. They say they are ready to do it but they are being rather slow in delivering it. Some of these small abattoirs pay out £6,000 to £7,000 in levy each year, and because they are small producers they do not get much. That could be a good, positive thing for the EFRA Committee to put forward.

The abattoirs need to invest, and they also need to invest in their people. It is important that they understand that some local abattoirs are doing very well while some are doing not so well, and the latter needs to learn from the former. I am sure everybody would like to say that it is all the Government's fault, but the answer is not the Government throwing a subsidy at it. There is support in the Agriculture Act, and your colleagues in the Lords did extract a promise for ancillary services, including abattoirs. There is some evidence that there is a little bit of backtracking on that from Defra, so perhaps what might be termed a gentle reminder of that would be useful.

On capital funding, the big abattoirs can get local enterprise regional funding; the small do not even know how to apply for grants. Defra does a really good job in small grant schemes for farmers, so how can that be done? For example, cutting room support is capital and equipment in the order of £30,000 to £80,000. This is a classic small grant area. That is something that can add value very quickly.

The EFRA Committee is a very broad church. Waste is a huge cost for abattoirs. There is a case study on the Isles of Scilly, where waste costs stopped an abattoir being developed. Actually, as you know, the circular green economy is a huge opportunity for the UK, both in terms of direct heat production for local businesses, or council offices, and avoiding landfill waste. There is a huge opportunity to join things up and avoid the cost of waste.

Finally, there is always stuff about regulation, but in fact, for the smaller operators, regulation is less of an issue. It is more individual issues with particular regulatory issues. However, there is one that is very clear. A small abattoir is below 1,000 livestock units. A livestock unit is a cow, eight sheep or something like that. The regulations go up in strength if you slaughter 1,001 cattle, so there is no incentive to grow. There is flexibility of 5% built into the overarching legalisation, the EU legalisation, but, lo and behold, the EU did not pull that derogation across.

That is another thing, another quick win, where the UK could produce more flexibility to help the abattoirs help themselves. That is my key



message. It is not about, "Here is a cheque. Go away and spend it, and then come and ask for more". It is about how we can help these small businesses, like any other small businesses, to help themselves.

- Q44 **Ian Byrne:** Thanks, Tim. That is probably the most comprehensive answer we have ever had on the EFRA Select Committee; that was superb. James, is there anything you want to add?

James West: The only thing I would add is that we heard on the previous panel the suggestion that these animals were being exported for slaughter because of a geographical issue, because an overseas abattoir was the nearest available abattoir. The figures we have for 2019 show that, of the 16,000 or so sheep exported, three-thousand-and-something were exported for slaughter, and the rest were exported for fattening. Those ones that are exported for fattening would eventually be slaughtered, but they are not slaughtered immediately. They are not being moved off the farm immediately for slaughter, but they might be within a couple of weeks of arrival in a destination country.

Also, of those sheep exported, something like 11,000 went to the Netherlands. That already stretches the argument that that is the nearest available abattoir. Around 700 of the sheep went to Bulgaria, which is clearly not a local abattoir by any stretch of the imagination. Another 200 or so went to Hungary.

The point I am making, essentially, is that I am not sure that live exports is a lack of slaughterhouse capacity. Tim made the point very adequately about what the Government should be doing in terms of improving slaughterhouse capacity in the UK. We agree that some research is probably needed into exactly how that takes place, but mobile slaughterhouses—

- Q45 **Ian Byrne:** We are coming to that, James, in a later section of the questions, so I am sure you can make a comment on the mobile slaughterhouses. Malcolm, would you like to add anything?

Professor Mitchell: No, not really. I was simply going to raise the concept of mobile slaughterhouses.

- Q46 **Dave Doogan:** It has been very interesting evidence on the role of abattoirs in the broader supply chain and what they facilitate and demand of producers. Before we move to mobile slaughterhouses, I wanted to get some views on spent hens; I cannot remember if that was in the session before this. I am happy to be corrected, but it is my understanding that spent hens are processed in one abattoir in the whole of the UK, and that is in Bradford. If we head for a four-hour limit, that precludes any spent hen from a farm north of Stirling, and I would imagine Cornwall and parts of Wales will also never manage that. That is a very developed supply chain. What role could the Government have, in that eventuality, in mandating additional capacity? It does not seem realistic to think that there will be some external Government intervention in a very well-



developed supply chain.

Professor Mitchell: First of all, there might be more than one place that is capable of slaughtering. It does require a number of changes. This is why I was identifying anomalies earlier. The four hours applies to broiler chickens. The proposals did not go far enough, so consequently we have an anomaly that, under the current regulations, the limit for poultry is 12 hours, because of problems and issues relating to 1/2005, but under the new proposals, the laying hens might fall into a different category. I am not certain about that.

However, the problem with the four hours is if it takes you 45 minutes to load and 30 minutes to unload, and we move to the new proposed definition of a journey, which, for poultry, is the one that previously applied to all other species, i.e. first animal on to last animal off. If you apply that to poultry, then the maximum journey time is actually going to be about two and a half hours, wheels turning. It could be less. We all know how many things can go wrong with timing a journey like that. Most journeys, not just for spent layers, would exceed the four hours. If it was to be four hours, it is a problem for broilers, but it is an even bigger problem for spent layers, because, as you say, the geographical distribution of the laying houses from which they come, relative to the slaughterhouses that can handle them, means that many of the journeys undertaken up until now have been compliant with the existing legislation, i.e. 12 hours or less.

It has always been 12 hours, for poultry in general, for the simple reason that although there was no journey time defined, the feeding and watering interval, under a different part of the legislation, was 12 hours. I cannot answer your question specifically, but I can say it is a real problem with some of the proposals; if you apply them to things like laying hens, it would not be economic to try to move them. You may end up moving towards the provision of on-farm slaughter.

Q47 **Dave Doogan:** James or Tim, would you like to add anything to that?

Professor Morris: This is a good example where one size does not fit all. There are several good horseracing trainers in Somerset who probably drive very near to you to go racing at Perth and win races. Those horses are acclimatised to doing that. If they thought they would make more winnings by having a rest, they would do it. That is very different from taking a spent hen, which has been in a controlled environment and therefore has not had the chance to acclimatise and build that physiological resilience—I am conscious we have a professor of physiology here—and subjecting it to an eight-hour journey.

If there really is a welfare issue with that, then let us face up to it. The problem was this was the bluntest of instruments presented in the bluntest of ways. I am sure that the members not politically aligned will recoil, but I have to say that the Scottish Government's consultation on



this was much more discursive: "May we have your information?" and all the rest of it.

The information is out there to make substantive, species-based welfare outcome judgments. That should be the basis of this, not one size fits all.

James West: We sent a fairly comprehensive response to Defra and to the Scottish Government, as you can imagine. I will not try to restate that here, but I am happy to send the relevant parts to the Committee if that would be of use. From our point of view, once you get over a fairly short period of time, in terms of the welfare in transport, particularly for spent hens but also poultry more generally, the point Professor Mitchell mentioned earlier, about potentially having animals that are too hot and too cold on the same lorry, comes into play. The solution here is not necessarily to extend the journey time, but to have a better network of abattoirs to deal with those animals.

Q48 Dave Doogan: This is just a very straightforward question to all of our witnesses. It is my experience that mobile slaughterhouses are touted as an expedient solution to many of these problems. However, the reality that there are very few of these operating successfully, certainly in my part of the world, signifies to me that there are environmental, scale, economic, recruitment and various other problems with mobile slaughterhouses. What is your view of the solution potential of mobile slaughterhouses? It would be very helpful in your answers if you could cite any specifically successful examples that you have experienced in your professional capacity.

Chair: Can we bring in Tim first, because you have done a report on this.

Professor Morris: I would probably say that it is moveable but does not move. I would refer you to the Hardiesmill model on the borders, where a very small farm-based abattoir was built. He has a very high value chain there, but the bureaucracy in getting that done was huge. As one example, an abattoir, because there are so few built, is required to have the same building regulations as an office building, which is patently ridiculous, simply because that there has never been a need to say, "This is an agricultural building where animals are killed". You have to get around problems like that.

Moving to mobile abattoirs, again I have to compliment the Scottish Government, which did a recent report on this that I would refer you to. It is not the panacea. The problem is the high overhead costs. A particular concern is the fact it could paradoxically displace trade from the existing local network. It is a bit, "Damned if you do and damned if you do not". The ideal solution is a robust network of choice. There may be some places where mobile might work if you can find the added value, particularly in some islands—I am particularly thinking of the western parts of Scotland—and maybe in the upper central part of Scotland, where distances are huge. As soon as you get into larger-scale production, fixed units have these economies of scale.



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It is not the easy answer to a simple question. They have their place, but it is a secondary place to the core thing, which is a strong local network of abattoirs of different size.

Professor Mitchell: I would defer on this one to Tim. My only comment would be about the difficulties of having a truly mobile slaughterhouse that meets all the requirements, depending on throughput, for the food standards and hygiene regulations, the welfare at time of killing regulations, et cetera; it also need to be monitored in some way to ensure adherence to those regulations, as well as the disposal of waste, emissions and so on. The logistics horrifies me. I know virtually nothing about them but, from what I can imagine, it would be an extremely challenging and therefore very costly exercise.

Q49 **Dave Doogan:** James, did you have a view? Do you have any insight on this?

James West: I cannot point you towards a specific mobile abattoir. Mobile abattoirs have a role to play in this, for sure, particularly when you are looking at areas such as the Scottish islands, as Tim says. I should point out that Compassion in World Farming's view is that transport between the Scottish islands and the Scottish mainland is not an export. It is an internal journey. It just happens to involve a sea crossing. We accept that in those circumstances possibly you are going to need to allow for longer journey times.

Maybe a solution is setting up fixed modular abattoirs. They might be open part-time, where you pay vets and so on to go to those abattoirs at set times to meet the needs of the people in those rural communities, to bring down journey times. I appreciate that, particularly for the Scottish islands, it is a complicated issue.

Dave Doogan: If I may be so bold, it is incumbent on us as a Committee to recognise that, following that question, there was no specific example of a commercially functioning sustainable mobile abattoir. We are talking about introducing legislation that potentially relies on a mobile abattoir solution and we do not have one working at the moment, although I appreciate that we have a product of current regulation, as opposed to future regulation, at the moment. We should be very careful about introducing something that relies on a solution that will never be met.

Q50 **Chair:** I take your point. We do not want to rule out having a possibility of mobile slaughterhouses, especially in certain parts of the country, but I do take the point you make. I also take the point that Professor Tim Morris made: that we would probably be better off trying to get smaller slaughterhouses located across the country. That is probably a better solution.

Professor Tim Morris, some of the major supermarkets only have one or two slaughterhouses that they use in the country. All the cattle or sheep going have to travel. Should we not try to change the methods and the way that these supermarkets are demanding this of the farmer and of the



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processor? If we want to have more animals slaughtered locally, we need our big retailers to sign up to this.

Professor Morris: If it is helpful, if you want to get the lowdown on the nearest-to-reality abattoir, I would be happy to give you the contact details for the Fir Farm project, which is nearly there but having huge difficulties, for example, in getting holding numbers for multiple locations. They are the people who could give you the up-to-date information.

On supermarkets, it is difficult because I remember, as I went over on the ferry to Orkney and then coming back, seeing the Tesco lorries rolling on and off. That is not to pick on Tesco. I was thinking that they have all these marvellous cattle and sheep on Orkney and these islands, including North Ronaldsay sheep, and they still do not have an abattoir and cannot locally produce. That happens on big islands like Orkney and small ones like the Isles of Scilly. It is a difficult thing to manage a five-year plan, with Soviet-style central planning.

Perhaps a better way to do it would be to look at initiatives like the Exmoor beef initiative or the Dartmoor initiative, which actually, in its supply chain and assurance, looks for, wherever possible, mandating the use of a localised abattoir. In other words, you tie it into locality, less carbon footprint and those other things, rather than giving them quotas. It is local beef for local people, but also local beef for local schools, hospitals and all the rest of it. There are some really interesting projects going now on local procurement. That would seem to me to be a better way forward. It is always easier to lay down a law. I am not being political and ideological here, but actually morals and greenness probably will get you there faster.

Chair: I would like to see the major retailers come forward with a policy that says, "These animals have only travelled short distances for slaughter", because that would bring a market about for perhaps more local slaughterhouses. Otherwise, they are sometimes just gobbled up by the very big players. We could debate this all afternoon.

Q51 **Dr Hudson:** I just have a wrapping-up supplementary. I first wanted to thank all the witnesses for both sessions. We have had an amazing specialisation of views and expertise. It has been fantastic to hear about a diversity of species, from dairy chicks, up through sheep, to horses and to pedigree bulls. It has been really powerful evidence for us.

There have been two big issues that we have been looking at today: one has been about what has changed and how things have changed as we have left the European Union in terms of movement of animals; the other has been about what is going to happen, potentially, with the upshot of this consultation about live animal export, welfare in transport and that side of things. There will need to be an adaptation across the sector. We have had some fantastic answers today talking about what is potentially going on with dairy bull calves, for instance, and potentially increasing use of less popular cuts of meat in this country, but there needs to be



time for adaptation for that as well, for the sector, the producers and the consumers.

My final supplementary question to all of the witnesses is about what we as a Committee can recommend to Government. What can Government do to facilitate this adaptation? We have this change with leaving the EU, with opportunities and challenges, and we have this consultation. What can Government do to facilitate the adaptation of the sectors to respond to this, so that the sectors can thrive and flourish, and animal health and welfare can be protected?

Professor Morris: I would say two things. The first is to remember, as the other witnesses have said, that the organic change of far less animal export for slaughter has already happened. That is not much to do with EU exit. Where there is export, for breeding or for performance horses, which I know you are familiar with, let us actually produce a digital solution, so that the paperwork does not get in the way of business and welfare; I know that came up in your last session. Let us invest in that now, rather than sit there waiting for it to be gifted to us by one trading partner, which is the EU. Do not forget: we have the rest of the world to trade with as well.

Q52 **Dr Hudson:** Can Government lubricate that final point? Can Government have a role in that?

Professor Morris: The evidence that I have seen is that they do not have a digital system. They have scanned in paper forms and then asked you to return paper forms. It is not a digital system. There are examples of fully digital systems. The other Neil has seen the national equine database, as produced by Equine Register. It is a fully digital system, with banking-level technology. You can do it. In the same way as you can do Amazon 1-Click—other services are available—it should be quite possible to do that. That would be the first thing: make it digital, make it our own and sell to the world. That is not just parroting whoever is in power. It is the common-sense thing to do. That is what we all do already.

The second one is a bit top-level, but I hopefully explained the detail; thank you for the kind comments from Ian. Make abattoirs a strategic national asset, for food production, for high welfare and for adding value to make farmers profitable. The best thing you can do for animal welfare is make it profitable to farm well. That is the number one thing you can do. If you neglect your local petrol station, if you do not invest in local food distribution and in local services, you lose them if you do not use them.

Professor Mitchell: First and foremost, I want the Government to ensure that, if they are going to improve the existing legislation, which I have already praised, that they are doing it for the right reasons. Interpret that any way you wish. In other words, have we extracted the maximum efficiency from the prevailing legislation? Have we genuinely identified, through the whole range of processes, consultation, review and



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opinion, any shortcomings, and specifically areas in which improvement is very important to make significant immediate change to animal welfare? Otherwise, we have a catalogue of things that would be nice. It would be far better and much more efficient to focus on the specific areas that we believe to be deficient at the moment.

Secondly, I would like more clarification on some of the proposals that are being made before making final recommendations to Government. We have spent all afternoon talking very often about export journeys, when we really mean long journeys. We mean long journeys that sometimes cross water. There are very long slaughter journeys in the UK, as we have heard several times. We should be legislating for journey times that apply across the board, not to specifically identify an export journey as somehow being inherently poor. Very often, the conditions can be well controlled. I would like to see, before making the full-blooded recommendations, a bit more clarity in some of the proposals.

The last one I would refer to there is things like technology. We have heard from me and other witnesses the suggestion that we can employ technologies to solve some of our problems across the board—in transport, in slaughter, et cetera. I believe that to be true. However, what is very difficult and very challenging indeed is the selection of the right equipment, its placement, its operation, its robustness, the collection of data and transfer, for example in transport to the cab, and then the interpretation of that data. Just putting an accelerometer on a truck does not tell you anything, and neither does measuring the temperature. The challenges of measuring temperature, humidity, air speed, air flow, lighting and acceleration in three planes or more is very useful, but please, before legislating, say, “A higher-standard vehicle must have that facility”. Let us do a lot more background work and a lot more modelling.

Q53 Dr Hudson: That is great. Finally, James, you gave us a very detailed answer, talking about dairy bull calves and what is happening in that evolving area. Is there a role that Government can play in terms of encouraging wider use and local rearing of these animals so that the British public can actually start using more of them, so they do not have to be transported?

James West: The short answer is yes. How they go about that, I am not 100% sure. As Tim said, the number of animals exported has dropped organically anyway. As I mentioned, we are not self-sufficient in beef. There is a market. The Government should be looking at how they ensure that British-reared bull calves enter into the beef supply chain rather than being moved for export, being shot at birth or having any other potential welfare issue relating to the fact that, essentially, they are male and cannot produce milk.

I would agree with the point that Malcolm made about a long-distance journey being an issue, whether it is inside the UK or beyond the UK. Welfare gets progressively worse the longer the journey goes on; that applies if the journey is inside the UK. Our concern is about the conditions



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on the point they arrive at the farmer overseas or the slaughterhouse abroad, where we cease to be able to guarantee their welfare. It is definitely about stopping live exports and encouraging those animals that would be exported to be incorporated into the UK supply chain or to be exported as meat exports.

One thing the Government could look at is the role a local slaughterhouse can play in a local economy. This is the point Tim was making. There is not just the benefit to a local abattoir in terms of minimising journey times and the impact that has on welfare. If a product is slaughtered and sold locally, that has a beneficial impact on the local area. With a consolidation of abattoirs, that is increasingly not the case. The Government should be looking at a better local network of abattoirs, be that mobile or fixed, to limit journey times internally and to incorporate the animals that would be exported into UK supply chains, if and when a ban on live exports comes into effect, which we hope it will.

Chair: Can I first of all thank the services here at Parliament for being so patient with us, because we have had a very long meeting? I do not really apologise for the length of the meeting, because we have had an excellent session. There is no doubt that, as we look at journey times across this country for animals to slaughter, we have to have the slaughterhouses available, not only to shorten the journey times but also to have some competition within the sector, so that you are not just held to ransom by one particular slaughterhouse in one particular area. There has been too much consolidation, over the last 20 years and more, in the slaughter industry. This is something we can really make a difference on.

Professor Tim Morris, James West and Professor Malcolm Mitchell, can I thank you again for a really good session? Your expertise shone through. As Ian Byrne said, some of the answers we have had this afternoon have probably been some of the best that we have ever had. Thank you very much. We had a really good first panel, and you have exerted a really good influence on us. We have plenty of good evidence to put a very good report together.

Finally, can I thank all members for being very patient to hang in there, because it was well worth doing this session? Thank you for hanging on right to the end, because we were quorate all the way through. Thank you for your questions. With that, I shall wish you all a very good evening.