

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: The work of Defra, HC 321

Wednesday 13 September 2017

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Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Alan Brown; Paul Flynn; John Grogan; Dr Caroline Johnson; Sandy Martin; Mrs Sheryll Murray; David Simpson; Julian Sturdy

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Witness

I: Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs



Examination of Witness

Witness : Rt Hon Michael Gove.

Q1 **Chair:** Good afternoon, Secretary of State.

Michael Gove: Good afternoon, Chair.

Chair: I think you are the first Secretary of State to appear before a Select Committee in this Parliament or this session, so you are very much welcome. Thank you very much for coming along this afternoon.

Michael Gove: Thank you very much for inviting me and giving me the opportunity to share some thoughts with you and answer the Committee's questions.

Chair: I think you want to wrap it up in 90 minutes, don't you?

Michael Gove: That would be a help to me, but I am in your hands.

Q2 **Chair:** There may be one vote in between, so we may perhaps have to be flexible on the time we take to do that, but it should otherwise run smoothly, all being well.

Michael Gove: Thank you very much.

Q3 **Chair:** I shall kick off with the first question, and this is almost a supplementary one. We are expecting a Fisheries Bill and an Agriculture Bill. What is the exact timescale for that and are you in a position to give it to us?

Michael Gove: I hope the Fisheries Bill will be the first of the two to be published. I hope that it will be published very early in the new year. I hope an Agriculture Bill will follow, probably in late spring.

Q4 **Chair:** How late is the spring?

Michael Gove: This is the one Select Committee of Parliament that will have a far more finely tuned view of the seasons than any. Certainly, I would think May or June, God willing.

Chair: June is in the summer, Secretary of State; I am just correcting you on that.

Alan Brown: Not in Scotland, Chair.

Michael Gove: Yes, the member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun says that of course there are regional and national differences.

Q5 **Chair:** With the Fisheries Bill, are we expecting a White Paper first?

Michael Gove: Yes, that is the plan.

Q6 **Chair:** Are we expecting a White Paper with the Agriculture Bill?



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Michael Gove: Absolutely, yes.

Q7 **Chair:** What are the timescales of those two White Papers?

Michael Gove: I hope we will have the fisheries White Paper before Christmas and the agricultural White Paper early in the new year.

Chair: That will not be the spring; that will be early in the new year.

Michael Gove: Yes.

Q8 **Chair:** How are you ensuring that the UK negotiation team in Europe understand the value and importance of agriculture, industry and trade? As the deals go forward, will we be sold out for the City of London?

Michael Gove: Absolutely not.

Q9 **Chair:** How will you ensure that?

Michael Gove: I will ensure it by using the expertise that exists within the Department, and the contacts and the relationships that were forged between team Defra and the teams at DExEU, the Department for International Trade, the Cabinet Office and the Foreign Office—even before I arrived—to make sure that our interests are front and centre.

In the conversations that I have had with Cabinet colleagues so far there is a deep appreciation that it is not just the case that agriculture matters because food and drink is our biggest manufacturing sector; it goes far beyond that. There are specific opportunities for agriculture and fisheries outside of the European Union, greater perhaps than any other sector. Certainly in terms of fisheries there is potential for rapid growth in our capacity to make the most of this wonderful, renewable and natural resource. There is also an opportunity in agriculture to move away from an over-bureaucratic and unresponsive system of agricultural subsidy that has not encouraged the productivity growth that we would all like to see. There is also the realisation that, outside of the European Union, there is the potential to follow a better path in agriculture and fisheries, which is very much appreciated by my Cabinet colleagues.

Q10 **Chair:** These trade deals with other parts of the world will come about, will take a little time, and will hopefully be good ones. However, we still trade 40% of our lambs in the EU, mainly to the French. They are not the easiest traders in the world, Secretary of State, and if they can find a problem with it, they will.

At five o'clock in the morning—in what used to be smoke-filled rooms but probably aren't anymore—at the last minute when a deal is being struck, how do we know that the food, lamb and the situation with getting agricultural product into Europe will not be traded away for a deal on financial services? That is the one thing that we really worry about.

Michael Gove: The proof of the pudding is always in the eating. The way in which you will see agricultural and fisheries policy develop I hope



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will give you the confidence that I have on the basis of the time that I have spent in government so far.

You make a very good point about the sheep meat sector. The first thing to bear in mind, as I am sure that everyone on the Committee recognises, is that we have a trade deficit in agri-food products with the EU. They sell more to us than we sell to them. However, as your question quite rightly lighted on, there are differences sector by sector, and the sheep meat sector is particularly dependent at the moment on EU exports. Of course, that is a particular concern of mine because whether it is upland Wales, Scotland or the north-west, sheep farming is integral to a way of life that has gone on for generations and which is part and parcel of what it is to be British.

It is more than just making sure that a particular sector of an important industry has access to a market. It is about making sure that the land, those who work on it and those who contribute to making our country special and beautiful are at the heart of our thinking in years to come. The British people would be deeply worried and concerned if they felt that Britain leaving the European Union meant that many of the things that they associate with Britain, and of which we are quite rightly proud, were to be eroded or undermined by our departure.

Q11 Chair: We have to accept that, with all of the sectors of agriculture, if you had to have 40% of lamb that was not exportable, to France in particular, come back on to the home market, the price would collapse. Sheep prices are reasonably good, but you are talking about good grassland, marginal land in a lot of cases, land that is good from an environmental point of view, but it also needs to be farmed with sheep.

I lived through the European Parliament when in 1999 we were re-establishing British beef. We were part of a single market, part of a whole system, and yet the French were still very difficult in getting that beef back into France. I therefore want to be absolutely certain that as we do these deals we can get that meat, and lamb in particular, back into France, because if they can find any fault with it, they will.

Michael Gove: It is certainly the case. I would not single out any particular country.

Chair: I would.

Michael Gove: That is your prerogative. I would not single out any country for being a tenacious defender of its own farmers' interests or its own interests as the Government at the time perceive them. For the overall reason that I mentioned at the beginning of the last answer, when it comes to the amount of exports that come from the European Union to here, there will be a general feeling that we want to maintain the freest possible tariff-free—non-tariff, barrier-free—trade between us and the European Union, consistent with continuing to maintain high standards in the environment and animal welfare.



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- Q12 **Chair:** On the general principle of how the negotiations will be dealt with, what is your direct relationship with David Davis and Liam Fox, so that as these negotiations are going on you can get your input directly to those who might be doing the direct negotiation?

Michael Gove: We are brothers from a different mother. We are as close as the sheaves of wheat that are bound in this particular Back British Farming buttonhole. The good thing about having Liam in the Department for International Trade, David in DExEU and Boris as Foreign Secretary is that we took, as it happens, similar positions during the European referendum and have very similar views of how Britain's relationship with Europe and Britain's future should develop in the years to come. I have had some very helpful discussions not just with my counterparts but with their teams.

- Q13 **Chair:** I am sorry to interrupt, but you are a very busy Secretary of State with lots of things going on. They are dealing with the Brexit negotiations. How will they physically feed back to you what is happening, what their thinking is and where our European cousins are coming from? I suspect they will prevaricate for a long time and then a deal will be done fairly quickly, if one is done. I would like to know, however closely you may be connected, how you will communicate, and communicate quickly.

Michael Gove: I appreciate your nervousness. Obviously, the principals—the individual Secretaries of State or Ministers—need to talk and be in alignment, but it is also the case that we have Departments that are constantly in touch with one another, officials who are constantly exchanging information and positions papers that are arrived at after collective discussion and scrutiny. It would be invidious to name names, but I also have an outstanding civil servant whose responsibility it is to man- or woman-mark every aspect of our negotiating strategy and to ensure that Defra's interests are respected, and she is supported by a fantastic team.

- Q14 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** You have talked about not a hard or soft Brexit but a green Brexit. You have also said that one place in which you feel the EU failed in its environmental goals is the Common Agricultural Policy. Could you give us more detail on that and what the main challenges are that Brexit creates for both environmental and agricultural policy?

Michael Gove: If we look at the history of British agriculture since we joined the European Union in 1973, we can see that production has of course improved, and that is fantastic. However, it is also the case that if we look at environmental indicators, for example the farmland bird indicator, that has shown a catastrophic drop in biodiversity. As we leave the European Union we are now in a position to do two things: to recognise that we need to improve our productivity in the future, but we need critically to make that sustainable; and to provide support not just for improving productivity and more effective marketing



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of British produce but for the many environmental goods that farmers deliver.

The point was made to me by Meurig Raymond, the NFU president, that farmers were the very first friends of the earth. No one in farming wants to do anything other than to ensure that the land upon which their livelihood depends is in the best possible condition and state. However, there have been rules and practices that have operated under the CAP that have not always allowed farmers to do exactly what they believe is right both for the environment and in terms of maximising productivity. I hope to work with, and have been working with, representatives of farmers' organisations, some very innovative people in the field of agriculture, and environmentalists, to see what a new policy may look like that combines sustainable productivity with environmental benefits.

Q15 Dr Caroline Johnson: Those are the opportunities that we agree Brexit presents. What will be the main challenges in delivering them?

Michael Gove: Challenge number one is making sure that we get the pace of change right. If you are moving away from any complex system, no matter how flawed, there is always challenge in moving away from that complexity. The Common Agricultural Policy has had several different incarnations, but farmers have got used to a way of support being allocated. If we are going to change—as we are—the way in which support is allocated, we need to give farmers time to adjust so that, if they need to change their business model or think about investment, there is time to do so.

The other challenge is thinking through the law of unintended consequences. It is sometimes the case that changes that have been made in the past, for example to make Pillar 1—the system of area-based support—more green, have actually led to massive bureaucratic duplication of effort.

Those are two of the particular challenges. They are not specific to leaving the European Union. They are specific to changing something as complex as the CAP, which leaving the European Union provides us with an opportunity to do.

Q16 Dr Caroline Johnson: At the moment, many decisions about what we use in this country are taken in Europe, for example the discussions recently about glyphosate and neonicotinoids. How will you strike the balance between the environmentalists, consumers and farmers in ensuring that decisions are made in the UK and on the basis of scientific evidence?

Michael Gove: One thing that we are very fortunate in having in the UK is one of the best science bases in the world, and in Government we have some of the best scientific advisers that exist anywhere in any public sector. I was talking to the president of the Royal Society earlier today and he was making the point that, whether or not one favours Britain



leaving the European Union, it is certainly the case that it was viewed by scientists in Europe that British scientists contributed to ensuring that the evidence base in lots of decisions that were made was more rigorous.

Without wanting to be chauvinistic about it, we have the science base in this country to enable us to make the right risk-based assessment of everything from fertilisers to pesticides in the future. Of course we will want to pay close attention to scientific innovation and concerns raised in Europe and elsewhere, but you are absolutely right—and this again is a point that was made to me in the conversation that I had earlier today—that Britain has a good record of balancing environmental protection with encouraging innovation, and that is because our scientists have a very pragmatic and empirical approach to making these decisions.

- Q17 **Dr Caroline Johnson:** Given that we are trading with Europe and they will now have a different body creating standards, how will we ensure that our farmers are able to follow our standards and not theirs, and also that we have a level playing field so that our farmers are not held to such high standards that it affects their competitiveness with the rest of Europe?

Michael Gove: My understanding is that when you have trade deals and agreements it need not be the case, if you have free trade, that two different countries must have exactly the same regulations, provided that the outcomes at the end are clearly comparable. We need to ensure that there is mutual recognition of standards on the part of us and the European Union such that the European Union's method of checking these chemicals, pesticides, fertilisers and so on is one that we respect and also that we have one that they respect. Of course it may be that at some time in the future we want to revisit those arrangements, but having that mutual recognition is the ideal that we should aim for.

- Q18 **Julian Sturdy:** I would like to follow up on what Caroline mentioned in her final question. In the speech you delivered in July—a very good speech, I might add—a key point I want to pick out of it is when you talked about UK soils, the degradation of our soils over the years, and how important it is for our long-term productivity that we maintain our soils.

A key point there that has been missed slightly is the fact that to really protect our soils and minimise carbon emissions, the way forward is likely to go to a low- or minimum-tillage option. With the current EU we have the important decision on glyphosate coming up. Is there something missed with the fact that glyphosate plays an absolute key role in delivering those low-tillage operations on arable farms, which can deliver low carbon emissions? There is a key environmental benefit to glyphosate, and this argument does not seem to have come out in the debate in Europe. It seems to be more about an emotional response to it.



Michael Gove: You are absolutely right. It can sometimes be the case that in some areas a campaign is generated against a particular intervention, often well-intentioned, that sometimes misses some of the trade-offs, nuances and balances that farmers live with every day.

You are also absolutely right that one of the most important things that we need to do is to maintain and improve soil quality. Some people have argued that we may have only 60 seasons left of decent soil in this country. It would be a disaster; once you lose the soil, you lose everything. For that reason we need to be open-minded about combining the very best of science with the developing understanding we have that some of the intensive methods of agriculture that have grown up over time have not been good for the soil, and that therefore balancing scientific breakthroughs in some areas with different forms of agriculture is the right way to go.

Q19 **Julian Sturdy:** Should the UK be pushing that in Brussels in its future arguments over glyphosate?

Michael Gove: First of all, we need to protect our own interests. Secondly, we need to make sure that decisions are made, wherever possible, on the basis of scientific evidence. Also, wherever possible, we would love for Britain and the EU to be on the same page. It may be that at some point in the future we accept a slightly different balance from the EU, but provided that both of us recognise in good faith that we are trying to achieve worthwhile ends, mutual recognition should remain. In the meantime we are full members of the EU and should use our influence to try to make sure that everything is evidence-based.

Q20 **Mrs Sheryll Murray:** Defra has estimated that around 1,200 EU laws, a quarter of the total, relate to your Department. How have you identified how much EU legislation applies to Defra and how will you transpose that?

Michael Gove: As the Committee will appreciate, there was a lot of argument during the referendum about the extent to which Britain was subject to European Union law. We now have a debate about the EU Withdrawal Bill and the consequences of that.

There are some folk who criticise the EU Withdrawal Bill for being a massive power grab, handing unprecedented powers and such. They are often the same folk who said that Europe has a tiny impact on the UK. It is either one or the other.

The truth is that a lot of work has already been done within Defra to identify the significant extent to which European Union law governs agriculture, fisheries and the environment, and we have identified around 100 statutory instruments that will need to go through the House of Commons in order to ensure that EU law—as it becomes UK law—is interpreted and understood in a consistent way.



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One thing we want to do, which is another balancing item when people talk about a power grab, is provide people with certainty and say that the rules that exist before we leave the EU and the rules that will exist on day one after the EU are the same. If we then want to change them, we can have a public debate, and if we think it is a good idea for us to diverge in that way, Parliament will take that decision. But there are some folk who think that the exercise in the EU Withdrawal Bill is about trying to depart from what we know; actually it is about—as David Davis has spelled out so clearly—giving people certainty so that the day after we leave we can know exactly where we are.

- Q21 **Mrs Sheryll Murray:** We have EU directives to transpose and EU regulations, but is it correct that there is sometimes a Commission decision that that legislation is already encompassed in UK law?

Michael Gove: Yes. The aim is to ensure that anything that is already accepted as a result of the European Union as being UK law applies the day after we leave. There is some debate over cases that are still pending in front of the European Court of Justice and whether we should allow the European Court of Justice to reach a determination and for that to become UK law after we leave, but that sort of decision is above my pay grade at the moment.

- Q22 **Chair:** Air quality is an interesting matter, where we have been taken to court and, however complicated air quality is, without the UK Government being taken to court and asked to do much more, I do not believe we would have done as much with air quality.

We want to be assured that you are going to get to grips with decent air quality for our cities and the high levels of pollution in our inner cities in parts, but I also want to ask: how do you see in the future the Government being held to account? It does not matter what colour the Government is; it does need to be held to account. I am sorry to make it quite a complicated question.

Michael Gove: It is a very clear question and, in the first instance, it is judicial review. One of the things about Britain is that, because of our common law system, and that we have judicial review that has built up over time, if something is the law and there are precedents, courts in the future when they come to interpret actions by Government will do so in the light of those precedents. As a Government Minister, I know that the judges are not shy, nor should they be, in being assertive in terms of judicial review.

Beyond that there are certain principles in the Aarhus Convention about access to environmental justice, which our judges also take seriously. However, this is also what has been identified as either an enforcement or governance gap that exists after we leave the European Union that people are anxious to fill. It is important that we recognise in attempting to address those concerns that our common law system is different from the legal system within EU countries, but I also recognise that there is a



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legitimate concern, and I am anxious to talk to people both in the House of Commons and environmental NGOs to see if we can provide the reassurance that they rightly seek.

- Q23 Sandy Martin:** One of the most effective ways of inducing the Government, local authorities, or anybody else to do things is with financial penalties. The European Union has threatened financial penalties on air quality issues. Will there be any financial penalties after we have left the European Union? If so, who will levy them, who will pay them, and whom will they be paid to? We clearly will not be paying them to Europe.

Michael Gove: That is true. Paying more money to Europe is not necessarily our cause.

You are of course right that fines are part of the legal armoury, but it can also be the case that one can be mandated, as I am, to take appropriate actions in order to bring air quality into line with the law. It was the case, even before we left the European Union, that Governments were brought to heel by the operation of judicial review—ever since the 17th century—and it will be thereafter. It is also the case that we have some time to consider how the particular requirements to ensure access to environmental justice are satisfied through any new institutions or mechanisms that we may set up.

- Q24 Chair:** It is clear that the Government need to be held to account, because they are slow to act, especially if it is going to cost a lot of money, and there has to be real incentive from the High Court or wherever to make that happen. You can understand why people and Parliament are worried.

You talked about 100 statutory instruments. Will we have five minutes to look at 100 statutory instruments? It reels off the tongue, Secretary of State, but in reality how do you get 100 statutory instruments through this Parliament with us having some look at them? Is it entirely on your whim? I am sure that you will believe that you are right, but how will we hold you to account on a statutory instrument where you feel that you want to change the rules dramatically? How will it happen?

Michael Gove: My first role in this house was as a member of the European Scrutiny Committee. I realised then that European Union law could not even be scrutinised in the way that these statutory instruments are going to be scrutinised. It was the case that European Union law, once arrived at, was something that we had to implement in the House of Commons and we had no choice in the matter.

Whatever criticism you may understandably point at the Government, legislation is going to enjoy far more scrutiny in the future than it has in the past.

Chair: We look forward to this great and democratic process,



Secretary of State.

- Q25 **David Simpson:** I was glad to hear you use the word “certainty”, especially when we are looking at the Repeal Bill and which legislation or laws we are going to keep. Concerns have been raised about the animal welfare side, especially the import of live animals, whether they be cattle, puppies or whatever else. Can you assure us that those issues will be looked upon—because animal welfare is a big issue that this Committee has dealt with in the past—and surety given that the Government will not allow the standards to fall? In fact, they may even make it more difficult to bring puppies in at an older age rather than a younger age.

Michael Gove: I could not agree with you more. We are fortunate in that we have high animal welfare standards. Sometimes some of the steps that have been taken—for example, improving the standards in pig farming which my predecessor, John Gummer, did—also involve some commercial cost to British farmers, but we can look back and take pride that we were a leader there.

You put your finger on two things. The live export of animals for slaughter is not something I am comfortable with, and similarly, regarding the way in which puppy farming goes on and individuals who understandably want to have a domestic pet can be exploited by the unscrupulous, these are concerns where I certainly do not want to see any dilution of our standards. Indeed, outside of the European Union we may be able—I do not want to go too far—to look at both those areas.

- Q26 **Paul Flynn:** You have said that you will honour your election obligation to continue giving £3 billion a year to farming. That is 40% of the money from Europe given to an industry that produces 1% of GDP. Will you honour the obligations that you personally made during the referendum when you said that you were going to give £350 million a week to the health service? How do these two things add up?

Michael Gove: First, it is interesting that you take such a Thatcherite approach towards agriculture.

Paul Flynn: We are in the Thatcher room. I honour the lady.

Michael Gove: Yes, her spirit infuses your first question. The first point is that, as we were discussing earlier, the agricultural support that the Common Agricultural Policy provides—you are right—does not encourage productivity in the way that a more enlightened form of support should. It is also the case that it does not encourage in every respect the degree of environmental protection that it should.

- Q27 **Paul Flynn:** Has agriculture in Britain been weakened and damaged by being part of the dependency culture? We know that a fifth of the money paid out goes to millionaires and billionaires. That will all stop now under British rule rather than under European rule and people will not be paid for the amount of land that they own. Would you prefer a system like New Zealand where they have improved their productivity and



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competitiveness by losing all subsidies in 1985?

Michael Gove: I admire both the Thatcherite rigour with which you lambast subsidy and the Jacobin distaste for landlords that you have. It is a very appealing combination.

Paul Flynn: You really must not defame her honourable memory—a woman I served under here a long time under her premiership. There were occasions when she did admirable things, but featherbedding farmers was not one of them.

Michael Gove: I understand. I do not want to featherbed anyone. We certainly do not want to emulate New Zealand. We want to use the money that is currently spent more wisely. With respect to the NHS, the Government's manifesto commitment to spend more on the NHS both in revenue and capital was a good thing. Of course, as you will know, NHS spending in Conservative-administered England is greater than NHS spending in Labour-run Wales, and as a result health outcomes in Conservative-run England are superior to those in Labour-run Wales. I say that as someone with family members in Wales.

Chair: I do not want to get into too much argument about that, because it is the EFRA Select Committee.

Q28 **Paul Flynn:** How has it been sensible to give £500,000 of taxpayer money to a Saudi citizen, Mr Khalid Abdullah Al Saud, for rearing horses; £500,000 to the royal family; nearly £1 million to Lord Iveagh; £500,000 to the Duke of Westminster; £500,000 to the Duke of Northumberland; and £750,000 to the Mormon Church? How does it help our economic situation to give these sums out to people who are very rich?

Michael Gove: You make some very fair points. One of the things that we would like to do as we reform the Common Agricultural Policy is to see if there is a way in which we can provide a cap on the level of support that any individual or institution can receive. Of course I mentioned earlier the law of unintended consequences. There are large sums, for example, given to NGOs—the National Trust, RSPB—that help to look after our land and receive money through the current system of agricultural support.

You are absolutely right: the current system needs reform. One of the ways in which we should reform it is not to give to those who already have in abundance, but we do need to do so with a degree of care, thought and attention. Irrespective of one's admiration or dislike for any of the individuals or institutions that you mention, the most important thing is to ensure that the money spent produces a public benefit. If somebody who happens to have some title or position is managing land in a way which provides significant environmental benefits then we should recognise that.

Q29 **Paul Flynn:** Your speeches seem to be infused recently with manic optimism. You talked about the Cod War in which we took on the mighty



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forces of Iceland and lost spectacularly, but you say that you did not expect problems with France because you have never found them to be aggressive. You do not get out much, do you?

Michael Gove: Not only do I get out more often in this job than ever before, but I got out to Iceland recently and had a chance to have a drink with the Icelandic Foreign Minister.

Chair: And you returned.

Michael Gove: I had a drink with the Icelandic Foreign Minister on one of the cutters—one of the boats used in the Cod War. I should of course point out that the Cod War was conducted with a Labour Government. I should also point out that Tony Crosland, a great man and Foreign Secretary at the time, was very determined to defend Britain's interests.

To move to the specific point about Iceland, the Cod Wars and the fisheries, the example of Iceland and the Faroes show that you can have countries that police the 200-mile limit around their waters and do so by co-operating with their neighbours, and with respect to France I have certainly found in my own lifetime that French politicians and the French people are never other than helpful.

Q30 **Paul Flynn:** Do you seriously expect our competitor nations—and they will be fierce competitor nations once we leave the EU—to roll or lie on their backs like spaniels and ask us to rub their tummies?

Michael Gove: No, they will follow their own rational self-interest, and the rational self-interest is the benefit from free trade here. As well as visiting Iceland I visited Denmark. When I was in Denmark I visited Danish Crown and Arla. Those are two companies, one of which has recently made a major investment in the UK, the other of which has a co-operative relationship with lots of UK farmers. It is in their interests as hard-headed businessmen to keep a business model that benefits from free trade going in the future. There are lots of reasons to be optimistic without having to be manic.

Q31 **Paul Flynn:** When we get the Brexit cheque and get all of the money back that we are expecting, 40% is already gone. How will the remaining 60% be split between the health service and the other 99% of industries that are not agriculture? What is your vision of the distribution of that bonanza from Europe?

Michael Gove: That is a matter for the Chancellor.

Chair: We are beginning to stray well beyond on the questions here. I have given you a fair bit of leeway. We need to draw it tighter, if I may.

Q32 **Mrs Sheryll Murray:** Secretary of State, the issue of policing our waters has been raised. Could you clarify that the United Kingdom's fishery limits are enshrined in an Act of Parliament and respected under international law, and have been since 1976; and also that the United



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Kingdom already has commitments under the current Common Fisheries Policy to police those waters at the British taxpayer's expense? Am I correct?

Michael Gove: Yes. At the moment that we leave the European Union we, in international law, become an independent coastal state, so our position is analogous to Norway or the Faroes or Iceland. That means that around our waters, as well as the territorial six- and 12-mile limit, we now have a 200-mile limit, our exclusive economic zone. Obviously, when Ireland, France or Belgium come into it, it is the median line between the two. That means that we can control access to our waters.

I do not think there is anyone who says that no foreign boat would ever fish in our waters, because it is of course in the nature of our own fishing fleet that we fish in Norwegian, Faroese, Icelandic and other waters, as well as French and Spanish. I was in Newlyn in Cornwall on Friday talking to fishermen who fish in French and Spanish waters.

Once we are an independent country, we can then negotiate with those countries and say, "Of course, it is the nature of your fleet that you may want to come to our waters. We want to come to yours." We can negotiate every year in a way that ensures that we respect each other's interests. However, it is our ultimate decision.

Q33 **Chair:** Do you see our fishermen having greater access to more fish in the future? That is what they believe they are going to get. Do you believe that you can deliver that, Secretary of State?

Michael Gove: At the moment if you look at the quotas for cod in the English Channel, it is the case that the French—it is just one of those historic things—have significantly greater access to cod in the English Channel than UK boats have. It is a simple fact that as we become an independent coastal state we will have control over that access. However, there is one caveat that I would add.

Q34 **Chair:** Is the answer yes or no?

Michael Gove: Yes.

Q35 **Chair:** Do you see our fishermen getting more rights to more fish in the sea?

Michael Gove: Yes.

Q36 **Chair:** They believe that when they went into the EU they got badly done by.

Michael Gove: That is correct.

Q37 **Chair:** Is that going to be corrected?

Michael Gove: Yes, it will be.

Q38 **Alan Brown:** We know that part of the historical reason that UK



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fishermen did not get as good a deal is because there were trade-offs in other trade agreements. The Scottish fishermen were deemed expendable as opposed to other deals. How can you guarantee that these other Departments, as was asked earlier, will not end up taking priority when it comes to these negotiations? The negotiations for fishing quotas will not be done in isolation.

Michael Gove: I take your point about quotas. The first thing to say is that anyone who observed the referendum debate will have recognised that the historic memory of what happened to the fishing industry in the 1970s and the desire to take back control of our waters was a very powerful, emotional and cultural aspect of that debate. Even though there are only a small number of people employed in fishing now, partly as a result of what happened in 1973, the industry quite rightly has a hold on the nation's heart. In particular, as you will appreciate, in areas from the south-west, to the north-east of Scotland, to Lincolnshire, to East Anglia, there is a desire to see the injustice that was done to those communities in the 1970s put right. That strength of feeling exists far beyond those communities. In that sense the fishing industry and communities punch above their weight.

The other thing is that it is also the case that, whilst we would want to negotiate with other European countries the terms on which they might have access to our waters, in a way one of the simplest things about leaving the European Union is that we do not need to negotiate what happens under international law. It is the case that we automatically become an independent coastal state and that we can then decide who comes in. That strong opportunity rests in our hands.

Finally—and I hope you will forgive me for saying this—we now have a cohort of energetic Scottish Conservative MPs alongside the excellent Scottish National Party contingent, who will keep me on my toes and ensure that the interests of the north-east and all of Scotland are effectively represented.

Q39 **Sandy Martin:** On fisheries, what are you going to be able to do to make sure that the fish stocks continue to be respected? In Great Yarmouth for instance there is a museum with a very graphic set of photographs. If you went out in a boat in the 1880s from Great Yarmouth, you virtually did not need nets at all; fish jumped on to the boat.

Chair: That was a fisherman's story.

Sandy Martin: By the time you reached the 1960s it was already difficult to catch the fish, because they were not there. How will you maintain the fisheries without losing the fish?

Michael Gove: In a word, "science". One of the advances that we have had over time is that we have a much better way of ensuring that we have the right marine conservation policies in place. It may be the case that we may need to see that there are parts of our seas where you



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cannot fish, in order to allow stocks to recover. There is a case for looking both at reform of the quota system itself and to consider whether or not there may be a case for trialling an approach called “days at sea”, which is a different method of managing access to our waters. There are a variety of different techniques that one can deploy when consulting with fishing industry organisations and others at the moment to see what the best way forward is.

Critically, after the campaigning of people like Charles Clover and the book and film “The End of the Line”, and some of the work that has been done by people like George Monbiot in exposing what has been happening in our waters, I do not think anyone can now claim ignorance. Therefore, after their work, we have to ensure—this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity—that we have not just access to fish stocks now but that those fish stocks are given the opportunity to recover where they need to and to become truly sustainable for the future. Again, one of the reasons for my going to Iceland was to see how they have managed it and dealt with difficulties in the past.

There is then a final aspect, which is that climate change is changing the way in which fish swim and the waters in which we fish, so science can again help us work out what the right regime is. What may have been right 10 years ago will not be right in 10 years’ time.

Q40 Sandy Martin: A lot of concern has been raised that, when we leave the European Union, with the new free trade agreements that you hope to sign with other countries, particularly the United States, the UK may have to lower its environmental and food standards. How will you prevent a compromise on environmental and food standards in the future and still agree trade deals with countries like the United States?

Michael Gove: One thing that the Cabinet has agreed—and we have discussed it—is that we cannot compromise high environmental or animal welfare standards in pursuit of a trade deal. In a way it would be harmful for us to do so, not just in environmental terms. If we think about British produce, we compete and sell on the basis of quality and providence. If we were to undermine the high reputation that British agriculture has earned by seeming to compromise on those standards, we would in a way be tarnishing the brand. That would be economically counterproductive as well as the wrong thing in its own terms.

Q41 Sandy Martin: Have you had discussions with the Foreign Minister or International Trade Secretary about the sorts of agreements that the Americans have signed with other countries and the practices that have been enshrined in some of those trade agreements, which I think most people in this country would find unsatisfactory?

Michael Gove: If there is going to be a trade agreement with the United States, which I hope there will be, then it will have to be ratified in the House of Commons. The British people are clear—crystal clear in my experience—that whilst we want freer trade with the United States



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among others, we do not want to see any dilution of environmental, animal welfare or, for that matter, labour standards or any of these other considerations. Free trade is a good thing, but the gains that we have made over time in all of these areas need to be protected.

Sandy Martin: What we want and what the Americans are prepared to give us are not necessarily going to be the same thing.

Michael Gove: Yes, we want to have a free trade deal, but we need those protections. If we cannot achieve protections in those areas, any deal will necessarily have a slightly narrower scope.

Q42 **Chair:** We are down to a deal with the United States and are about to agree, but the sticking point is whether we accept chicken that has been washed in chlorine. Will you sit there and tell me and this Committee bluntly that that will hold up the whole trade deal when it is perfectly safe to eat under WTO rules? It is very poor on animal welfare and hygiene standards but still safe to eat, and you would tell me that that would hold up the whole deal? Will you put that on the record?

Michael Gove: Yes.

Chair: Good. We will hold you to it, Secretary of State.

Q43 **Julian Sturdy:** I would like to drill down on Defra's influence on the Brexit negotiations and target your influence with the International Trade Secretary as well. Can you put that into context? What input have you had in the recent negotiations with the EU on tariff rate quotas for imports of agricultural products? In your opening remarks you touched on the sheep meat sector. With that in mind, you could look, for example, at New Zealand lamb.

Michael Gove: I have been talking to a number of Cabinet colleagues, particularly the Secretary of State for International Trade, about precisely this issue. As I am sure everyone on the Committee will appreciate, it is the case through tariff rate quotas that countries like Australia and New Zealand have the opportunity to sell into the EU market without incurring the tariff that they may otherwise. The argument is of course that the consumer benefits from a greater degree of choice.

Q44 **Chair:** However, there is a limited tonnage, isn't there?

Michael Gove: There is. It is a specific tonnage. I do not want to pre-empt some of the decisions that may be taken, but it is no secret that some countries have said that as we leave the European Union the entire tariff rate quota for the EU should go to the remaining EU27 and then the entire tariff rate quota should also go to Britain as well, so that they have what I imagine they would call in "Only Fools and Horses" "double bubble".

Julian Sturdy: A double hit.

Michael Gove: There are pros and cons to that, but without prejudice to future negotiations I would say, yes, we have been involved in those



conversations and one of my principal concerns is to make sure that we can get an outcome that is a net positive for UK agriculture.

Julian Sturdy: That is the key. For example, there were 230,000 tonnes of New Zealand sheep meat imported into the EU on low tariffs in 2016. If that was suddenly doubled, with that going into the EU and the same tonnage to the UK, that would have huge consequences on the sheep sector.

Michael Gove: It would certainly have consequences. It is the case that we take more than our per capita share of New Zealand sheep meat. I would have to look at the figures precisely, but we are a more favoured destination. But you are right: it is the case that at the moment not all of that goes into the UK, and if it were the case that one were to have the same TRQs applied to the UK and EU, that would have an effect, yes.

Q45 **Chair:** Do you accept that, if we do not get a decent deal with the French so that we cannot get 40% of our lambs into the French market and have to accept a lot more New Zealand lamb, it will finish off the sheep trade? It is as simple as that. I am not being over-dramatic. These are really serious matters.

Michael Gove: That is true. They are very serious matters. There is another thing though, which is that a significant number, but not all, of upland sheep farmers are operating on very tight margins for the exact reasons that you and Julian point out: they face difficulties. However, it is also the case that they are already in receipt of support, and for good reasons. As we touched on earlier there are a number of iconic landscapes and rural communities that depend on traditional approaches to sheep farming that have existed for generations. I read over the summer James Rebanks' book about sheep farming in the Lake District. Nobody can read that book without admiration for those who carry on with that way of life.

But farming does change over time, and it would be foolish to guarantee that every acre currently farmed in a particular way is going to be farmed in the same way in 20 years' time, but I am sensitive to these concerns.

Q46 **Chair:** Would you accept that if you take the hill-land in particular and do not have sheep grazing that land, it will become inaccessible, and therefore it is about landscape and access to the public? There is quite a lot wrapped up in this. You cannot just abandon sheep. Do you see support for that type of farming beyond 2022?

Michael Gove: I certainly see support for people farming marginal land and who are, in the process, helping to keep iconic landscapes the way they are, and who also contribute to the strength of the rural economy and contribute overall to the production of quality food. There is a balance. There are some upland areas—not necessarily those currently in the hands of sheep farmers—that could in the future be managed in a different way in order to ensure that there are other environmental



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benefits as well. However, these matters, as you rightly point out, must be approached sensitively.

Q47 **Chair:** Do you see support for those areas beyond 2022?

Michael Gove: Yes. In basic terms, of the amount of money that we spend on agriculture, some has to be devoted to improving productivity overall, whether through technology or improving the skills base; some has to be to help people to move from the current model to the future; and some has to be targeted on either the public access benefits you have alluded to, or helping people on particularly low incomes in particularly important areas. I will use the phrase, although not satisfactory, "human ecology", but you put it better yourself.

Q48 **Chair:** You raise an interesting point. Do you see it partly as a social policy as well as an economic, agriculture and environment policy?

Michael Gove: Yes. I believe, as Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, that there is merit in providing support to rural areas and the way of life in rural communities, and that there are different ways in which we can do that. Everything can be done from using whatever levers that Government have to extend superfast broadband to rural areas, to recognising that there are people who pursue particular ways of life that are worthy of support. In Scotland there is a long and honourable tradition of supporting crofting communities, and you have people who are farming marginal land or are in difficult economic circumstances who cannot support themselves entirely on the basis of the food produce that they create, and it is a good thing, because the human ecology of the highlands and islands deserves to be supported.

Q49 **John Grogan:** You have had a busy summer. I, like my fellow Yorkshireman here, the Member for York Outer, read your speech with a large interest and it was thought-provoking. As you say, you get out and about a bit as well, notably to the opera in Germany with the editor of the *Evening Standard*. I will not ask you which aspect of agricultural policy you were discussing.

Back to your speech: you railed against corporate greed and devil-take-the-hindmost individualism, extractive and exploitative political systems, the selfish agenda of vested interests—more Ed Miliband than Mrs Thatcher. Which particular examples of corporate greed and which particular selfish agenda within your brief were you thinking of?

Michael Gove: It would be unwise of me to name names, but I was talking about what had happened in the past with respect to the environment. It is fair to say that there were some chemical and energy companies responsible for particular environmental disasters. I am sure that we can think of them, but I will not name them in case I unwittingly libel someone.

John Grogan: There is privilege. Ed Miliband had the same difficulties in



describing predatory capitalism.

Michael Gove: Look back on the way in which some chemical companies have operated in the past, including, as it happens, some chemical concerns beyond the Berlin Wall. If you also look at some energy companies—oil companies in particular—and the way they operated in an unsustainable fashion, and if you look at some past methods of intensive agriculture as well, you can see that there was a desire to maximise the profit at the time without thinking about the environmental balance as well.

Q50 **John Grogan:** Shall we take waste and incineration in particular? Among your extensive holiday reading, did you read the Eunomia report about incineration? As a consultancy, they have come to the conclusion that we now have over-capacity of incineration and there is perhaps a perverse incentive not to recycle, but to give recyclable waste to incinerators. Did you look at that?

Michael Gove: I did not. Who was the report by?

John Grogan: It is a report from a consultancy, Eunomia.

Michael Gove: No, I did not see it.

Q51 **John Grogan:** Obviously the Conservative party is reviving in Scotland, as you mentioned, and the Scottish local government manifesto this year called for a complete moratorium on incinerators. Ruth Davidson is now 33-1 for the next Prime Minister; you are 40-1.

Michael Gove: She is a far better bet.

Q52 **John Grogan:** I will take your word for it. Does a moratorium have some attraction?

Michael Gove: There are two things to say, one is a pro forma thing. The purpose of devolution is so that the Scottish Conservatives can have different policies and diverge where they want to.

The other thing I would say is that I am taking a look myself at how we can move to a better policy on waste, and what has been called the circular economy. One thing that I would like to explore is first how we can generate less waste in the first place and then ensure that the waste that we do generate is disposed of in the best possible manner. I have been talking to the team at the Environment Agency about how we might deal with that, and the most urgent problem that we face in waste terms is the fact that there are a number of illegal waste sites and the number has gone up recently. There are links between those who are operating outside of the law in the waste industry and other criminal activity. I am keen to do more on that.

As to the precise mix of different ways to deal with waste between incineration and others, I cannot give you a definitive answer at this



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point, but I will try to come back to you at a future hearing with more to say.

John Grogan: There are interesting things coming up. The National Infrastructure Commission is looking at waste infrastructure. As long ago as 2011 the Department said that some aspects of dealing with waste do not take fully into account the externalities.

Michael Gove: That is fair.

Q53 **John Grogan:** Is that fair? That possibly includes incineration.

Michael Gove: I would not want to presume too much at this stage.

Q54 **John Grogan:** No, but there is a body of work going on or you are thinking about it. How would you summarise how you intend to take forward waste policy under your watch?

Michael Gove: We will be seeing more of the 25-year environment plan and we have been working through that block by block. If there is an opportunity to return to the subject in the next couple of months, hopefully I will be able to better satisfy you. But I will be honest: in the hierarchy of things that I have been looking at, I have been looking at it, but not at the same detail as some other stuff.

Q55 **John Grogan:** Did you not discuss it with the editor of the *Evening Standard*?

Michael Gove: No.

Q56 **John Grogan:** It must have been a long discussion because it was a Wagner opera, wasn't it?

Michael Gove: It was a Wagner opera. We did not discuss incinerating waste, but as you may know, at the end of the opera that we were watching the home of the gods goes down in flames.

Q57 **Chair:** Talking about things going up or down in flames, has the previous 25-year environment plan gone up in flames if you are drawing up a completely new one? That is the rumour that is circulating. You have a very hands-on approach. When will we get this plan and are you rewriting it?

Michael Gove: I first asked Dieter Helm, Chair of the Natural Capital Committee—because the 25-year environment plan flowed from their work—to lay out some principles. We should be getting a letter from them laying out some of those principles. We hope to have a plan in response to that towards the end of this year.

All I would say is that I am augmenting it. We had a set of fantastic principles and some great policy ideas. I am making sure that we can add some additional material to it to reflect some of the new and emerging concerns that have been expressed, not least earlier here.



Q58 **Chair:** Is the answer that, yes, you are rewriting it?

Michael Gove: When I was the comment editor of *The Times* a long time ago, Simon Jenkins' article would arrive and I might occasionally add a word at the end or tweak the headline. In that sense I was rewriting it, but in fact I was making some fine-tuning adjustments.

Q59 **Chair:** In your rewriting of this 25-year environment plan, we are worried that agriculture, food and farming is very much part of an environment. I am not certain why we have two different plans. I want to be sure when you rewrite it, and as you do, that farming and food is all linked into the environment. Will you do that?

Michael Gove: Yes, because it is inextricably linked. In the conversation that I had with Julian earlier, he made the vital point about soil. Whether it has been the breakthroughs that the organic movement has been responsible for, scientific understanding or the straightforward common sense of farmers, there has been a consensus that we need to do more in order to enhance soil quality. You can say that that is an environmental, ideological or practical concern. To my mind, they come together. Unless you have a sustainable environment, we will not be able to produce the food that we all need. Going back to my point about farmers being friends of the earth, farming depends on a flourishing, resilient and green environment.

Q60 **Chair:** I think we have got to the bottom of the rewriting of it, so thank you very much. I am leading you, rather, on that. There is a lot of leaked information about the UK's wishes for Brexit negotiations. How and when will Defra publish its objectives for Brexit negotiations and how can we present to this Parliament and the world what we want, and then go and negotiate it with our European partners? This whole process is very difficult, because we want to be transparent and demand it, but the more transparent we become, surely the more difficult it becomes to negotiate with what you believe are our wonderfully co-operative European partners. I am not as convinced as you that they are so co-operative.

Michael Gove: I understand—there is your experience in the European Parliament. On the whole, the clearer we can be about where we want to go and the more transparent, the better, which is why saying that we would like to have a system whereby we have mutual recognition of our different approaches is the right way to go.

The other thing is that I want British farming to be more productive. I want us to be able to produce more, sell more and export more, but it is also the case that I want to have a situation where the consumer here can continue to have access to a wide range of high-quality produce from across the world, including from the European Union. I see opportunities for Britain outside of the European Union, but I certainly would not want to be in a position—and I would stress this to the European Union



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nations—where we do anything other than continue to benefit from the high-quality produce that they have as well.

Q61 **Chair:** Do you intend to publish Defra's objectives and the UK position on Brexit, and when? What is the plan?

Michael Gove: Ultimately the lead Ministry is DExEU and DExEU are responsible for those negotiations. As we touched on earlier, there are folks in my team who are working hand-in-glove with DExEU on these issues. I do not know of any other Government Department that is publishing a separate list of negotiating demands, but position papers have been published and both the 25-year environment plan and the paper that will precede our Agriculture Bill will helpfully inform the debate.

Q62 **Chair** Do you see anything more directly than that being published?

Michael Gove: I would have to discuss that with David Davis and DExEU, because he is the man with the negotiating mandate to discharge and everything at his fingertips. I would not want to be out of step with the approach that he takes. I will reflect on the point you make, and say that in the conversation that I hope to have with David later today.

Q63 **Chair:** You raise an interesting point. You do not want to be out of step with what he wants to do, but how will you make sure that you are influencing the situation as far as what Defra and we want for food, farming and the environment sector? It is not quite as transparent as it is appears.

Michael Gove: Within Government, when you are developing a common position, it is often the case that it is a good thing to keep the conversation going by making sure that there are two or three of you in the conversation rather than 600. Of course my own view is: share as much as possible, but also respect the fact that sometimes as policy develops you want to be working closely alongside your colleagues, recognising also that David is the lead Secretary of State in these negotiations and I have to respect that he is in charge of the conduct of them.

Q64 **David Simpson:** You will have heard many discussions and comments about a hard and soft Brexit in relation to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and the issue of the border. In the event that there was to be a hard Brexit, have you made any assessment of what the impact of that would be on the agri-food sector per se in relation to that?

Michael Gove: Everyone understands that the agri-food sector across the island of Ireland has become highly integrated. Things like milk products cross the border constantly and, whilst totally respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic, there is helpful economic integration. Nobody wants to see that go. In fact, the position paper produced by the Government looking at future arrangements for



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Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland was a very constructive step forward.

Taking a step back, the Irish Republic has a very strong economic relationship, not just with Northern Ireland but with the United Kingdom. No one in the Irish Government, Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom or the EU27 wants to see that upset. You have a coalition of interests trying to ensure that all the benefits that have flowed in terms of economic integration continue.

Again, there has been a recognition on the part of the Commission that Ireland needs, because of the unique land border between Ulster and the Republic, a bespoke solution. The point was made by David Davis that progress was being made in this area and it is very much in my mind for a host of reasons that we need to make sure that agriculture—because it plays such a big part in the economy of Ulster and the Republic—is supported.

Q65 David Simpson: In Northern Ireland there are approximately 100,000 people employed in the agri-food sector, so it is vital that we try and keep those relations going. I assume that you have a reasonably good working relationship with your counterpart in the Republic. It is in their interests as well to keep this flowing. I assume the final decision on all this will be down to Brussels.

Michael Gove: Ultimately we all want to see a good agreement. There will be a withdrawal agreement. It is a tribute to the foreign service of the Republic and its political leadership that they were able to ensure that at the top of the EU's agenda was making sure there was a good solution for the Republic and Northern Ireland. I think everyone recognises, for a host of reasons, that is important.

David Simpson: You will know that the success that DAERA has helped to negotiate for the Philippines, for China, and the UK Government had input into that; that is a good news story for the fifth quarter of those two industries—for the pork and beef. They want that to continue and we would like to keep that moving forward as best as we can. We do not want anything to jeopardise that. It is in everybody's interests to try to keep a common sense approach to the border issue. That can be achieved if Brussels agree to it.

Michael Gove: Yes, you are absolutely right.

Q66 Alan Brown: We understand the reasons why we want a bespoke solution for Northern Ireland where they might be selling to the Republic. The Secretary is well aware that in Scotland 62% of the electorate voted to remain in the EU. Is there any explanation for why a bespoke arrangement could not be considered for Scotland along the lines of the compromises suggested by the Scottish Government?

Michael Gove: I will be pernickety. 62% of people in Scotland voted for the United Kingdom to remain in the EU. It is an important point to



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make, because as the general election results showed, whilst there were some people who voted for Scotland to leave the United Kingdom, some of them were people who voted for Scotland to leave the EU, and there were others who voted for Scotland to stay in the EU who very much want Scotland to stay in the United Kingdom. It is difficult to interpret the 62% vote as some have chosen to. That is the first point.

The second is that you are absolutely right that Scotland has a particular structure to its agriculture, food and fishery sectors that we need to respect. That is why some of these matters are devolved. It is also the case that there are products that have been huge economic successes for the UK from Scotland, like whisky, which have benefited from the broad platform that Britain provides when it comes to giving export support and relief.

The right approach is to take a balance. There are huge benefits to Scotland being in the UK, but you also need to have a particular approach when it comes to considering the freedom of manoeuvre that the Scottish Government needs in allocating agricultural subsidy or support.

Q67 Alan Brown: We will always differ on what the vote meant and what promises were made in 2014. Clearly Defra is the most devolved governmental Department. That means there needs to be collaboration and inclusive working with devolved Administrations. Your predecessor told this Committee last October that she intended to set up an interministerial group with Environment Ministers from the devolved Administrations. Has this group been set up?

Michael Gove: Yes. We will be meeting the week after next with representatives from DAERA, because of course there is no Executive in Northern Ireland. As things stand, Fergus Ewing from the Scottish Government is coming and Lesley Griffiths from the Welsh Administration. I hope that this will be the first of many. I had a good conversation with Fergus at the Royal Highland Show in Inverclyde. I also talked with Roseanna there as well. I hope that, as well as those four-party discussions, we can have bilateral discussions. I must say that the Scottish Government officials have been working very collaboratively with Defra officials in London.

Q68 Alan Brown: Are you confirming that there will be an inclusive approach, the first of many meetings, and there will be regular, scheduled meetings with all the stakeholders?

Michael Gove: That is my plan. I cannot necessarily say that we are going to agree on everything, but my intention is to try to be as collaborative as we possibly can. Certainly from the tone and nature of the very first conversations that I have had with Lesley and Fergus, they have taken exactly the sort of constructive approach that I would have hoped to see.

Q69 Alan Brown: Working with the devolved Administrations, how do you



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see this play out with powers going to devolved Administrations? The Scottish Secretary of State, David Mundell, has talked of a power bonanza coming to the Scottish Parliament. In a previous campaign role the Secretary said that Scotland could get control of immigration, which now does not seem to be happening. We have already heard the phrase “power grab” today. What will happen to devolved Administration powers relating to Defra policy areas?

Michael Gove: This is for discussion. The most important thing is to make sure that the agri-food sector, fisheries, have an arrangement that enables them to plan, invest and grow appropriately, but we obviously need to discuss once we have these powers taken back how we move from a situation where there is UK-wide agreement and certainty to one where the interests of people within the devolved Administrations can be properly respected. I am going up to Aberdeen on Friday to speak to representatives from farming and the fish processing industry to do just that. My agenda is to listen and see what the arrangements are that they think would best serve their industries.

Q70 **Alan Brown:** A ministerial group is sitting around the table. The three Ministers of the devolved nations say, “We want control of X. It should come straight to the devolved Administrations.” The Secretary of State may have a different opinion. Who will win that battle if it is three against one sitting around the table?

Michael Gove: One thing is that it is very rarely clear-cut like that. In some of the discussions that we have already been having at official level, you can see that there are ever so slightly different views that understandably each of the Administrations’ citizens might take. My aim is to not assume conflict and division. Let us try to work collaboratively together.

Sometimes in the past there have been politicians in Scotland who may have wanted to use disagreement to create grievance. Following from the election, I detect, and hope that it is true across all parties, that there is a desire not to flam up disagreement here or there for grievance’s sake but to try to recognise that people are working in good faith in the interests of the people who pay our taxes.

Alan Brown: So there will be a power bonanza and not a power grab.

Michael Gove: There will be mutually beneficial and constructive conversations.

Q71 **Chair:** We can interpret that in many ways. When it comes to devolving, especially agricultural policy, I can understand different nations wanting their own agricultural policies. However, we also want to make sure that there is not too much competition and different sources of incomes for farmers across the border so that we do not create an economic advantage or disadvantage between England and Scotland or Wales, or whatever. How do you balance the fact that we need the devolved nations to have their powers but also need to have some commonality in



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the overall policy for the United Kingdom?

Michael Gove: You do it through conversation and an understanding of the mutual interests of all. You are right that when it comes to the allocation of agricultural support we want to give the maximum amount of autonomy to the devolved Administrations, but it is also the case that we have to say that if exercised in a particular way a decision by one Administration may have a material impact on another. We need to find the right method of reconciling the need to respect the devolution settlement with the need to ensure that we do not undermine the agri-food industry, farmers or fishermen UK-wide.

Q72 **Chair:** To consider a scenario that may or may not happen, if you have at one side of the border a highly subsidised regime per head of sheep or suckler cows for instance and on the other side of the border you do not, it seriously disadvantages those who are not getting the support. This will happen across Europe, but it is even worse if it happens in the United Kingdom.

Michael Gove: Yes, and of course there is also an issue with future trade deals. If you have one part of the United Kingdom and it is too radically divergent in some aspect, that may imperil the chance for all of us to be able to export to a third country.

The critical thing here is to stay in touch with the people at the frontline. I understand that it is in the nature of landholding in Scotland that a different method of support has grown up, but that is why I am going again to Scotland in order to ensure that I can develop a proper understanding from farmers and food processors themselves of what is in their collective interests.

Q73 **Alan Brown:** As a gesture of goodwill, could the Secretary of State commit to passing on the convergence of that money that came from the EU, which is based on the lower rates that Scottish farmers receive?

Michael Gove: I understand why people feel as they do about the convergence payments, but it is one of those issues that is now difficult to unpick. But I hope to be able to talk to Fergus about it.

Q74 **Alan Brown:** Is it a possibility?

Michael Gove: I understand why people feel the way they do, but the decision having been taken in the way it was makes it difficult to unpick. One of the things that I want to do is to ensure that in the future we do right by Scottish farmers. However, it is very difficult to unscramble the omelette.

Alan Brown: I would beg to differ.

Michael Gove: I understand.

Q75 **Paul Flynn:** As each week goes by, new Brexit horrors are revealed that were not apparent when the referendum was held. There is a precedent



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in other parts of Europe and certainly in Wales for taking a decision, which they did 1979, against devolution and then, in 1997, in favour of devolution. If the country and public opinion changes and decides that second thoughts are superior to first thoughts and demands a second referendum that decides to stay in Europe, will your policies on subsidies remain the same within Europe?

Michael Gove: We are extremely unlikely to have a referendum of the kind that you mention. My aim is to ensure that, the decision having been taken to leave the European Union, we make sure that that works in the best interests of British agriculture, our environment, and consumers and citizens. That is as much as I can say. You are inviting me to engage with a hypothesis that is very unlikely.

Q76 **Paul Flynn:** I find it difficult to cope with your wild optimism, which has no boundaries on this. Could you think for one moment that there could be a nightmare in your case—a dream in mine—and the country could change its mind? It has happened before.

Michael Gove: One of the things that has contributed to unhappiness with the European Union sometimes is the fact that if countries take what is viewed as the wrong decision, they are cajoled, encouraged, incentivised or bullied—

Paul Flynn: I know; they believe things written on the side of a bus, for instance.

Michael Gove: —into voting again. Whether it is Denmark, the Netherlands or Ireland, having voted one way, another referendum comes along. It is very rarely the case that people, having taken back control and exercising a greater degree of sovereignty, want to dilute that.

I do not think, if there were a second referendum in Wales or Scotland about whether one should get rid of the Welsh Assembly or the Scottish Parliament, that would happen; if we had a referendum in the Republic of Ireland about whether or not it wanted to re-join the United Kingdom so that we could have one big single market, I do not think that would happen. We can have all sorts of historical speculation about it, and I know that we were on different sides in that campaign. However, it is better—fun though historical speculation can be—for me to get on with the job of making a success of the decision that the British people took.

Q77 **Chair:** How many new staff has Defra taken on in the last year to deal with the increased workload due to Brexit, and what is different about those staff? For 40 years we have managed a CAP. Now all of a sudden we are going to have our own agricultural and fisheries policies, and we have to negotiate our way out of the EU. What sort of staff do we have? Do we have enough? Have you taken them on? Have you fired them? What have you done?



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Michael Gove: We have taken on more people. I will write back to the Committee with the exact numbers, because it is increasing.

Q78 **Chair:** Trade negotiators—what sort of people do we have?

Michael Gove: DIT has a fantastic trade negotiator, Crawford Falconer, who they have brought along. We have had people transfer from other Government Departments and have also been deliberately looking out for expertise from beyond that. For example, I have asked for additional support from economists, people with experience in environmental economics, and people with experience at the sharp end of agriculture, in order to make sure that we have the right team in place. The Treasury have very generously acknowledged that the process of taking us out of the European Union, because it had a bigger impact on Defra than anywhere else, would require us to take on some additional staff. That is what we plan to do and have already done.

I will write to let you know. Going back to Paul's question, one thing is that we are taking money back from the European Union and are also going through a period where I hope we will in due course—when it comes to administering rural payments for example—have a slimmer system that requires less bureaucracy in order to deliver what farmers deserve.

Q79 **Chair:** Are you hoping for a computer system that works, and works immediately? We have introduced successively in Governments new systems that have always been guaranteed to work and have almost always failed. It was not just our own Government, but the previous Government as well is guilty of this.

Paul Flynn: They have worked in Wales.

Michael Gove: Paul is right. If we look back at what happened when one of my predecessors was keen to have a new bells and whistles IT system and wisely the Scottish and Welsh Governments went for something that was a bit more penny-plain, the Welsh and Scottish Governments got it right and the UK Government did not. One lesson from that, but not the only lesson, is wherever possible to keep it as simple as possible. That is one of the things that I am anxious to do.

Q80 **Chair:** It is probably a little further down the road than at the moment, but as we move out of the EU and towards trade deals with other countries—let us say we were trying to do a free-trade deal with China—would you bring people in like the New Zealanders and others, because they have had the experience of dealing with China? I feel that we are going out into a brave new world, which is fine, and everything is supposed to be fine, but do we have the expertise in dealing with all of these countries? We have not dealt with them for 40 years because we handed it all over, rightly or wrongly, to the European Union. That is what I would like to be reassured on. It is all very well for you to say that it is fine, but who are these people and do they know what they are



talking about? Can they negotiate deals?

Michael Gove: I have so far been very impressed with the people whom I have encountered in Defra.

Chair: Yes, but the people you had in Defra before were dealing with totally different things from what they are going to have to deal with now. I am not convinced that they have suddenly changed their clothes and spots and are completely different.

Michael Gove: The first thing about the UK Civil Service is that it has a great many highly skilled people. Much in the same way that you can have a great Chancellor of the Exchequer who could also be a great Foreign Secretary, so you could also have someone who has been a brilliant Treasury analyst who can bring to bear their analytical abilities to a different area of policy. It is also the case that there are some questions, environmental or agricultural, where you have a body of knowledge that has been built up in Defra that is now being deployed in a different way.

You are right that there are one or two new challenges that we have as a result of leaving, but Crawford Falconer and others who are distinguished trade negotiators are there in the DIT team; and, yes, I am seeking additional expertise, but I would not want to prejudice the individuals concerned by naming them or the areas in which they are expert.

I want to take another step back. When it comes to thinking about China, we already export to China. Thanks to some of the fantastic work done by my predecessors, including Liz Truss, we have significantly increased exports to China.

There is one other thing. I was at the Yorkshire Show talking to a group of farmers, and one of them said that one of the reasons that he had voted to take us out of the EU is that at the moment there is a limited appetite for pig products in the UK. There are some parts of the animal that are of course very popular; others parts, less so. However, you can increase pig production in the UK and increase the demand for pig products from UK farmers if you can sell those products abroad.

One of those products, cherished in China, is the pig's ear. However, because of the way you put a ring in a pig's ear in order to properly identify the animal, that is seen as a less valuable product. Outside of the EU we can dispense with the ring and have another method of identifying the animal in order to ensure traceability and improve the value of the product, not only earning more for ears but also making sure that we are getting value nose to tail from the creature.

This is a small but tangible and real benefit of leaving the European Union, and is being factored in by the brilliant team that we have in Defra.

Q81 **Chair:** We could also export chicken feet, but it is taking time to get that



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done. I am not saying that we cannot trade with China, but it is about having the expertise, licences, and getting it all done. Do you have the staff in place to get the licences with China to deal with this? All of these things take time. Defra has been cut back in the number of staff. Are they there? Do they have the expertise? Can we move quickly? We have not moved quickly in the past. I can give you a number of tales where businesses have found it very difficult to get licences to trade into China. We can do it and it is great when we do, but it takes time to do. Do we have the expertise?

Michael Gove: Yes, but we can always do better.

Q82 **Chair:** When are you likely to launch the consultation on the ivory ban? It is a totally different question and I am sorry to land it on your plate.

Michael Gove: It is perfectly legitimate; presently.

Q83 **Chair:** You cannot put a date to “presently”.

Michael Gove: When it comes to these important policy questions, I have to write to all of the other members of Government in order to assess their views, but we have listened hard to the concerns that have been expressed by a variety of interested parties, and our approach to this issue will be shared with the Committee and everybody else present.

Q84 **Chair:** Cross-party, across the country, everybody is concerned about ivory. When they tried to have a ban of historical ivory, that did not necessarily work very well because a lot of fresh ivory was added to it. It is important. Can you give us any idea at all? Is it one month away, six months, the spring, summer or autumn? When is it likely to be?

Michael Gove: The timing is out of my hands because it is dependent on a Cabinet process.

Q85 **Chair:** Will you give us any guesstimate of when that may be? We are breaking again for conference recess, so it is after that. Will it be launched by Christmas?

Michael Gove: I would not like to make any predictions at this stage.

Q86 **Chair:** Government works very slowly. When it is something like this, why does it take so long?

Michael Gove: Some things we can move very quickly on. Some things we move a little less quickly on, but we will see.

Q87 **Chair:** Is there no degree of urgency?

Michael Gove: All I will say is that there is enormous urgency about everything in the Department and it is driven from the top.

Q88 **Chair:** “All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.” In the priority list, where is the ivory ban? Can you list one to 10?

Michael Gove: You are tempting me down a path that I will not go.



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Chair: We are very keen to see this happen.

Q89 **Sandy Martin:** Given that there are not that many wild elephants in the United Kingdom, it would be good to have a complete ban that we could put on the table at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. That would be a nice deadline for you to achieve the ban.

Q90 **Chair:** You are being tempted again, Secretary of State.

Michael Gove: I am smiling.

Q91 **Chair:** Right. There is a lot of concern and the sooner that you can get that delivered, launch the consultation, and get a decision, that will be good.

Michael Gove: That is very clear and I very much appreciate the points that you and the Committee have made.

Q92 **Chair:** You mention these 100 statutory instruments. We would be keen to receive in writing quite a lot of them and what they will be, and how it will be dealt with. Can we have that in writing?

Michael Gove: Yes, absolutely.

Chair: I thank you very much for appearing before us. We have had a good conversation with you this afternoon. We got a number of things down on record and shall look forward to you coming to see us again, and we appreciate you coming to see the Committee that has only been reconstituted since the general election for two days, and you are here. We very much thank you for that.

Michael Gove: Not at all. I am very grateful. Thank you very much. The only other thing that I was going to say is that there is a standing and open invitation to you, Chair, and members of the Committee. If you would like to come to Defra and if there are particular areas of policy where you would like the official team there to help deepen your understanding, we would be only too delighted to help.

Q93 **Chair:** Shall we have a negotiation between our clerks and your officials to make that happen? We will try to fit in a Wednesday morning or something to do that.

Michael Gove: Of course. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you very much.