



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

Wednesday 26 April 2023

Session 6



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RURAL AFFAIRS AND ISLANDS COMMITTEE
12th Meeting 2023, Session 6

CONVENER

*Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

*Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

*Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

*Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)

*Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

*Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Mark Bird (Greyhound Board of Great Britain)

Paul Brignal (Thornton Greyhounds)

Professor Madeleine Campbell (Greyhound Board of Great Britain)

Paul Flanagan (Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board)

Joe Hind (Scotland Food & Drink)

Kate Rowell (Quality Meat Scotland)

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Emma Johnston

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Rural Affairs and Islands Committee

Wednesday 26 April 2023

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:06]

Interests

The Convener (Finlay Carson): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the 12th meeting in 2023 of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee. We welcome to the meeting our new member, Christine Grahame, who is replacing Jenni Minto. Members should also note that Mercedes Villalba has left the committee. I thank Mercedes for her contribution to the committee over the past two years and wish her all the best. Rhoda Grant has been appointed to the committee but, due to a previous constituency engagement, she is not able to be here with us this morning and has given her apologies. Before we begin, I remind those members using electronic devices to please turn them to silent mode.

Under the first agenda item, I invite Christine Grahame to declare any relevant interests.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Thank you, convener. With a belt-and-braces approach, I note that I am convener of the cross-party group on animal welfare.

Future Agriculture Policy

09:07

The Convener: Under the next item of business, we continue our pre-legislative scrutiny of Scotland's future agriculture policy, focusing on food production and supply chain resilience. I welcome to the meeting Kate Rowell, who is the chair of Quality Meat Scotland; Joe Hind, who is the policy manager for Scotland Food & Drink; and Paul Flanagan, who is the stakeholder engagement director for the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board.

We have approximately 90 minutes for questions and discussions. I will kick off the questioning. We know that sectors or points in the supply chain have experienced risk in the past and expect to do so in the future. What are the reasons for risks in the supply chain in Scotland? Will you talk about resilience, particularly in terms of farm profitability and processing capacity, which I believe is key to sustainability in Scotland? We will kick off with Kate Rowell on her experience on issues around profitability.

Kate Rowell (Quality Meat Scotland): Thanks very much for inviting QMS to give evidence today.

There are a lot of risks. The immediate past risks are very obvious. The war in Ukraine has caused huge increases in input prices. That is one of the biggest risks that farmers have faced in the past year or so. Covid, too, has upset supply chains right the way through. We represent people from the primary producer to the processors, and Covid was a huge shock to them, as well. We were just recovering from that and then we got the war in Ukraine. There are also the longer-term risks of climate change, labour and skills and all related issues.

Throughout Covid, the red meat supply chain has shown how resilient it can be. There was a huge shock at the start, but a lot of people adapted very quickly. A lot of the businesses downstream pivoted to do business differently, and they showed huge resilience overall. However, as we know, there are huge challenges ahead, and we must invest in the supply chain to ensure that it continues.

The big problem that we face is the loss of critical mass in the red meat sector. If we lose animals and primary producers—farmers—we will not have enough animals to make the rest of the supply chain viable. If we cut back on cow numbers, the first thing that will happen is that we will lose a major processor. If there are fewer processors in the game, prices will go down, because there are not so many people competing

for the product. If farmers go out of business, we will not have hauliers, because, if they cannot get work, they will disappear. If large-animal vets do not have the work, we will lose them. Feed companies will close down. All those things are downstream from the top level number of animals on the ground and the numbers of farmers and businesses that are out there.

The Convener: You will, no doubt, have picked up on the letter that Chris Stark wrote to the committee about future agriculture policy and climate change. The Climate Change Committee persists in suggesting that the only way for agriculture to reach its targets is to cut our red meat industry and actively support farmers to leave the industry. Why is the message about critical mass falling on deaf ears?

Kate Rowell: The CCC has a job to do. Its job is to do with emissions and, when it writes a letter such as that, I suppose that that is it responding to its job. Your job and our job is to look much wider than that, at the unintended consequences from those proposals, and the things that I have just said are definitely a risk if we go down that route. The proposal does not take livelihoods or the rural economy into account. It is numbers on a spreadsheet; whereas, in your world and in my world, we deal with people's real lives, their livelihoods and their businesses. There are so many things going on in the agricultural industry on mitigating emissions.

The science is not absolutely solid yet, either. There was a report recently in *Nature Geoscience* that said that the effects of global warming from methane have been overestimated by 30 per cent. That is one paper, but, if there are still question marks over the science, it would be incredibly damaging to even think about going down that route—which we cannot then come back from—only to discover in a few years' time that we have done the wrong thing. Therefore, we need to keep making the point.

As I say, I am not here to get into an argument with the CCC. That is its job and it has done its job. I am here to try to explain the unintended consequences that would result from any intention to follow that route.

Paul Flanagan (Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board): I agree with everything that Kate Rowell has said. Sustainability is not just about carbon footprints. The CCC has its job to do, but we are here to look at how to achieve resilient farming and land management systems. We want to look after the health of the people, the animals and the environment. That is a much broader view than the CCC has taken.

Some people should be consuming more meat and dairy, because that would be beneficial to

their diet. Clearly, each individual group takes its own view on that, but we need to look a bit more broadly. There is climate resilience, of course. We need to look at economic resilience and the fabric of society. We need to take a much broader view. From an agricultural perspective, and almost being a little bit self-critical, we need to do more to demonstrate the progress that we can make towards net zero. We have to get away from the discussion about gross emissions; net zero emissions is what we must talk about.

The Convener: From the Scotland Food & Drink perspective, does the agricultural sector do enough to show and evidence the efforts and changes that it has made on emissions and what will be available in the future? How can the food and drink industry as a whole add to that?

09:15

Joe Hind (Scotland Food & Drink): We are grateful to be here and to have the opportunity to speak. We are quite fortunate in that we can look across the industry as a whole, from farm to fork.

Looking at the debate around this very important issue, it is clear that it will dictate the future of agriculture, land use and food—massively critical elements of society—for the foreseeable future. In the debate, nobody is arguing or advocating for the status quo; we all recognise that there are ways in which we can improve and things that we can do around processes. However, we must recognise—as Kate Rowell touched on—that livelihoods, economies and the viability of rural, coastal and island communities are at stake.

A topic such as meat is very contentious and polarised. Some people advocate for no meat and others advocate for more meat. We say that there is a balance to be made and a global context to consider when we think about the impact of meat and dairy. We have to think about unintended consequences in the global context. If we reduce production in Scotland but consumption levels remain the same, that will potentially displace production to a place where emissions are higher and welfare standards are lower.

For land that is potentially not useful for other forms of farming, there is a very strong argument for ruminant farming. That is advocated for by all parts of the spectrum of thinking on the issue, including non-governmental organisations that have called for agroecology, for example. Ruminant farming is an absolutely critical element of a sustainable food system. There is discussion around balance and, from our perspective, continuing to have the discussion and bringing in lots of people is a critical element of that.

The Convener: I want to stay on the response from the CCC, because it is incredibly important. It

would appear that the CCC does not agree that livestock production should continue in Scotland; it wants to see a dramatic cut. Given that most of Scotland is only good for growing grass, can we realistically have resilient food security without having livestock and red meat production at the heart of it?

Kate Rowell: Cattle and sheep production in Scotland is split into less favoured areas—LFA—and non-LFA at the moment. LFAs are the disadvantaged areas, and they make up a huge amount of the country. It is not just over on the west coast; a lot of the south of Scotland is also LFA.

The cattle and sheep from the LFA parts of Scotland account for £706 million of output, which is 26.5 per cent of the whole output of Scottish agriculture—one quarter of everything we do in Scotland agriculture-wise. From looking at the CCC letter, it appears that it is saying, “Forget about all of that; focus on the bits that produce lots of things and grow trees elsewhere.”

It is a huge headline figure, but we must also consider the number of people on the ground that it applies to. There are people up glens and out on islands, and there is the whole infrastructure associated with a farm or croft. There are all the people who feed into that—the feed merchants, the vets, the fencers and every single person who relies on those businesses to exist. If the farm and croft businesses go, and then all those associated people go, what do you have left? You are talking about the complete depopulation of some of those areas. We argue incredibly strongly that that is absolutely not the way that we want to go in Scotland.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): The CCC is a statutory adviser to the Scottish and UK Governments. The Scottish Parliament signed off the Climate Change Act 2019, so it is clearly part of the equation. However, I take your earlier point about the science. When we had an evidence session with the CCC, it said that older grazed grass will probably sequester less carbon, but there is no actual science on that.

When we are talking about resilience, we must talk about whether there is a long-term future for the livestock sector in Scotland, given the numbers that you have just given us. Do you know of any work that is being done to look at the science that will probably tell us that old grass sequesters less carbon?

Kate Rowell: I am sure that Scotland’s Rural College is working on that, but there is also quite a lot of work on soils from others, including Rothamsted Research. It has records going back 150 years on soil and its potential to sequester carbon. As far as I can see, the science is evolving

and, as I say, we need to make sure that we do not go too quickly down one route based on one piece of science, which then turns out to be incorrect or incomplete.

That CCC letter referred to low-carbon breeds. As far as I am aware, that is not a thing. There are low-carbon genetics but not low-carbon breeds. That one little sentence said to me that the CCC does not really understand all this. However, as far as I can see, there is huge potential in the genetics of cows, in particular, because individual cows can vary in the amount of methane they produce by up to 50 per cent. If you can tie in the genetics and breed low-methane-producing cows, you will make serious inroads into the climate change targets.

Paul Flanagan: There is some evidence—I will get it and pass it on to the committee—from a company called Devenish that is based in Northern Ireland; it has a farm in Ireland. John Gilliland, who works for AHDB as a consultant, has done a number of things working with livestock and with multispecies swards that include legumes. There is a process that I think is called light detection and ranging technology, which comes from archaeology, where you can look at the carbon in the hedgerows and the trees and get to the net carbon level.

The challenge on sequestration, especially right now, is that too often we are looking at tier 1 international level averages and then greenhouse gas emissions using tier 2 national levels, but we do not have information on tier 3, the individual farms. We need that baseline. Certainly, Devenish has done some very good stuff on sequestration and the interaction of livestock and forestry. I can find that and pass it on to the committee; it is really interesting.

Jim Fairlie: Thank you. I am pretty sure that that is the company where Professor Alice Stanton did the work on the red meat supply chains. I think that the committee will look at that.

I want to talk about profitability. Kate Rowell, this is for you. Farmers can make money in two ways. They can either sell to the market at the cost of production plus, to get a profit, or they can sell to the market and be supported by the Government so that the price of the product is not beyond the consumer’s ability to buy it. That is my understanding of the two ways in which a farm can be sustainable. What role do supermarkets play in that equation?

Kate Rowell: One of our problems in the United Kingdom in general is that we have a very small number of very big supermarkets. That means that they can have disproportionate effects on everybody. I will not sit here and say that supermarkets are bad; they buy a lot of what

Scottish farmers produce, so they absolutely are not bad. However, if they are in a price war with each other and they are focusing on their profits and their issues, the unintended consequence can often be that farmers, right down the line to primary producer level, are affected quite a lot by what is happening.

Jim Fairlie: I am certainly not asking you to kick the supermarkets. I want to get to the factual position of how the farming community sells its products to be profitable. It is either through Government support or through the market or it is a combination of both. If the export market is constrained in any way, the supermarkets go to war with each other, and it is always the primary producer that pays the price for that, in terms of how much the supermarkets take out of the marketplace. Do supermarkets have a responsibility to play more of a role in making sure that there is food resilience for the people of the country?

Kate Rowell: Supermarkets have a role to play, but ultimately it is up to the Government to make the policy that they then have to abide by. Supermarkets are businesses. They will try to make money for themselves, as all businesses do. It is absolutely down to the consumer, as well as the Government, to put pressure on supermarkets and say, "This is what we want." QMS tries to speak directly to consumers because they will then put pressure on the supermarkets. If we can get across to consumers how important it is to buy Scotch beef, Scotch lamb and specially selected pork, all of which is raised in Scotland, and they then go and put pressure on the supermarkets to say, "We want to see this on the shelves," that will achieve it, as well as any Government policy. The issue with the whole supply chain is that processors, secondary processors and all the other people in the middle need to make a living. That is the problem.

Jim Fairlie: We are traditionally a "stack it high, sell it low" economy, and people in this country are used to cheap food. The supermarkets tell us that they respond to consumer demand. The cost of production in this country is always higher because of the standards that we set—standards that we, as a Government and as consumers, expect from our producers—yet that cost is never reflected in the shelf price. How do we ask consumers to put pressure on supermarkets and demand that product when people are struggling to pay their everyday bills?

Kate Rowell: I know. People talk about food poverty, but my opinion is that there is no such thing. It is poverty. We have to separate these things. People need a proper return on the food that they produce, right the way through the supply chain, and people need to be able to afford to buy

that food. We cannot have cheap food just so that people can afford it. We need to fix the poverty bit, not just the food poverty bit.

Our society has a different view of food from that of many other countries, where individuals spend a bigger percentage of their income on food. People value food more and value local food more. That is a societal feeling. In France, people are very much more into local food than we seem to be here. That is where we need to get to. That is a societal conversation that we have to have. We need to make sure that people understand how important it is to have local food, local farmers and local supply chains, without always bringing it down to the lowest common denominator of price.

Paul Flanagan: At AHDB we look after the beef, lamb and pork for England only, so I give way to Kate Rowell on red meat in Scotland. However, we look after the dairy sector for Great Britain.

How do we square the circle? How do we get more money back to the primary producers? As Kate Rowell's organisation and AHDB are doing, the route by which we do that is by selling not just to the supermarkets but pushing more and more into export markets. The advantage of that is that, not always but most of the time, you will get a higher price. You can talk about provenance—what has happened in Scotland—and really sell that and get a higher price. At the same time, you are tightening the home market and giving yourself more options.

Jim Fairlie: When you say, "tightening the home market," are you talking about reducing production?

Paul Flanagan: No, I mean that if you are selling more to export markets, the supply to the home market will be less, if you can do that at the same time. Clearly, you cannot just switch by waking up on a Monday morning and saying, "Right, I am going to switch everything across." That would be crazy. Getting a better balance between those markets and driving better returns is the best way in which we will get a better return for the primary producers.

Some of the other things that we will talk about today, such as areas for reducing climate impact, will also be financially beneficial, but exports are the main way in which we will get money into the top line for producers and get more money into the supply chain.

09:30

Jim Fairlie: Sorry, I am hogging the session. I apologise. With the convener's permission I will ask one final question. If we are to get consumers in this country to demand Scotch beef, Scotch

lamb or specially selected pork, surely we have to be looking for a point of differentiation. That cannot be just the badge. It has to be something else, such as eating quality, taste and all those kinds of things.

I have a problem with our grading system. Other parts of the world are looking at grading their beef, in particular, with a focus on eating quality. My view is that there is a much better eating quality with native breeds—Angus, Galloway, Highlanders—but we are not looking at the shape of the animal before it goes to slaughter. What is QMS's view on the grading system?

Kate Rowell: I hear this all the time and have done for the entire five years that I have been in the chair. We are in the initial stages of a meat eating-quality project. As chair, I do not have the ins and outs of that, but I can get you the details on where we are going with that. A lot of work has been done on that in the past and we have definitely picked up on it. In fact, all our industry development work for next year is based on the meat eating-quality work, so I can come back to you on that.

There is one thing that would be an important signal. The public procurement sector in Scotland is worth £150 million and it would be a very good example if schools, hospitals, prisons, the Scottish Parliament—everybody—led the way on having as much local produce in their meals as possible. We have some figures that show that that has gone backwards since Covid, so we need to be pushing on that.

There is a lot of good work being done out there. The Soil Association has a food for life project with schools. We have heard anecdotally that local authorities are pulling out of that because of the cost. It may not be a huge amount of money in the grand scheme of things, but it is important that public procurement goes down that route as a good example and to show leadership.

Jim Fairlie: I will stop there, convener.

The Convener: We will have the opportunity to question the cabinet secretary on progress on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022 at a session that is coming up very soon.

We are also planning on having the supermarkets in front of us. Joe Hind, this is a question for you, and you can come in with your other comments as well. There is a groceries code adjudicator. We know that the adjudicator does not have the ability to control price but can bring sanctions against supermarkets that delist suppliers at short notice because of rises and falls in supply and demand and so on. Should there be provisions in the agriculture bill to give the groceries code adjudicator more powers to bring a

little bit more resilience and certainty over the supply chain?

Joe Hind: That is certainly a question to ask. We have a close relationship with the groceries code adjudicator and invited him up to Scotland to meet some of our producers and suppliers. He took away a number of issues.

That said, we must look at the issue system-wide. We have to look at our highly efficient food production and selling system. We produce premium produce in Scotland. We should be proud of it and of all the people in that system who produce the great food and drink that we all enjoy at home and abroad. That should be celebrated and championed. There is therefore a tension, which Kate Rowell alluded to, in the fact that, as households and communities, we do not spend as much on food as other countries do.

How we resolve that tension is important. Perhaps that is in diversifying markets, reaching out to become a trading nation as part of a national strategy for economic transformation and making sure that we have other routes to market. However, we absolutely cannot ignore the role of supermarkets in what they choose to buy for their customers. They are, of course, minded that we are in a cost of living crisis and they will seek good value for their customer.

Is consumer demand about accessibility, affordability and availability of the products, so that those of us who have the wherewithal can go into a store and choose Scottish produce for our meals, which we all should do where we can? Is doing that available to everybody and, if not, what is the solution? How do we resolve that?

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): My questions are about processing capacity and are directed to Kate Rowell initially. I noted in our papers that 50 per cent of abattoirs in Scotland closed between 1970 and 2000. What does that mean for the business resilience of livestock producers, especially in rural and island areas, and how can we better support short supply chains, bearing in mind the value of local food production and the end result: consumers using local food?

Kate Rowell: As you say, abattoirs have disappeared very quickly, and that is not necessarily all financial. It is down to regulation and other things, including labour and skills. There are not enough people out there who want to work in processing facilities, and that is a major issue, particularly in the more remote areas. I have the numbers somewhere. We have about 39 processors in Scotland but only a handful of very big ones, and a lot of them are all around the country; there is Shetland, Mull and out on the Western Isles. I am from Peeblesshire and we do

not have an abattoir at all down in the south-east, which affects that local supply chain. The big processors work with the supermarkets and the bigger wholesalers, but any farmer who wants to sell directly is coming up against big issues in finding somewhere that can kill their animals. Then there is the butchery as well, although we are starting to see a few more butchers who are happy to do that and who are starting to see a gap in the market.

We need to change how we think about small abattoirs. The big ones are businesses. They obviously need support and help and we need to make sure that they continue because they have such a huge value to the economy. The smaller ones, however, are infrastructure and that is how we need to look at them. The comparison that I will make is that fishermen have piers and harbours where they land their catch, and that is infrastructure. I am not a fisherman, but as far as I know, those facilities were put in by local authorities or by Government to make sure that that industry could work and those facilities do not necessarily have to make a profit. When we look at island communities and more remote areas, we need to think of small abattoirs in the same way—not necessarily as profitable businesses, but facilities that have to be there to service the local area and ensure that primary producers have somewhere to take their animals. A definite mindset change there will be useful.

I know that there has been a lot of talk in the past about mobile abattoirs and there was a Scottish Government report on that. However, no one appears to have come forward to grasp that, which I think is mainly because of the regulation, rather than the financial side. It is both, but regulation would be so difficult with a mobile abattoir.

I have one or two figures here. The processing sector in general ranks high in the Scottish Government's "Supply, Use and Input-Output Tables". In the type II economic multipliers, it is ranked second out of 98 sectors; the processing sector is important. There is capacity to increase that, but people are often the factor that stops abattoirs from doing more because they cannot get in enough labour and skills.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): My apologies, convener, for being late due to the train. The point about abattoirs is interesting, so I am glad I caught that.

I know from experience in my constituency in the Borders—I am not sure whether it is because of the geography—that a lot of farmers are having to take their cattle a fair way south, with increased input costs to do that, because of the contraction of the smaller abattoir sector in Scotland. What is your view on that? Considering what you have just

said, would you rather that Scottish cattle—bred, born and reared in Scotland—were killed in Scotland, or are you agnostic about it?

Kate Rowell: No, Quality Meat Scotland's brands are Scotch beef, Scotch lamb and specially selected pork. The guidelines for those brands include that the animals have to be killed in Scotland. Therefore, we absolutely do not want people going down south with animals, although, obviously, if that is their business decision we cannot do anything about it.

It is important to have a strong abattoir sector in this country and not just the primary abattoirs doing the first part of the process, but secondary processors as well. I think that we have only one packing facility in Scotland. For a lot of the other processes, the animal is killed up here but is then sent down south to a bigger facility to be processed further: cut up, packed and things like that. As an economy, we lose a lot of the value of the produce by sending it down south. Obviously, those are commercial business decisions and the companies have consolidated things to make their businesses more efficient. However, that has contributed to how much of the added value has gone out of Scotland, so it is very worrying.

Joe Hind: Thinking system-wide, our processing facilities across Scotland are absolutely critical if we are talking about resilience. Resilience is not just, "Are you okay?" Resilience is not just about finances and who has the deepest pockets; it is about structure. It does not matter how much money you have if the labour is not there for you to recruit. Similarly, if processing infrastructure is not there, you have to spend more to process your goods and, as Kate Rowell rightly touched on, the value is lost. That includes processing across all sectors. The food processing, marketing and co-operation grant scheme is one tool that we have for that. We are conducting a review of the grant, which is great and will hopefully lead to more availability of funding in the right way to support the industry to grow responsibly through processing and production.

The Convener: How significant is the risk to the Scottish beef industry from the number of livestock moving south because of supply and demand issues south of the border? How significant is the risk to Scottish beef in Scotland in that critical mass being lost?

Kate Rowell: Obviously, we are not very happy about that, but it is the result of a huge range of factors, including the fact that English agricultural policy has gone down the route of removing direct payments. That means that a lot of the suckler producers down south have decided that it is not worth their while, so the finishers, who need to make sure that they have numbers, are coming up

to Scotland to buy store cattle to take down south to finish. In some ways that is a compliment—they are coming up because our cattle are so good—but the trouble is that that creates more demand around the ring. Although that demand has possibly helped to drive up the beef price a bit, the fact that they are then taking the cattle out of Scotland means that they are lost to our brands. We have put a lot of work into developing our Scottish brands and Scotch beef is so widely known in Scotland that it is important that we have enough cattle going into abattoirs in Scotland to keep up that critical mass.

Rachael Hamilton: If the direct payment were maintained in Scotland in the future, could there be, on the back of market demand, an increase in suckler herds here?

Kate Rowell: That is entirely possible if the suckler beef sector in Scotland is properly supported and investment is made in it. Think about how the climate is changing. Our climate is fantastic for growing grass, which is what we need. People are looking for grass-fed beef. We are in an ideal place and it is a huge opportunity for us in this country. We have the rain, the land, the grass and the skills in the farming community. We could grasp this, and I see it as a huge opportunity. However, we need support and not just financial support; we need regulatory support and everything to make that happen.

09:45

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Kate Rowell, I am interested in your comments about abattoirs and I want to pick up on what you said about mobile abattoirs, which interested me, as a Highlands and Islands MSP. You mentioned that the regulations are too difficult. Could you unpack that a little bit?

Kate Rowell: Abattoir regulations are incredibly stringent, for good reason; it is for food safety and nobody is arguing that we need to make it a free-for-all again. One of the biggest issues is how we get rid of waste from abattoirs. The mobile abattoir ideal is that a lorry would drive around each farm and kill the animals on the farm that they grew up on. That is fantastic from an animal welfare point of view. However, every single farm would then have to have the infrastructure in place to deal with that waste. They would need to have all the regulations in place.

As far as I know, only one abattoir has opened in Scotland since devolution, and that is down in the Borders. It is a very small micro abattoir. The owners gave me a tiny flavour of how difficult that had been. They said they were dealing with dozens of different public agencies. For example, on one part of the water system there had to be a

valve. Scottish Water said that it had to be a specific kind of valve or they would not sign it off. Environmental health said that it had to be a different specific valve or they would not sign it off. It took months to get that valve. Things like that make development difficult. With a mobile abattoir, you would need that compliance at every single place it went to. The lairage would have to be up to the specification that you would demand at a static abattoir. You would have to have vets there, which is another issue that we have not touched on. There is a lack of vets and there is difficulty in getting vets to be at the abattoir. Food Standards Scotland does a good job, but there is a lack of vets for abattoirs. There is a whole host of different things. It is not impossible, but it is very difficult.

Having spoken to a lot of people about small abattoirs, I would say that if we wanted to invest in them, we would do better to look at a model such as Shetland, where they have a static abattoir that I think is community owned. It can be operated by one person. It has an extra room after the abattoir that butchers can rent and that has all the equipment that that they need to make sausages and so on. A model like that, in my opinion, would probably work better. Even though you would still have to take the animals to it, I think it is probably more realistic than a mobile abattoir.

Ariane Burgess: Would we have a number of those around Scotland?

Kate Rowell: Yes, in the more remote areas. There are some. Mull abattoir does a fantastic job. I discovered recently that 70 per cent of what goes into Mull comes from the mainland; it is not just for Mull. It is being operated as a successful going concern, a good business. It is about making sure that we have facilities at the strategic points in the country where we need them.

Ariane Burgess: I am hearing from your example of Shetland something about getting the right scale.

Kate Rowell: Yes.

Ariane Burgess: I am aware that Orkney created an abattoir that was maybe too ambitious and there was a problem with it.

Kate Rowell: Going back to labour and skills, if you can have something that one or two people can operate, that is probably ideal. It can be seasonal or whatever and they can do other jobs, particularly in island communities. Mull was closed for a few months because they lost their slaughterman and it took them a while to get another one. That shows how key one person is in those smaller situations.

Ariane Burgess: Thank you. It is helpful to get that detail.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I will pick up a point about haulage capacity. Do any of you want to say anything about where things stand? Concerns have been expressed in recent years about the availability of lorry drivers from other European countries, the difficulties of port crossings into Europe and more generally a labour shortage in that sector. Could you say anything about how that impacts on agriculture or whether there are any other factors around haulage that are relevant?

Kate Rowell: Hauliers are critical. I read somewhere recently that, like farmers, their average age is not in the lower bracket, so there could be a loss of them quite soon. Livestock haulier, in particular, is a specific role. It is not something that anybody can do. Most of the livestock hauliers that I have come across are Scottish. I do not think the Europeans and others who have come and driven lorries for supermarkets and things have made it into the livestock haulage business, as far as I am aware. However, I suppose that the lack of lorry drivers in other sectors could be pulling people out. Someone might not want to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and load cattle on to a lorry in the pouring rain; they might prefer to go to a distribution centre. Lack of haulage capacity is a real risk. Again, there is regulation that is necessary, but hauliers definitely need support to help make sure that everybody is getting through it.

The real risk—I do not know whether this has gone away or not, because things have gone very quiet—is a consultation that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs put out about the transportation of animals. There has been talk of changing particularly the headroom that is required for animals and also temperature controls. I am not sure where they have got to, because it seems to have gone quiet, but, if those things were to be brought in and suddenly hauliers were being told, “You need to replace your £250,000 lorry with a brand new one that is five inches taller” because of the headroom, it would put a lot of people out of business. Things like that are done for good reason and people think that they are doing the right thing, but we need to be cognisant of the unintended consequences of that sort of change.

Paul Flanagan: I will talk a little bit about hauling milk. There are a number of factors here, which Kate Rowell talked about, such as the average age of lorry drivers. Going back a couple of years there was pressure because there was not a pipeline of haulier drivers coming through. To get around that, a number of milk processing companies trained their office staff and people who are field based to drive lorries. I do not think

that it has come to those people having to move jobs to do that.

I will go back to an earlier question from the deputy convener about the lack of processing facilities. From a milk perspective, a couple of creameries in the west coast have closed in the last 10 years and a milk-processing site in Aberdeen has closed in the last 10 years. Therefore, milk is being transported for longer distances, so more drivers are needed, and driving longer distances is an additional pressure on drivers. People are not screaming about that right now, but it is a risk for the industry.

The Convener: Can we open up the topic of labour more broadly? Can I have your views on the current labour issues that we face in agriculture and horticulture, focusing on what can be done through an agriculture bill to alleviate some of the issues?

Joe Hind: It is a known issue. We are launching a new national strategy for the food and drink industry in the summer. As part of that we have gone around the country to gather views from different people and businesses. One of the top priorities is labour shortages and labour skills. We know that some of those issues are being looked at by the Migration Advisory Committee, which is continuing its work on the shortage occupation list. There is movement there around who we can potentially bring in to Scotland to fill those labour gaps. There is also other work such as, for example, John Shropshire’s “Independent Review into Labour Shortages in the Food Supply Chain” for DEFRA. It focuses on England but will almost certainly have ramifications for Scotland. There are various pieces of work.

It is clear that there is an on-going issue with recruiting people, especially into rural areas. We have examples of members who are bussing workers from urban areas into rural areas to do a day’s work. Having to take such measures demonstrates the nature of the issue and the problem that we face. It is compounded, as I understand it, by a shortage of not just labour but accommodation, given things like Airbnb and how easy it is now to rent out accommodation that previously would not have been a viable economic input.

That presents the problems rather than the solutions, but work is under way to review the issue and see what can be done. Clearly, the bill provides opportunities to help businesses to fill those gaps and continue to produce. We know that, sometimes, businesses turn away orders because they do not have the labour. Automation also plays a part, but it requires investment. It is not feasible for an individual business to invest the amounts often needed to automate a particular production section.

The Convener: Paul Flanagan, in the dairy industry we have seen some managers changing the working week for dairymen. We know that milking cows is a hard task—I have been there and done that—but we are seeing different practices. From your perspective, how can labour shortages be addressed in the future?

Paul Flanagan: You are right—it is particularly challenging. A number of farmers are looking at different contracts to fit around the individuals they can bring in. We have challenges with farmers poaching people from the neighbouring farmer, which obviously causes some issues. A number of farms are almost solely relying on family labour. The challenge with that is that there is a knock-on effect on mental health.

Thinking about policy from a Scottish Government perspective, we want farmers to learn, and we know that farmers learn best from other farmers, so they need to get along to meetings with other farmers. If they are stuck on the farm and are not getting off it, then they are trying to learn about climate change mitigation or biodiversity online. Watching a webinar is fine, but the best way to learn is by seeing things in practice. That is causing a number of issues, and right now there is no solution.

Some farms go on social media a bit and do not have an issue with people coming through the door, but a number of other farms are finding that very difficult. With the average age of farmers increasing, it gets to the point at which people are wondering how long they can keep going on their own or with just family labour when they are having to milk two and sometimes three times a day. It becomes impossible.

Jim Fairlie: Convener, you asked the panel whether we could do anything with the bill. Given that Brexit is clearly the biggest cause of the lack of labour coming into the country compared to what we had previously, how could the bill alter that, given that immigration is reserved?

Paul Flanagan: I meant the indirect consequence. If we are talking about an agriculture policy for Scotland, and if, as part of that, you need farmers to understand what they can do from a climate mitigation perspective or for biodiversity, the best way for those farmers to learn that process would be to come to meetings. My specific point was that, if they are stuck on the farms because they do not have labour, they cannot attend the meetings and therefore their ability to pick up the intelligence and the learnings and implement them back on their own farm will be restricted.

Kate Rowell: From my point of view, it is two different things. There are the more intensive sectors, like dairy and soft fruit, where you need

seasonal workers to come in and that is the point—

10:00

Jim Fairlie: We also need capacity in processing and slaughtering. A lot of those lads came from eastern Europe, went home and have not come back. If we are talking about resilience and profitability, we need people in those jobs. However, the Scottish Government has no locus in any of the immigration policies, so how does the bill rectify that?

Kate Rowell: From my uninformed point of view, the bill cannot rectify that because immigration policy is reserved. However, apart from needing people to come in and help our processing and other intensive sectors, we need people in this country who want to go into food and farming. The bill could promote confidence in those sectors to encourage more people from this country to go into them.

It is not just those sectors that are struggling. I was up in Caithness in the summer, and farmers there were telling me that they were giving up and selling up their cattle. It was not all to do with financial issues. It was to do with the fact that they were getting older and there was nobody they could get locally to help them to do a tuberculosis test or a pregnancy diagnosis on their cattle or whatever they needed. It was about the skills that were not there on the ground. That is not about eastern Europeans or Filipinos coming in; it is about people in this country. We have to start from the bottom up. We have to work in schools to let kids know that farming is an option for them. We need to be as welcoming as possible to try to get people to come in from outwith the farming sector. We also need to make it as easy as possible for our own children in the farming sector to carry on and to make them want to carry on, so that we have people coming through.

We need to make sure that things like skills and education are designed around rural communities as well as being designed around going to university, so that, if you do not want to go off to university, there is an opportunity to go somewhere local and learn. That is about colleges like Scotland's Rural College and things like monitor farms, which is what Paul Flanagan was talking about and which QMS has. It is giving people opportunities with the Farm Advisory Service to get out there and learn in the community that they are in and not saying that they have to go off to university.

To me, they are two different sides. You are right—I do not know what the bill can do about the Brexit side, but we can certainly do something

about promoting confidence in the whole sector using the bill.

Joe Hind: The new food and drink industry strategy is looking for responsible growth. Responsible growth is about economic prosperity and having vibrant, viable communities across Scotland with food and drink at the heart—food and drink productivity, profitability and sustainability. If we achieve that, it should become more attractive as a sector for our domestic workforce. That does not solve everything, but the bill could support that.

Christine Grahame: I want to pick up on what Kate Rowell said about local employment. I think that it was NFU Scotland that ran an event at Border Union Showground last year. All the local schools came and they had big fancy tractors and sheep shearing. It was to get local children interested in the farming sector more broadly. Borders College also had a stall. Did you know about that? I do not know why you would not know. Would it be worth going back to the NFUS, which I think was promoting it, to ask what the outcome was, and also whether the college had any feedback from the event? It was a good day.

Kate Rowell: The Border Union Agricultural Society runs the day. It has been doing it for a while. Every primary 6 or primary 5 child in the Borders is invited to go to the countryside day. My daughter is now 24 and she went, so they have been doing it for a good long time. The Royal Highland Education Trust is also very involved. QMS and NFUS also go along. It happens in the Borders; I do not know whether it happens elsewhere, but it is a good introduction.

Christine Grahame: I am asking about the outcome. It is an interesting day, but do people take up careers in agriculture and horticulture as a result? I am interested in seeing what impact it has.

Kate Rowell: I do not know whether they have any information on that, but it would be interesting to follow that up. I suppose you are talking about 10-year-olds and then you need to speak to them again in probably 10 years' time to see whether that had any effect on them.

Christine Grahame: If it has been going all that time, we must have some uptake already. Your daughter is now 24.

Kate Rowell: There must be. We could certainly see whether there is any.

Christine Grahame: Convener, could we do a follow-up and see whether there is an audit of what happens at the end of the day, what follow-up there was from Borders Union and from Borders College, which also had a stall there? It seems to me that that is an interesting thing for

local employment. You employ people locally, they spend locally.

Joe Hind: The Developing the Young Workforce programmes across Scotland are seeking to hold those sorts of engagement events and have engaged with Scotland Food and Drink on how to get more people, processors and primary producers involved in those sorts of events. That is absolutely an opportunity for us to improve the level of awareness and understanding of the opportunities for careers in this sector.

Paul Flanagan: RHET, ourselves and QMS do a number of things, including speaking to teachers about the role of meat and dairy and talking about the careers in the industry. We also run a consumer campaign, we eat balanced, which talks about the role of meat and dairy and which is aimed at anybody who watches TV or looks at social media; it is also in retail environments. We raise awareness of careers in meat and dairy in a number of places. It will be interesting to see what the Border Union says, and particularly what RHET says, because it would be the leader in that work.

The Convener: Yes, the Royal Highland Education Trust does a huge amount of good work and I am pleased to say that it will be coming to the Parliament some time soon to educate MSPs. I will not suggest that they need to be educated, but it would open their eyes to some of the issues that we face in the rural agricultural sector.

Jim Fairlie: I want to talk about natural impacts such as weather, pests and things like that, from a livestock producer's point of view. A couple of years ago, the Galloway Cattle Society used a phrase, "The future is traditional", to promote native breeds and their ability to outwinter—there is resilience and profitability. I go back to the question that I asked you earlier, Kate, about whether we are judging on eating quality or shape—my question is focused on cattle and sheep again, I am afraid. What role do the traditional native breeds have in ensuring that we have long-term profitability?

Kate Rowell: Breeds are very much an individual decision for each farmer to make. However, in the national picture we are seeing the number of native breed sired calves increasing. The numbers of Aberdeen Angus, Shorthorns and Herefords are going up. If you go back in time, we sent those genetics around the world. All the cattle that you get from South America are from those genetics, so it is very important.

Quality Meat Scotland cannot tell people that they should have this or that breed, nor can the Government. We can show farmers the benefits of the characteristics that different breeds have and then they can make up their own minds depending

on the situation on their farm. I absolutely agree that native breeds are a great selling point. Aberdeen Angus, in particular, is recognised worldwide, and the number of Aberdeen Angus-sired calves is going up year on year.

Jim Fairlie: I am very disappointed that you do not mention Galloways. I do like my Galloway cow. I know that I was very specific in that. Is there anything else that others want to talk about on natural issues? I go back to traditional breeds wintering out better, rather than needing to be in sheds. Is there anything else that the rest of the panel wants to add to that?

Paul Flanagan: No, not at this point.

The Convener: We wanted to get your views on whether you can see anything in the future around natural impacts—the change in weather or increase in pests—that we need to be aware of and potentially consider as part of the bill.

Joe Hind: Risk management requires capacity to understand and measure and mitigate that risk. The bill could presumably provide some of that capacity systemwide, because the risks exist across all points of the supply chain for all produce, processes and so on. Climate change will probably drive different weather patterns and we will have to respond to that. There are also geopolitical and environmental risks. All those risks have to be monitored, managed and addressed. The capacity for that is probably one of the key elements of resilience.

The Convener: That takes us nicely on to geopolitical and environmental risks.

Ariane Burgess: I want to look at geopolitical and environmental risks in the future. Joe Hind, given the risks of trade deals like those with Australia and New Zealand undermining food production to the higher environmental standards that we have been discussing—those in place in Scotland—is there a need for something like a carbon border adjustment mechanism, which the EU is bringing in, to increase the price of imported goods from countries where carbon taxes are not in place? Do we need a similar mechanism to increase the price of meat and other food products imported from countries with lower environmental and animal welfare standards?

Joe Hind: It is difficult to talk about specific mechanisms. I do not fully know all the consequences of each one, but it is true to say that, if you produce a premium product and the price of that product is undercut by imports due to trade agreements, you threaten the viability of the domestic production. Some form of protection would be needed. What form that took could differ depending on what decisions were made.

The trade agreements that are being made are of concern, in terms of understanding them. They are complicated. We do not yet fully understand the opportunities that they might present or the threats that they might present. We are engaging with the Scottish Government on that specifically, because there are a lot of them happening and a lot are in discussion. When we were a member of the European Union, we had a very effective trade agreement. That has obviously been dismantled and unpicked, and there are complications and challenges around supplying our nearest neighbour—that is a critical factor that we need to monitor; it presents a threat. Diversifying markets is one of the potential solutions, in that that ensures that we have a diverse range of people and places that buy Scottish produce.

Ariane Burgess: Thanks very much for that response. Kate Rowell or Paul Flanagan, do you have any thoughts, not necessarily specifically on carbon border adjustments but on trade agreements or anything that you think we need to be aware of that could be coming our way?

Kate Rowell: It is important that carbon mechanisms are on a level playing field. It would be absolutely wrong of us to cut down domestic production and bring in food from somewhere else and pretend that it did not matter because it was somebody else who was producing it. That is very important. It is also very important that we have mechanisms in place to make sure that disease is not brought into this country. There needs to be a huge investment in that. That is not necessarily this Parliament's issue, it is maybe for the UK. It is all very well to say that we have checks in place, but they need to be done for them to matter. There was a recent case of lorries coming in and only one out of 22 being even looked at. The big current issue is African swine fever. If it came into this country, it would be absolutely devastating for our pig industry. However, as the climate changes, there could be any number of different diseases. We need to make sure from a biosecurity point of view that checks are made.

On an export level, there are huge opportunities out there in the world for our producers. I echo what the other two witnesses have said about how that can help our domestic market and the primary producer. We do international trade shows, and it helps international export trade to balance carcasses with red meat. There are a lot of things in an animal that we, in this country, do not want to eat. I have seen some things that they like to eat in places like China and Indonesia that we would not touch with a bargepole, so it is very important that we have that carcass balance. We can sell the things that other people want and we can bring in anything that we need extra that we do not have the capacity to produce. Lambs have only two back legs and you have to make sure that the

balance works. Exports are important, but they have to be done on a level playing field.

10:15

Paul Flanagan: My organisation is a non-departmental public body, so I would be skating on thin ice if I talked about policy. However, from an evidence perspective, the question about carbon border adjustments and the policies of different organisations is interesting. I could commit to doing some analysis on that and sharing it with the committee.

Alasdair Allan: In talking about future geopolitical risks that we face, everybody quite rightly points to the shock to the agricultural economy worldwide that the illegal invasion of Ukraine has represented, but we have to be prepared for other potential shocks in the future. Despite the fact that, regrettably, this Parliament cannot legislate on some of the problems that we have been talking about, can you say a bit more about how resilient Scotland is to future shocks, what those shocks might look like and where the role of the labour shortage is in being resilient to future shocks?

Joe Hind: The risks and resilience issue is complicated. Risks exist almost everywhere across the supply chain. We are talking about a natural product and variants in weather being hugely critical to that, and we have to provide protection for our primary producers and for the rest of the supply chain. As an island nation, we also have to recognise that industrial unrest will sometimes cause blockages at ports. For perishable goods, that is a short-term acute situation that we have to have some form of mitigation against.

I echo what I said previously, which is that you need a risk capacity within the country to understand what is happening—we are part of a task force that has been set up to look at things such as food security. Such mechanisms are important in ensuring that there are eyeballs on the situation and something there to call upon for support to overcome any headwind. We have had major headwinds for some time and they continue. We need to build resilience in the short term across the industry, and then we can look forward to a future that is bright.

The Convener: Should Government underwrite the production of certain crops? Some crops are more risky to grow but should form part of our future food supply. Should Government underwrite those like an insurance policy against the more frequent natural weather patterns that make growing some cereals more difficult? Is that something that the policies should consider?

Joe Hind: Policy probably has to consider all forms of investment from the public fund into agriculture and where that lies. There is not a limitless pot and difficult decisions have to be made around what support we provide. We support what the NFUS has been quite clear about—the cabinet secretary has also said this—which is that we can all get behind and be proud of active and productive farming in line with our environmental constraints and our social aims and ambitions for vibrant communities. All those things are possible, but there is a difficult balance in deciding what we use the public funding that we put into that to achieve. That partly comes down to decisions made at United Kingdom Government level as well. Unfortunately, we have to live with uncertainty.

Alasdair Allan: You mentioned uncertainty and the UK Government; they are often mentioned in the same sentence. As organisations, are you making representations to the UK Government about preparing for geopolitical shocks in the future? Would it be useful if some of the relevant powers were exercised here? That is a hopeful last question, but I will put it anyway.

Kate Rowell: As an NDPB also, we are not a lobby organisation but we absolutely are speaking to people at both levels of Government to provide information and make sure that they know the facts about red meat production in Scotland. That is all that I can say.

Joe Hind: Likewise, we have conversations with a wide range of stakeholders. We have a membership group. We are also a leadership body. We co-ordinate the Scotland Food and Drink Partnership and are responsible in part for driving forward the new industry strategy. For some of that strategy to be successful requires decisions to be made at UK Government level. We will engage around that to try to ensure that the sector and the industry as a whole can grow responsibly. Both parts of that—growth and responsibility—are important.

Paul Flanagan: It is the same for us. We provide evidence to the Government, rather than lobbying.

Beatrice Wishart: My question follows on from what has just been discussed. What should the priorities be for agriculture and food policy in order to mitigate some of the risks and to ensure long-term resilience?

Kate Rowell: We have three priorities, which I have already gone through. We would want local and public procurement—those are two different things, I suppose. There are various things that could be done in relation to public procurement. It would be really useful to have a streamlined process and a framework that everybody works to.

The infrastructure that you need for local procurement is an important aspect. Labour and skills are hugely influential in how we go forward. We also need help with international exports. Those are what we see as the priorities.

Joe Hind: We want to ensure that Scotland maintains its international reputation as a producer of world-class food and drink. We need to work together, collaborate and continue the dialogue if we are to achieve that and help to protect that position.

Sometimes, difficult decisions will need to be made, and we, across industry, recognise the need to act swiftly to address the climate challenge and nature crisis. However, one thing that is absolutely clear to us is that food production must be at the heart of the industry and at the heart of agriculture. That is how we can protect the jobs, the communities and the ecosystem that support, and that is supported by, the food and drink industry.

Paul Flanagan: The only thing that I will add, which may be related, is how policy lands with farmers and how engagement with them, particularly on this issue, is done. We did some analysis on sustainable farming incentives. I appreciate that that related to DEFRA. The key message was that higher payment rates were needed to incentivise farmers to take part in some schemes.

When considering new policy development, the key things for us would be the ease of application for farmers; the ease of operation of the scheme; the attractiveness of the payment rates; the confidence of the participants in the audits and expressions; and any additionality gained from participation.

In the same way as QMS has, we have expertise in engaging farmers. That is primarily around farmer-to-farmer learning through the groups that we have done. It is about using that expertise and industry so that we can come together with one voice. From a dairy industry perspective—the sector is probably further ahead than other sectors—there is a lot of learning to be had from the environmental road map that has been in place in terms of getting farmers to move along certain lines.

Ariane Burgess: I will direct my question to Kate Rowell. What are the risks to meat production—we have talked about the processing issues—specifically from climate change?

Kate Rowell: At the moment, the biggest risk is that we go down the wrong route in our efforts to tackle it. As we said right at the beginning, nobody is arguing that we do not need to do something. However, we need to ensure that we go down the right routes and that—I have said this several

times—we do not end up with unintended consequences.

It is important that we keep people in rural areas, not only from an economic and a societal point of view but from an environmental point of view, because without people in those areas, there will be no one to take the actions that we need to be taken.

I know that you have spoken to Martin Kennedy from the NFUS. He has started talking about funding as investment; he is no longer calling it subsidy or support. That is absolutely what it is—any public money that is going into agriculture is an investment. It is an investment in society, in rural economies, in our future health and in our food security. It is so important that we keep that investment going to ensure that the sector has the confidence to continue.

Confidence is another big risk. As I said a few weeks ago when I was here, farmers feel absolutely browbeaten. That lack of confidence is a huge risk to the sector.

Ariane Burgess: Last week, we had Ian Boyd-Livingston on our panel. He talked about the need for investment—I will start using that word—for livestock farmers who want to diversify their income streams or transition to low-stock or no-stock farming. What investment is needed to enable those farmers who want to transition to low-stock farming or to move to different forms of environmental land management?

Kate Rowell: Not many farmers I know want to leave livestock production. They want to continue with it, they want to be able to do it profitably and they want it to work not only for their business but for their farms.

Lots of farmers are diversifying. That is a newish word, but it is not a new concept. Farmers have always done everything it takes to be able to make a living and to stay on their farm. Fifty years ago, my dad had a trout farm on our farm, which gave us a little bit of extra pocket money. It is long gone now, because of regulation. We need to help farmers if they want to diversify into agritourism for example. All those things should be supported.

However, at the bedrock of it all is the farming life and the business that they have. It is a very emotional subject because, as I said before, farmers love their farms and they love farming. We are there because we love it. We love producing food for people, we love being in the countryside and we love looking after nature. We just need to make sure, policy wise, that people are enabled to do that. Farmers have always adapted and they have always done extra things. They will do that if they are given that help. It is about education, support, investment and the policy direction to

show that they are valued and are important for the rural economy.

Ariane Burgess: I am picking up from that passionate response your love for the work that you do—I certainly meet farmers who also express that love. I also note your earlier comments about peer-to-peer learning, the monitor farms and those things where people can get out and learn from each other about new practices or different ways of doing things.

Kate Rowell: Yes. That is so important, because it is an isolating industry. I have just gone through four weeks when I have not left the farm at all. You do not see people. There are lots of farms out there where that happens most of the year, not just at this time of year. It is very important to share skills and education. Peer to peer is the best way to do it; that has been proven. We work very closely with the AHDB to run the monitor farms and to make sure that we facilitate that wherever possible.

10:30

The Convener: Unfortunately, we are running out of time—we have only five or 10 minutes left. I ask that we try to keep the questions and the responses as succinct as possible.

Rachael Hamilton: I will continue with the topic of mitigating risk and promoting food resilience. How is your organisation modelling for the future? It is expected that the use of new technologies and innovation in agriculture will increase gross domestic product and reduce emissions. The Scottish Government is seeking to reduce emissions in agriculture by 31 per cent by 2032. So far, not much progress has been made towards meeting that target.

Paul Flanagan: The best route to do that is through the road maps. As I indicated earlier, the dairy road map is probably the most established—it has been around since 2008. Our organisation, the processor organisation Dairy UK and the farming unions are working together on that. Underneath that is a whole range of stakeholders working with one aim.

I acknowledge that it is easier in the dairy industry because it is more consolidated. You can work with a smaller number of processors—the two largest processors probably handle more than 50 per cent of the milk in Great Britain—so getting farmers and our organisations to work through the processes together is easier. That will be the main route through which we will achieve progress so that everybody is behind one plan and understands what we are doing from a climate perspective and from a biodiversity point of view. However, at its base has to be the economics. If that does not work for farmers to produce milk, we

will not have milk and we will have to import it. There is also Kate Rowell's point about society to consider.

I know that that is happening in the beef and sheep sector as well—there are road maps and various working groups are coming together. That is the way that we will create progress. Of course, Government has a role in that, but industry needs to lead on the road maps and on driving that forward. That will give us the confidence in having and delivering on the risk maps and the mitigation techniques in the road maps, as well as having efficient road maps and allocating the required level of resources behind them.

Rachael Hamilton: Do you realise that you looked as though you were milking some cows just then? [*Laughter.*] I ask Kate Rowell to respond.

Kate Rowell: Much like AHDB has for dairy, we have a red meat net zero road map in production. That covers everything from primary production through to processors, and there is life-cycle analysis to see where the gaps are in what we know and what we need to know.

The other part of what QMS does is help to share science and research. We do not do that—the SRUC is among many organisations that does that. We try to share new practices—some would say that they are old practices coming back into use again—get them more widely understood and ensure that farmers know exactly what they are doing as well as what they are being asked to do and how they do that.

That is part of our work, and the monitor farms are a big part of that sharing of information.

Joe Hind: I do not know whether I mentioned that we have a new industry strategy that is being launched in the summer. There are key pillars of work in that, one of which is net zero and sustainability. All elements of the industry, including agriculture, have signed up to and are supporting the industry strategy. A delivery plan—a pathway—will follow that will allow us to reduce emissions.

On emissions as a whole for Scotland, renewable energy is a massive issue for the industry. We are energy intensive as a necessity. If we can reduce the carbon footprint of our grid energy, we will massively move towards net zero. It is very complicated with meat, but if we displace those emissions to other countries' production, we will shoot ourselves in the foot.

Rachael Hamilton: None of you has answered the question specifically about what organisations are doing to support farmers to work out how we reach that point. So far, we have anecdotal information about route maps and a strategic review. Unfortunately, farmers are being asked to

put all the eggs in one basket and we are scrutinising that. Farmers are feeling under pressure from the expectation that they are to be part of meeting net zero by 2045.

As far as I can see from the pre-legislative scrutiny so far, we have not reached the stage at which there is a clear indication of what farmers can practically do, with support from organisations and the Government, to get to that point. It seems as though, as I say, they are under pressure and that everyone expects a lot of them to get to that point. Do you understand where I am coming from, Kate Rowell?

Kate Rowell: Yes, I do. The farmer-led groups have, in particular, put together a lot of measures. However, no one has said, “If you add A, B, C, D and E together, you will get to F.” That is the problem.

Is the point that you are trying to articulate that we do not know what the position will be if we do all those things?

Rachael Hamilton: Yes.

Kate Rowell: A big part of it is how things are accounted for. Sequestration has already been mentioned. It is not necessarily all being counted. If it is being counted, it is in different parts of the inventory. Government can bring all that together at an individual farm level and set out what good, positive things the farm is doing. It can also set out what things can be done better and highlight the different savings that that would make. Furthermore, it can set out not only where targets are being hit or going beyond what is required, but where the action is not quite there yet and offer some other options for the farm. Is that what you mean?

For me, that needs to be at a farm level. We need people who know what they are talking about to help farmers with that. There have been a lot of accusations about consultants’ charters. We definitely do not want that. On the other hand, we need the expertise to help farmers. We would have to get that balance right somehow.

Paul Flanagan: I will come in briefly on that. I agree with Kate Rowell. The baseline needs to be at the farm level.

We have done that on a number of our farms. We have strategic dairy farms. We use Agrecalc—that is an SRUC tool. We get somebody in to do that, and then we look at the mitigation measures underneath that.

I can send a whole heap of information—I am trying to be succinct—on what we, as AHDB, are doing and what we are doing at individual farm levels on that. It really must be at individual farm level rather than at national level or international level. That is the way that we will make progress.

A number of years later, we then go back and test, to see what progress we have made.

The Convener: That information would be helpful. We are running out of time. It would be hugely useful if you could, in writing, provide real-life examples of what farmers are doing on the ground right now.

Christine Grahame: It has been a very interesting session. As the witnesses know, collectively, we have faced a perfect storm with Brexit, Covid, the Ukraine war, climate change and food inflation at about 18 per cent. However, I am going to cheer you up. Out of adversity comes opportunity, and there is a big opportunity across the sector to drive consumers towards more seasonal local produce. I heard what was said about the supermarkets—I understand why you might be cagey about them—but supermarkets are key. Consumers can have an influence, but supermarkets are very clever at influencing consumers. What should we ask the supermarkets to do? Are you going to be frank about it?

The Convener: I think that that question is for Joe Hind.

Joe Hind: Thank you. [*Laughter.*] It is very difficult to tell a major retailer what to do, is it not?

Christine Grahame: No, it is not. Please do it. I am a consumer and I want this to happen. Normally, I can afford to pay inflation prices but, when I look at the prices on the shelves at the moment, even I say that I am not paying £1.50 for a cauliflower.

Joe Hind: Our members include retailers, too. We work across the whole food and drink sector, and we run programmes in which we meet buyers and suppliers, bring them together and encourage them to form a relationship. That helps to ensure that we have local products on local shelves. Retailers will always be mindful of the end price, as will consumers, so the work relating to the cost of living and the availability, accessibility and affordability of food among our communities is paramount in resolving the situation. We have touched on the issue of resolving symptoms rather than resolving root problems. One of the root problems that we have to resolve in this country is inequality and the lack of resources among communities to afford the things that we would like them to afford.

Christine Grahame: Yes, but I want to get back to the point about seasonal produce. There is no point in buying tomatoes that are rock hard, which they are, or plums that are rock hard. If we go back to promoting Scottish or UK seasonal foods, we will educate the palate of the consumer once again. You should not be eating strawberries in January—there are the food miles, and they also taste crap. What discussions are you having with

supermarkets that BOGOF on non-seasonal products, whereas Scottish mince, cauliflowers and other things that are grown here are quite dear? I do not mean to have a go at them, but—

Joe Hind: It is a collaborative effort. Our food and drink system is what it is. We are starting from this point, but we hope to move towards more resilient supply chains. We need a strong domestic market, a UK market and international markets. We need to diversify and produce these things. If we need to look at the balance of what we produce to ensure that we can supply those markets seasonally with the volumes that we need and at the right price, we all have to play a part in that. It comes down to the funding that we put in place, the structures and regulations that we have in place and the decisions that consumers make about what they eat and drink. We believe that, if we get that right, we have the opportunity to be genuinely proud of the food that we produce and consume.

Public procurement, which Kate Rowell touched on, is a huge part of that. We have been trying to crack that issue through Food for Life Scotland, but local authorities have public procurement systems that are still weighted towards cost. If we chase the lowest cost, we are unlikely to drive up the supply of Scottish produce. How do we fix that? In the public sector, we probably can fix it. In the private sector and the commercial world of supermarkets, it is more challenging, but we absolutely want to champion Scottish produce.

Christine Grahame: I am a member of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, and we push for local produce to be served in what I call the canteen, as well as in the dining room.

Supermarkets do not push local produce. It is available, but it is not pushed in the same way as other items are. How can we get supermarkets to appreciate that the price of cauliflower—which, I think, is in season just now—is so dear? Why is that the case? How do we get them to say to people that it is better to eat local produce than it is to spend their money on imported stuff that is out of season?

Joe Hind: That is probably the million dollar question. You are talking about food culture and the decisions that people and private businesses make. We hope that the new industry strategy will drive a conversation so that we can improve the situation. We want to improve the situation, but I am not going to hammer supermarkets in this forum to drive them to change how they operate. Those discussions will need to continue, and we will, of course, continue to support local domestic supply for retailers. At the moment, retailers are critical to providing food and drink to our people and communities.

The Convener: We will probably get a chance to look at that issue again when we consider the good food nation.

Last but not least, I will bring in Karen Adam.

10:45

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): A lot of my questions have been answered during the session, so I might throw in a wild-card question—it is not too wild, convener.

Having heard all the evidence thus far, I want to touch on what Kate Rowell said about France spending a bit more on food. That got me thinking that energy costs and commuting costs in France might not be as high as they are in our everyday lives. A report might need to be commissioned to find out why more is spent on food there and why we often cannot pay more.

The constant dichotomy between profitability and affordability keeps coming up all the time. We might want to focus more on a health and wellbeing economy in which low-carbon foods are encouraged, perhaps with a levy on produce with a high-carbon footprint. That would mean that imported produce that would generally be cheaper might cost more because of its higher carbon footprint, whereas local produce would have a lower carbon footprint. Perhaps some Government support could be provided for low-carbon produce. We could flip the position around and focus on a health and wellbeing economy in which we consider the environment, good mental health and local food production with great employee benefits.

Fishing and ports were also mentioned. There are quite high costs for people landing their fish in the north-east—

The Convener: Can you focus on agriculture, please?

Karen Adam: I am sorry—I am trying to wrap things up. If we focused on a health and wellbeing economy rather than just profits, would that make a big difference to the industry and to what we do?

Paul Flanagan: I see where you are coming from, but we would have to think about how we modelled that. My concern relates to what percentage of the population would be able to pay for that when we are going through a cost of living crisis. When we sell stuff, it would be nice if we got twice the money for doing certain things, but we need to be able to serve the needs of consumers. It is worth thinking about what you have said, but we would have to do some modelling on how we would segment the population to pay for that.

Joe Hind: We focus on responsible growth, both parts of which are important. Responsibility

encompasses sustainability. With meat and dairy, it is a contentious topic, with very intelligent people arguing, from different perspectives, for different solutions. There are sustainable food systems and models that use ruminants as part of the system, and we advocate for farming to support productive agriculture. If we get those decisions right, that will affect how we use our land and how we farm and produce, but it will also touch on how we sell and trade internationally and what we eat as a country. The demand for different foods from different consumers at the retail level is an important part of that mix.

Putting a carbon price on something would involve viewing the issue through a single lens. There are other factors. We touched briefly on the fact that, in Scotland, meat and dairy agriculture takes place on land that is unsuitable for many other forms of agriculture. That is part of the mix. We should consider that and the fact that, if we took away fossil fuel use, which is obviously driving climate change, that would involve our energy and transport sectors—we probably would not look at agriculture at all in relation to its climate change impact, because it is part of a methane cycle and, by and large, does not use fossil fuels.

A lot of factors are at play, and we need to consider them. However, if we get it right, we can all be rightly proud of the food that we produce and eat in Scotland.

Kate Rowell: Karen Adam is right in saying that we, as a society, need to focus on health and wellbeing, which are core, but the health and wellbeing of farmers is largely dependent on being profitable. The two things are completely entwined. Farmers do not just need their farms to be financially profitable; they need to ensure that the environment and society are in the profitable category, too.

I want to end by talking about the French example. At an NFU conference a few years ago, a French lady from the ministry of agriculture spoke about all the things that are done in France in relation to food. One farmer put up his hand and asked, “How can we get our society to value food, particularly local food, in the same way as you do in France?” She did not understand the question because, to her, it was not something that you got people to do. It was just how you were—it was part of you, so that is what you did. That is how you do it. She did not understand the question, not because of the language barrier but because that is part of French society and their psyche. That is where we need to get to, and it all starts with children’s education and moving slowly in the direction of a health and wellbeing economy.

The Convener: I thank the witnesses for joining us this morning and for their extended but hugely valuable contributions. It has been a fascinating

discussion, which will certainly help us in our deliberations when the bill is before us.

I suspend the meeting until 11 am.

10:50

Meeting suspended.

11:00

On resuming—

Petition

Greyhound Racing (PE1758)

The Convener: Welcome back, everybody. Our next item of business this morning is consideration of PE1758, which is on ending greyhound racing in Scotland. I welcome to the meeting Paul Brignal, who is the owner and director of Thornton Greyhounds; and Mark Bird, who is the chief executive officer, and Professor Madeleine Campbell, who is an independent director, of the Greyhound Board of Great Britain.

We have about 75 minutes for questions and discussion. I invite all our witnesses to give a short opening statement. I will ask Paul Brignal to start.

Paul Brignal (Thornton Greyhounds): Good morning.

At the moment, Thornton greyhound track is the only one operating in Scotland. We race at approximately 40 meetings per year, when, on average, 30 greyhounds will race in five or six races. The greyhounds race against each other for their enjoyment and ours. It is safer for a greyhound to run around our safely prepared sand track than it is for it to run around a field, where uneven ground and rabbit holes can be far more dangerous.

I question whether any of the concerns that have been raised by the petitioners in their previous statements to the committee have any bearing on greyhound racing in Scotland. We have provided video evidence to show the committee and the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission that there are very few injuries at our track. The SAWC has attended the track and has seen that all the greyhounds were in excellent condition and there were no animal welfare issues.

The SAWC has submitted a report to the committee that contains very little relevance to greyhound racing in Scotland but makes a case for phasing it out based on greyhound racing in other countries. It has recommended that a vet be present at all race meetings. Although every animal-based sport would love to have a trained vet in attendance, the cost for an amateur sport is far too high. All Greyhound Board of Great Britain tracks have a vet in attendance, but they are paid for by bookmakers and funded by the multimillion-pound betting industry. How do you propose that amateur greyhound racing and, for that matter, all other hobby sports involving animals competing, would fund a vet?

In the rare event of a serious injury, there are several vet surgeries in the close vicinity of the

track, so an injured greyhound will receive treatment faster than any person would be treated at an accident and emergency department. Even if there were a vet at the track, the injured greyhound would still have to go to a surgery, because there would need to be X-ray and operating facilities in order to treat it.

The SAWC should give independent advice to ministers. However, its previous correspondence, report and subsequent presentation show an unacceptable level of anti-greyhound-racing sentiment.

The call for views has given animal activists in Scotland yet another platform from which to attack greyhound racing. Although the committee maybe felt that it would get the views of the general public, that was never going to be the case, because the passionate animal rights activist has far more motivation to take part in the call for views than any other person does. That can be seen clearly in the report of what has happened. The call for views is no basis on which to decide the future of greyhound racing in Scotland.

The Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 protects all animals in Scotland, and there is no reason why a greyhound in Scotland should be treated any differently from any other animal that competes for fun and competition and recreation. Thank you very much.

Mark Bird (Greyhound Board of Great Britain): You will be glad to know that I am not going to use the three minutes that you have offered, but thank you for allowing us to come along this morning.

I have a question. To go back to Paul Brignal's comments about the SAWC report, I note that Madeleine Campbell and I gave evidence to an SAWC committee. We were pretty dismayed by what we read when it was published. We have submitted a response to that in which we outline over 35 inaccuracies that we want to air today at this committee meeting. Can you confirm that you have that report and that the members of the committee have seen it?

The Convener: Yes.

Mark Bird: Thank you. That is as much time as I need.

The Convener: We will kick off with questions. Thank you for those opening remarks.

I want to explore how GBGB and Thornton protect the welfare of greyhounds through your role as a director and the board's role as a nationwide organisation. What evidence do you have that the approach secures the highest level of animal welfare? In your responses, could you set out your role and how you monitor the tracks for GBGB, how data on monitoring is made

available and how you engage with the public and external organisations in order to incorporate expert advice? I ask Mark Bird, from the GBGB, to start, and then Paul Brignal to outline how you address potential animal welfare issues.

Mark Bird: The GBGB came about as a result of the Donoghue report that was done by the Westminster Government, which looked at greyhound welfare. Subsequent to that, legislation was passed in 2010 on the welfare of racing greyhounds.

All of that came into being and GBGB became the self-appointed regulator of the sport in the UK. We are not a big organisation and we are certainly not for profit. There are 32 members of the board of the GBGB. We are required to certificate and license all the tracks, of which there are 20, and all trainers and residential kennels. That has been the case since the Donoghue report was given life, and the situation has evolved over the nearly 22 years since.

We have a small office in London, but most of what we do is about feet on the ground and going to the tracks and doing inspections, mostly at random, although tracks are recertificated every year. That is the case with the trainers, as well. We have 504 licensed board trainers, and their kennels are checked twice every year, as a minimum, as part of what we are doing to try to safeguard the welfare of greyhounds.

You asked also what we do in relation to the public and other stakeholders. As well as having a stakeholder board, we report back through the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. We meet other animal welfare charities that sit on the greyhound forum—that meeting still takes place. Even though, as you are probably aware, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Dogs Trust and Blue Cross have called for a ban on greyhound racing more widely, they are still members of the greyhound forum and we continue to exist alongside them, speak with them and work with them on taking greyhound welfare forward.

Professor Madeleine Campbell (Greyhound Board of Great Britain): Can I add a couple of brief comments to that? You asked about the scope of the protection that we provide for animal welfare. As you know, we are required to take responsibility for animal welfare only within the racing period of a greyhound's life. However, as you will have seen from the strategy that we published almost a year ago, the GBGB has made the decision that we will take responsibility across the entire life of a greyhound that is bred for racing and that we expect all stakeholders to join us in adopting that responsibility.

On engagement, there is everything that Mark Bird described, on top of which we are working with the charities within the greyhound forum to develop roadshow-type events whereby, alongside them, we can go out and engage with the public—for example, at county shows and things like that—to talk about welfare, particularly of retired greyhounds.

The Convener: Thank you.

Paul Brignal, it appears that the GBGB is almost the professional arm of greyhound racing, and, from what you said in your opening statement, it seems that you are very much the amateur side. Week to week, how do you review animal welfare concerns as part of an amateur sport?

Paul Brignal: Fundamentally, because we are an amateur sport, the welfare of the greyhound, day to day, is the responsibility of the owner of the greyhound. As a track, which is a hobby track, our only real responsibility is to ensure that the track is as safe as possible and that the environment that the greyhounds are in is as safe as possible when they come to the track. We do that to the best of our ability.

We can always improve things, but, at the end of the day, if a dog that was not in a good condition was coming to the track, we would address that. We would approach the owner and say that they were not looking after the dog properly. That is the scope of what the track will do for the greyhound's welfare. Fundamentally, it is the responsibility of the owner, as it is with a whippet or an agility competition dog. The owners turn up at events and it is their responsibility to look after the dogs. Fundamentally, our responsibility ends at the safety of the dog on the track.

The Convener: As the director and the owner of the track, do you go through a procedure? Do you have a board of directors that meets regularly and decides that an owner has presented a dog regularly that has not been, in your view—

Paul Brignal: That has never happened, to be honest. All the people who look after the dogs at our track look after them exceedingly well. The SAWC will confirm that. Contrary to what the SAWC thinks, we did not tell anybody at the track that it was coming. It turned up and the first that people knew of it was when I announced over the tannoy that the SAWC was there and we asked people to co-operate with it. That was the first that they knew, so what the SAWC saw was what happens regularly at our track.

Ariane Burgess: The Scottish Animal Welfare Commission noted that

“Racing greyhounds suffer specific injuries, particularly around the foreleg, that we do not see in other dogs—companion dogs or dogs that run but not in races.”

Can you give some more information about the types of injuries that racing greyhounds endure compared with those of other dogs, and can you outline the role and importance of having vets present on the site?

Professor Campbell: It is not surprising, perhaps, that canine athletes, like human athletes, incur different injuries to non-athletes. One of the things that the board was already doing, which we have continued to develop within the current welfare strategy, was drilling down into the evidence base. We are working, and have already worked, to improve the granularity of the evidence and data that we collect. That is sometimes difficult because the numbers are quite small and we need to be careful that we interpret them carefully. With exactly that in mind, we are also in the process of recruiting a data analyst specifically to help us to do that.

We are trying to understand what type of injuries occur and what the predisposing factors are that might result in those injuries. That goes across the board. It covers everything from track design—there are parts about that in the strategy—to the way that dogs are prepared for races, to detection, to the way that people are trained to detect injuries very early so that the dogs can be rested and treated appropriately and not raced. They are subclinical injuries that we are talking about.

All that is written into the strategy, as is use of new technologies. We have in place research on that that will help us to make use of all of the techniques that nowadays are used for human athletes, so that we can try to adopt some of them and apply them to canine athletes, as well.

Ariane Burgess: What about the role and importance of the vet?

Professor Campbell: As you know, there is always a vet on site at any GBGB-regulated track, whether the dogs are trialling or racing. The vet checks the dogs when they first arrive, before they go to race and when they come back from the race. Any concerns that the vet has can be dealt with at those points.

We also have a system in place for following through. If a dog has incurred any injury at all, the vet will treat it at the track. Immediate first aid is always provided. If the dog needs to be referred on, specific instructions are given and the GBGB follows up on whether those have been taken care of thereafter.

Ariane Burgess: Thanks very much. Paul Brignal, why is it seen as less important, as I understand it, to have a vet present than it is to have a bookmaker at your track?

Paul Brignal: The bookmaker is basically fundamental to improving the experience of the

people who are racing their dogs. If they want to make a small bet—it would be a small bet; we are not talking about large bets—the one bookmaker that we have at the track is there to provide that service to the people. If they have a £50 bet on their dog, that makes it a little bit more exciting for them than running just for a rosette. Some of the people who run dogs at our track also have whippets, which they race for rosettes. Many people at the track run their dogs but do not bet and instead race the dogs for nothing more than the privilege of seeing their dog win.

11:15

Ariane Burgess: We have just heard from GBGB about the importance of a vet being present at a regulated track.

Paul Brignal: The GBGB has a different policy on vets. It is a huge organisation with a multimillion-pound turnover. If we were to employ a vet to stand at our track, he would probably charge £400. Where is that £400 going to come from? We are just a small club and we do not have the capacity to pay that. You do not insist on having a vet at a whippet race meeting or at some other amateur sports racing, so why would an amateur sport such as a greyhound track have to have a vet?

Ariane Burgess: Well, clearly, it is an important—

Paul Brignal: If a dog hurts itself, it will get treated extremely quickly. If a person hurts themselves, a doctor does not jump out of the bushes and come to treat them. I find it hard to understand why we think that a dog should have better treatment than human beings—that is a bit weird. I appreciate that the dog may suffer for 10 to 15 minutes during the journey to the vet, but a small child who has broken his leg playing football will have to sit in a car to go to accident and emergency. Why do you think that it is so important? I do not understand.

Ariane Burgess: We are just—

Paul Brignal: The GBGB has a vet at the track for several reasons, but one of the reasons is that, when a trainer turns up at a GBGB track, he will have 10 or maybe 13 dogs on the card. If one of his dogs were to break a leg, he could not drop everything, take his 13 dogs and zip down to the vet. He has to have a vet at that track to treat that dog, otherwise it would be total chaos. They would have hardly any dogs running. The GBGB has a vet on the track for totally different reasons, and those reasons do not apply to us.

Ariane Burgess: Okay. Thanks for that detail.

Professor Campbell: One small point that I forgot to mention is that, on GBGB tracks, under

the new welfare strategy, in addition to what we might call the treatment vets, which we have just been talking about, we now have a team of regional regulatory vets. They are there to deal with the whole regulatory side of it. Veterinary surgeons are also there.

The Convener: My understanding from what has been said is that GBGB is about providing greyhounds for betting—for the gambling industry—whereas Thornton is very much about providing a facility for amateur greyhound owners to race their dogs, and the bookmaker is secondary to that desire.

Paul Brignal: It is secondary but, to be honest, most of the people would like the bookmaker to be there so that they can put £20 on their dog if they want to do that. We have come to the conclusion that if a bookmaker is not available, we might just as well cancel the meeting. In the past, by the way, we have run without a bookmaker and people have run their dogs without the bookmaker. However, bear in mind that we do not make any money out of this and, if the bookmaker says that he does not want to go to the meeting, fundamentally, we will turn around and say, “We will not have the meeting.”

The Convener: Thank you. Jim Fairlie is next.

Jim Fairlie: I have to admit that I have never been to a dog track in my life and I have no idea what it is like, but I have raced pigeons, I have been to agility tests and sheepdog trials, and I have worked with animals most of my working life.

What I am getting from all the evidence that we have been presented with and from hearing from what I would like to call the professional side of the business and from the side that Paul Brignal seems to be on is that two fundamentally different things are happening here. The amateur side that you are working on, Paul—and please correct me if I am wrong; this is my assumption—is based on people who own their dogs. The dogs are part of the family. They go to the racing and that is part of their everyday life. Those dogs are cared for and treated in the same way as pets, except that they race around a track, whereas some of the evidence that we have taken is that big breeders produce lots of pups specifically with the purpose of racing them at the highest level and, if those dogs do not hit the highest level, they are no longer needed by the people who breed them or train them. Am I wrong in making that assumption?

Paul Brignal: Yes, you are. In many of the cases, when the greyhound retires, the people keep the dog as a pet for the rest of its life.

Jim Fairlie: Sorry—I am asking you whether I am wrong to make the assumption that, for the folk

that are coming to you, the dog is part of the family—

Paul Brignal: Yes.

Jim Fairlie: However, the evidence that we have taken from the SAWC and from the GBGB is that there is much more of a professional take on it, with the point of view that the dog is a commodity rather than part of the family. That is the point that I am trying to make.

Paul Brignal: In general, for our dogs, an owner will probably have two or they may have only one. There are no big kennels and the dog will probably have the run of the house and the garden. It is treated as a family pet. So, it is totally different from what the GBGB sees, yes.

Mark Bird: Some of the 504 trainers that we have licensed to us almost sit in Paul Brignal's category in as much as they are not doing it for a commercial reason. We call them professional trainers because of the expectations that we have of them around the care and welfare of their dogs, and we ensure that that is there. However, a good number of those 504 are not in the category of doing it for a commercial reason. They have another job. They do it because they live and breathe greyhound racing.

A section of those trainers do it as a job and a form of income. They do it on much more of a commercial basis. Going back to the previous question, the 20 tracks are doing it for commercial reasons. It is not just about the running of the dog and the bookmaking against it. For some people, it is also about the entertainment value of going out, taking the family, taking their friends, having what is now a good meal at most of the tracks and watching the dogs run. It is not all about the gambling.

Professor Campbell: That is an important point to make. To say that the professional greyhound industry exists only to provide a gambling product is incorrect. There are other aspects of it, as Mark Bird says. Equally, to say that, on the one hand, we have this professional thing and, on the other hand, we have a family-oriented thing is also incorrect. My experience as an independent expert coming in has been very much that everyone involved in GBGB-licensed training is truly passionate about animal welfare. They care deeply for these dogs and many of them remain involved in the lives of the dogs—whether, in fact, those are dogs that never go racing to start with or whether they are dogs that are homed and, once they finish racing, people stay involved with them at that stage.

Jim Fairlie: Forgive me if it appeared that I was trying to demonise one side against the other; I am not. I am purely trying to get an understanding of why there is an issue about dogs racing. There

clearly is an issue, because we have people petitioning to get it banned. I know, having worked with dogs my entire life, the care and attention and everything else that is put into that. Why would you then want to do something that will make that dog ill, hurt or whatever else? Working as a sheep farmer, I have had dogs killed on the farm. I understand that these things happen, but why is there a need to stop greyhound racing when people are so passionate about looking after their animals in the way that you tell me they are? Where does that issue come from?

Professor Campbell: It is a good question. I fulfil many roles—a lot of my roles are around horse sport as well as around greyhound sport, and I completely agree. What we are discussing today is only a small part of human use of animals generally, so what is different about it? Part of the issue may be a lack of awareness about what is already done for greyhound welfare. It is important to say that, when a greyhound goes out to race, there is absolutely no intention ever that it should get injured. That is always an accident and something that everyone involved wants to avoid, just as they would want to avoid an accident to their sheepdog, their racing pigeon or whatever.

Christine Grahame: Mr Brignal, you said in your opening statement that you are responsible for the welfare of the dogs only at the track. Is that correct?

Paul Brignal: Yes. We are responsible for making sure that the dog does not hurt itself on the track surface. I use my 40 years of experience in greyhound racing and working on tracks to ensure that the track is as safe as it possibly can be.

Christine Grahame: Yes, that is not a problem—you have made it plain that you are responsible for their welfare only at the track. However, you have commented on the welfare of the animals with their owners when they are not at the track and afterwards. How can you know about that when you are responsible for their welfare only at the track?

Paul Brignal: I do not quite know what you are getting at. You are saying that the people come to the track, they are nice to their dogs, they turn their dogs out in good condition and then they take them home and do not look after them. How could that possibly—

Christine Grahame: I am not saying that that is happening. I am asking how you know what happens. You cannot know.

Paul Brignal: I do not, but common sense will tell you that if someone looks after their dog well at the track and the dog looks in prime condition, it will not be abused when it goes home.

Christine Grahame: There is another little issue—the phrase “prime condition”. You have stated that you say to owners that, if a dog is not in a fit state, you will not let the dog run. No vet is there to assess that. Can you tell me why you should be able to say, without a vet—and it might not be too obvious in certain animals—that they are not fit to be there?

Paul Brignal: What would you think would be an unfit dog at the track?

Christine Grahame: It is not a question for me to answer—I am not an expert. You are the person who sees the dogs all the time.

Paul Brignal: If a dog is far underweight or if a dog is obviously injured—and I can tell that from 40 years of experience in greyhound racing—it would be unfit. I have had greyhounds all my life and I can see if a dog is injured just as easily as a vet.

We need to understand the process that a vet would go through to assess whether a dog is fit to run. He would ask you to walk the dog up and back, and he would look at the dog to see whether it was lame. He would not give the dog a thorough examination. Someone with a trained eye, whether it be a vet or a dog physiotherapist or a trainer, could look at a dog when it was walking and know immediately if it was lame.

What you also do not understand about greyhound racing is that all the dogs that run at our track go to physiotherapists and are regularly checked by physiotherapists. When the dogs come to our track, they will probably have been checked before they race anyway.

Christine Grahame: Do you know that the dogs have been to physiotherapists?

Paul Brignal: I do not know that they have been to physiotherapists, but—

Christine Grahame: I am not being difficult. It is just that you keep saying “probably”. I am just asking how far your reach is in respect of the welfare of the dogs.

Paul Brignal: There is a limit to what I can do, obviously. What you are asking me to do is impractical. We are a hobby sport. If you go whippet racing—

Christine Grahame: Sorry. You misunderstand me. I am asking you what you know, not what you think you know.

Paul Brignal: We are a hobby sport and I am responsible for making sure that the track is as safe as possible. I am responsible for making sure that the dog is not lame when it goes on to the track. I try my best to do that.

Christine Grahame: I accept that—I understand that you are responsible for welfare at the track. However, I would suggest that there is a difference between an elite athlete suffering injuries and a greyhound doing so, because the athlete chooses to compete and the dog does not. Let us park that as a comment.

Let me move on to the GBGB. How far does your veterinary responsibility for the welfare of dogs extend? I understand from Mr Brignal that his responsibility is just at the track, though he may know other stuff through passing knowledge. For you, how far does it extend? For instance, does it extend to where the dogs are bred, how they are kept, what happens to them when they are injured and what happens to them when they can no longer run or when they are euthanised? When those things happen, how far does your responsibility extend?

Professor Campbell: Quite a lot of the detail on that is provided in our written response to the SAWC report, which we have given to you, but you are absolutely right. As I said, as a board, we chose to take responsibility for welfare across the animal's lifetime.

In the early stages—in the pre-racing stages of a greyhound's life—we work alongside, for example, the Kennel Club, which is developing a bespoke assured breeders programme so that we can concentrate on welfare standards around breeding. We also work alongside the Greyhound Stud Book so that we can interact with all those who breed greyhounds. We now have in place not only the treatment vets but also a team of regional regulatory vets, who will help to track and ensure the optimised welfare of dogs at that stage of their lifetime. Of course, stewards also go in and check on kennels. When we go into the racing period, we have an independent kennel auditor visit residential kennels once a year.

11:30

We are in the process of finalising United Kingdom Accreditation Service accreditation for trainers and residential kennels, and all trainers are required to be compliant with the PAS 251:2017 standard. If concerns are raised by regulatory vets, by treatment vets, by the vets who look after greyhounds on a day-to-day basis, by stipendiary stewards or by any of the others who visit kennels, they can be brought back to the GBGB. We have a director of regulation, and a complaint can go through the disciplinary process, which has independent members sitting on it. The whole system around establishing the welfare standards within kennels is run by something called the impartiality committee, which has a vet on it and is an independent sub-committee.

When a greyhound goes into the retirement stage of its life, it is normally moved into the care of a non-greyhound vet—a regular vet who looks after pet animals. It then falls under their care and under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, and, at that stage, it is looked after as any other animal would be.

Christine Grahame: Am I correct in saying that not all greyhounds are suitable for retirement, because they have not been socialised and so on, no matter what you try to do? You did not answer the question about how many dogs are put down and for what reasons in a period of a year—last year, let us say.

Professor Campbell: I will pass over to Mark Bird in a moment, so that he can give you some figures on that.

In answer to your question about the dogs that are not suitable for rehoming—or for homing, because it is the first time they have gone to a home—that is a very small number, though we are, nonetheless, committed to driving that number down. In the welfare strategy, we have a particular stream around behaviour, and we work with one of the charities in the greyhound forum specifically around that. There are several strands to that work, including—importantly, as you mentioned—in the early stages of a greyhound's life, everyone responsible for it making sure that it is socialised in a way that will make it easy for it to go to a domestic home at the point at which it retires. That is one programme.

We are also developing, in collaboration with a canine charity, a standardised assessment of behaviour of greyhounds, and we are making sure that we have in place—again, along with the charity—a number of behaviourists to whom greyhounds can be referred. We are conscious of that issue and we have systems in place.

I will pass over to Mark Bird for the details.

Mark Bird: Christine, when we met, which was about four years ago, when you were in the cross-party—

Christine Grahame: Yes—I have more recent correspondence, but the committee has not seen it.

Mark Bird: We had only just started collating track injury figures and, within that, the fatality figures and figures on what happens to dogs at the end of their racing careers, when they go into retirement. When we first started collating the numbers, back in 2018, 242 dogs had died at the track. They were put to sleep or were caused sudden death at the track and were overseen by a vet. That was in 2018. In the figures for 2021, which are the most recent figures we have, that number had decreased to 120. That is a 50 per

cent reduction, in four years, in the number of track fatalities among greyhounds. The number of injuries has pretty much remained the same, in terms of the number of runs versus the number of dogs that are running. I can give you other figures on other fatalities if you want.

Christine Grahame: Yes, because that figure is for dogs that died at the track—they either were put down at the track or died otherwise. What about dogs that are not suitable for retirement?

Mark Bird: It depends on what you are saying they are unsuitable for. If you are saying they are unsuitable for homing, which means that—

Christine Grahame: Do you put down dogs that are not injured?

Mark Bird: The figures for dogs that are unsuitable for homing, because there is some behavioural problem with them, show that, back in 2018, 190 were put to sleep by vets for that particular reason.

Christine Grahame: Was that out of the 242, or was that additional?

Mark Bird: It was additional. In the 2021 figures, that number reduced to just 13—a reduction of 93 per cent. The reason that that came about was that we worked with trainers around the culture. You mentioned the dogs being a commodity and the need to get the trainers away from the view that a dog is a commodity and towards the view that it is a sentient being that has been used in racing and, therefore, will go on to retirement. The work that we have done over the four years has seen that number drop by 93 per cent.

Professor Campbell: The absolute number is very small, but we are not complacent about that. That is exactly why we have this huge collaborative programme within the welfare strategy to do everything we can to make it easier for greyhounds to transition to a domestic life when they retire.

Christine Grahame: That was helpful. I will stop there, but I might come back in later.

The Convener: Thank you.

It was remiss of me not to mention that we have with us Mark Ruskell MSP, who has taken a very close interest in this topic as we have taken evidence. Mark will have an opportunity to ask some questions, but I will first bring in Ariane Burgess.

Ariane Burgess: I want to go back and pick up a bit of a thread connected to Christine Grahame's questions. This question is for the independent track owner. In Thornton Greyhound Stadium's written evidence, you wrote that, if you felt that an owner was failing in their duty to look after their

dog properly, you would address that. Picking up on the earlier conversation about the vet, I am interested in hearing about the next steps that you take in the situation that a greyhound is injured, given that no vet is present on the site and only out-of-office emergency vet services are available on a Saturday night, when races at the track take place.

Paul Brignal: We have a vet who is at home on Saturday nights. We would ring him immediately and the dog would go to his surgery to be treated.

Ariane Burgess: Okay. Thanks for that clarification.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I want to go back to the issue of euthanasia. You introduced some figures. I gather that 1,400 dogs were euthanised over a four-year period from 2018 to 2021 for a range of different reasons, including difficulties with rehoming and treatment costs. I want to ask Professor Campbell about some comments that she made recently on euthanasia. These are your words, Professor Campbell:

"Euthanasia at the end of a racing career has the advantage that the fate of the animal is secured, and the guarantee that the animal will not suffer any subsequent welfare problems."

Can you explain what you meant by that? On the face of it, it sounds like you were saying that the dog would be better off dead.

Professor Campbell: No, of course I am not saying that. As always, when things are taken out of context, they need to be explained.

You are absolutely right: euthanasia, by definition, is a humane process. We need to be very clear that, by definition, euthanasia is not a welfare issue. We are always concerned about improving welfare standards. That is why we are undertaking all the work that we are talking about and constantly striving to drive down injuries that result in a genuine need to euthanise a dog, because they cannot be treated, and do everything we can to give the dog the best possible chance of having a set of behaviours that allow it to be successfully homed at the end of its racing career.

I am not for a moment suggesting that greyhounds would be better off being euthanised—absolutely not. That has been taken out of context. The situation is exactly as I have just explained.

Mark Ruskell: It is difficult to explain the words that you have written there. You are saying that euthanasia is a humane process.

Professor Campbell: By definition.

Mark Ruskell: Surely, euthanasia is a humane process if it is in response to something that is unavoidable, whereas an injury sustained by a greyhound going around a track at 40mph is avoidable. How is it a humane process when dogs are euthanised in that context?

Professor Campbell: I think that you are confusing two things, if I might say so. As I have said, from a scientific view, by definition, euthanasia is humane. That is the definition of euthanasia. You are talking about whether it is ethically reasonable for dogs to run if the possible consequence is that they will become injured, and you are then talking about avoidable risk. The question is exactly the same across all animal sports—equine sports and other dog sports, as well as greyhound sports.

We have to accept that all animal sports have some risk of injury associated with them, as all human sports do. That is why we are constantly trying to identify risk that, exactly as you say, is avoidable. We gather increasingly granular data and we have all the research written into the strategy so that we can understand very well the causes of injuries and can understand what we can do to mitigate them. We then have an absolute responsibility to do everything we can to mitigate the causes of those injuries, so that we are left with only the unavoidable risk. It is not avoidable risk as long as we are constantly trying to undertake that research and to improve practice and policy.

Mark Ruskell: I may come back in later, convener.

The Convener: I am really struggling here. We are not comparing apples with apples. Most of the information that we have had from the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission is about the activities of the GBGB and professional, industrial-scale greyhound racing, if I can put it that way. However, what we have not had, which makes this difficult, is information surrounding the one and only flapper track, as it is described—the unlicensed track.

There is legislation in place specifically to protect greyhounds—greyhounds are mentioned in the legislation—but what confidence can we have that there are no animal welfare issues at Thornton if there is not regular inspection somehow? I understand that the SSPCA does not have access to—or has not taken access to—Thornton, and we have no other way to understand whether there are or are not animal welfare issues at the track and, subsequently, in the breeding of those animals. You are saying that it is mostly a hobby thing.

How are we to understand how we can improve animal welfare if we do not have Scotland-specific

information? We have no GBGB tracks in Scotland; we have only an unlicensed track. So, how can we be confident—or what needs to be put in place to ensure—that we know that the current legislation ensures the best welfare for greyhounds? Do you think that the SSPCA or the Government should be doing more to ensure animal welfare at these tracks? All the information in front of us is about the GBGB, and, from what I understand, it is comparing apples with pears. Your business at Thornton is completely different from the GBGB model.

Paul Brignal: We would more than welcome the SSPCA if it wanted to come. In fact, we have written to Mike Flynn, saying, “You’ve had every opportunity to come and visit our track.” He eventually came to the track with Professor Dwyer. I do not think he was in any way concerned about anything that went on at the track, and the same thing would have happened if he had come at any time. As I say, the invitation has been open to him, and he is more than welcome to come if he wants to.

Jim Fairlie: I want to go back to the point about euthanasia. I presume that, when you get to the point at which a dog is going to be euthanised because it is unsuitable for rehoming, that is because of a severe injury, the dog’s temperament or whatever. How did you manage to reduce the number from 190 to 13? What made a difference? Why did people change their minds about euthanasia?

Professor Campbell: First of all, we should talk about homing rather than rehoming, because they have not been homed until they get to that stage of their lives.

It is a really interesting question. There is a lot around decision making. There is the scientific part, about which injuries can be successfully treated, and there are questions about how quickly we can refer to specialist centres. Within the strategy, we have a big workstream on making sure that we can do that really effectively. There are also questions around making sure that everyone understands clearly the responsibility for doing everything we possibly can to successfully treat injured greyhounds.

I will hand over to Mark Bird, who can talk a little bit about the injury treatment scheme.

Mark Bird: We have an injury recovery scheme. When a dog is injured at the track and it goes into treatment with the vet, it is a pretty emotional time, because the dog is probably in pain. It is a question of changing the culture from when the dog is in pain. The owner, the trainer or one of the kennel hands might be upset themselves because the dog has become injured, and that has sometimes led to the dog being unnecessarily put

to sleep because that is what people felt was the best course of action when actually it was not. It was more the case that they did not have a prognosis of what the injury was. Working with the vet to give the dog some immediate pain relief, you can assess the scale of the injury and what the forward-thinking prognosis is. That has caused some of the changes.

11:45

Going back to the issue of a dog being unsuitable for homing, it is just about behaviour. The owner's or trainer's assessment would be that a dog would not home and, as a result, the dog was put to sleep. That was happening far too often, and, in our view, that was unacceptable and unnecessary. We have worked very hard with trainers and owners on the behavioural problems of most of these dogs, and, as you have seen, the numbers have changed radically through a process of changing the culture.

Professor Campbell: Funding is also available to help with treatment costs.

Mark Bird: There is treatment cost funding and there is funding for getting dogs retired. When a dog enters racing, a retirement bond of £200 is paid by the owner. When the dog comes to retire, that £200 is then released for the dog, with a further £200 from the GBGB to assist with the homing journey of that particular greyhound. The injury recovery scheme helps to fund some of the treatment costs when the dogs are injured. For a long bone injury, you could be talking about anything up to about £5,000. You will realise that some people who have dogs as domestic pets cannot afford to pay that. We take the responsibility—as do the owners in our sport—that, if a dog with an injury is saveable, we should do our utmost to make sure that that dog is looked after as well as possible, and that includes the treatment.

Jim Fairlie: So, the dogs have these bonds and what have you. I am interested to hear that they are not being rehomed because they have never been homed. That goes back to the point that I was trying to make earlier: the dogs are bred for a specific purpose, which is to race only, whereas my understanding—I could be wrong—is that, at the amateur track, the dogs are very much part of the family. Please do not think that I am trying to make that differentiation between the two things.

At a professional track, do the owners have insurance? If I am a pet owner and my dog gets injured, I can have pet insurance that will allow that dog to be treated, up to a certain amount. Do you have insurance? Paul, do the folk who come to your racing track insure their dogs against injury

on the basis that there is a risk that the dogs will get hurt when they are going round the track?

Paul Brignal: No. You would be very lucky to find a pet insurance policy that would insure a greyhound that was racing. They are not insured. It is fully the responsibility of the owner to make sure that his dog is well looked after if it does get injured.

Mark Bird: It is the same with the professional side.

Paul Brignal: To put things into perspective, throughout the whole of last year, we had two bad injuries that needed treatment promptly by a vet. One of them was a broken leg, which was fixed—the dog is now sitting on the guy's sofa. The other dog broke its wrist and, unfortunately, the owner decided that the cost of having it fixed was too high and had it put to sleep. That is something that we do not encourage, but it is, fundamentally, the owner's choice.

Jim Fairlie: That kind of goes back to the point that the convener made. We do not know how many dogs will get euthanised by the folk who come and race at your track, but we have statistics, so we can make that argument and that judgment. It goes back to the question that the convener asked: how can the committee be confident that how your track is being run will allow the committee and the wider public to have confidence that what you guys are doing meets the standards and people's expectations around animal welfare?

Paul Brignal: We provided the committee and the SAWC with all our race videos. Believe me, if a dog breaks its leg, it is blatantly obvious. Anyone can see it. If you watched the videos, you could see that there were no other serious injuries throughout the course of the year's racing.

I am not saying that there would not have been some muscle injuries. As you heard previously, like all athletes, all animals that take part in any competition will pick up muscle injuries. You might think that flyball is a totally harmless sport, but the wrists take an absolute pounding and a lot of the dogs get serious wrist injuries. It is just the nature of taking part in a competition. Whether it is an animal or a human, there is an element of risk, and they will pick up injuries. However, all the injuries will be treated and all the dogs will make a recovery. If they do not recover, they will be homed—probably by the person who owns them in the first place. On the odd occasion, they might get sent to a rehoming centre to be rehomed.

Jim Fairlie: Does Mark Bird or Madeleine Campbell want to come in on that?

Mark Bird: To cover off the point again, even in professional greyhound racing, there is very little

chance that you can get insurance to cover a dog. I am sure it is exactly the same with horse racing. The injury recovery scheme that we have spoken about is almost a form of insurance that allows a dog to be treated or some of the costs met.

The point that Madeleine Campbell was going to make was about the fact that some of the tracks will meet any additional costs over and above what we put in under the injury recovery scheme. If it is a long bone injury and the cost of treating it is £5,000, the owner will not have to pay out anything for the dog's treatment. Some of us have an issue with that, because it is about responsible ownership, but that responsible ownership comes at the very end, when the dog is due to retire and the owner does the right thing by the dog.

The Convener: But GBGB-licensed owners are completely different from the owners who race at Thornton. They own an asset rather than a lapdog, if you like.

Mark Bird: The quandary is obvious to the committee today. As you said, it is apples and pears. We impress on all the owners who bring their dogs to licensed sport that the ownership responsibility is there, and we make sure, through our rules, that that is adhered to. Paul Brignal is working on the basis that these are family pets that are used to race, and the ownership responsibility follows from that.

Professor Campbell: Everything that Mark Bird has just said is true, but I do not think it is fair to the owners of greyhounds that race under a GBGB licence to describe their animals as being assets to them. The owners are often attached to their animals and, like all owners, under the animal welfare acts in both nations, they have ultimate responsibility for the welfare of their greyhounds.

The Convener: But the majority of the greyhounds are kennelled at a GBGB location rather than at the owners' homes.

Mark Bird: They have to be kennelled. I will tell you the reason for that. A few years back, when I came to speak to Christine Grahame, some dogs—especially in Scotland—were being housed in the home, and the problem with that is that there is then access to all manner of different substances that a dog could get their nose into, including things like tea, coffee and chocolate—those are all prohibited—that, at a licensed track, they could be tested for. So, we had to do away with that type of licence. The only type of licence now ensures that a dog is kept in kennels for its racing career.

The Convener: We are, absolutely, not comparing apples with apples. That just reinforces that.

Mark Bird: In many ways, other than, as Madeleine Campbell and Paul Brignal have said, in the owners' responsibility for their dogs.

Professor Campbell: We are and we are not. The systems are different—you are quite right. However, what is important from the animal's point of view—and this is very much how we look at things nowadays in animal welfare—is the animal's lived experience of its own welfare. In fact, this goes back to Mr Ruskell's question about the quality of an animal's life and whether it is a life worth living, which is a baseline level, or whether it is a good life. That is exactly what we describe within the strategy. Whichever system they are in, it is important that their welfare needs are being met. Those are clearly described in legislation, and they are also very clearly described in the five-domains model that we have adopted in the welfare strategy. The way in which we will—and do—meet each of those is also described in the welfare strategy.

The Convener: Okay.

We will have three supplementary questions from Christine Grahame, Karen Adam and Mark Ruskell before we move on to the next topic. Again, I am at fault here as well, but I remind everybody of the time constraints that we have.

Christine Grahame: This will be short. The first question is to Mr Brignal. Has there been an increase in usage at your track since the closure of all the licensed tracks in Scotland?

Paul Brignal: No.

Christine Grahame: Thank you. My next question is to Mr Bird, on the data. We have not gone into all the details because of the time, but is a form completed at the track or subsequently to detail why an animal was put down?

Mark Bird: Correct—yes.

Christine Grahame: Have we seen a copy of that form?

Mark Bird: The form has only recently been revised. We can provide you with a copy.

Christine Grahame: Could we see a copy of that form, please, if that is appropriate?

Mark Bird: Yes, indeed.

Christine Grahame: Could I see the previous form, to see the amendments that have been made?

Mark Bird: Indeed. We will explain why those amendments have been made as well.

Christine Grahame: Thank you.

Karen Adam: Behavioural issues have been mentioned a few times. Can we get some clarity

on that, for the record? What kind of behavioural issues are we talking about, and why have those happened?

Professor Campbell: A lot of them are related to greyhounds finding it stressful to be in a domestic environment, because that is not what they have been used to up until that stage of their life. That is exactly why we are putting systems in place, in collaboration with the charities and with one particular charity within the Greyhound Forum, to help everyone who looks after a greyhound, from the moment it is born, in its pre-racing stage, to when it goes racing, to accustom it to things like—it sounds silly—hoovers, sofas, noise and general household objects, so that, when it retires, it is not a stressful environment that it enters.

Karen Adam: How does that behaviour manifest itself? I know that they would be stressed—that is the emotion—but what behaviour is displayed?

Professor Campbell: It varies from dog to dog. Sometimes, a stressed dog will withdraw into itself, and sometimes it may—this is rare in greyhounds—become overtly aggressive simply because it is stressed. It is fundamental to reduce the causes of the stress through appropriate management, in order that they do not exhibit any of those behaviours later.

Mark Bird: I will give an example of that. I have a retired greyhound at home. When we got him from the trainer, we were told, because we have two other dogs that are not greyhounds, not to feed that particular ex-racer with those two dogs, because he had always been used to eating on his own. We did that for a number of days or weeks, but then, one day, due to human error, we looked away and then found that my other dog had her nose in the same bowl as the greyhound.

Some of it is perceptual as well. Because they have been handled in a particular way, as a working dog and a canine athlete, people have the perception that they will react in a different way. Sometimes they do and sometimes they do not.

Mark Ruskell: Can I ask about the GBGB data on retirement? As I understand it, it also includes greyhounds that are designated for breeding and greyhounds that go on to race on unregulated tracks. Can you explain how that constitutes retirement?

Mark Bird: It is retirement from the sport.

Mark Ruskell: Retirement from the GBGB?

Mark Bird: From regulated sport, yes.

Mark Ruskell: But the greyhounds might then move on to unregulated sport somewhere else.

Mark Bird: Not any more, because that loophole has been closed.

Mark Ruskell: Mr Brignal, have you ever had greyhounds that have had a racing career at GBGB-regulated tracks race at your track?

Paul Brignal: To say that we have never had one would not be true, but it is rare, to be honest.

Mark Ruskell: What is your data on that?

Professor Campbell: Mr Ruskell, you are taking a historical perspective because, in the welfare strategy, which was published almost a year ago now, it is explicitly stated that the GBGB no longer finds it an acceptable outcome for a dog at the point of retirement to go from regulated racing into unregulated racing. We are completely clear about that.

Mark Ruskell: Okay, but how do you monitor that? Mr Brignal, you are saying that you think that it is rare, but do you have data on where these dogs come from?

Paul Brignal: Historically, it probably has happened, but we do not have any dogs at the moment that are ex-GBGB racers.

Mark Ruskell: You do not have data on how many ex-GBGB racers have raced in the past at Thornton and how many are racing now. It is a perception that—

Paul Brignal: All the dogs that run at our track at the moment have been with the owners that they have now for a long time and they have not raced on GBGB tracks.

Mark Ruskell: Would the GBGB be concerned if racers at your formally licensed tracks were racing at Thornton? Clearly, that would be in breach of your new welfare standards.

Mark Bird: Yes, we would be concerned.

Mark Ruskell: How would you monitor that?

Mark Bird: When a dog comes up for retirement from licensed racing, the owner has to fill out a green retirement form. Quite clearly, that talks about who the new owner will be. In the event that we found out—and we have an investigations officer—that a dog perhaps had not gone to the person who was entered on the form or had gone into unlicensed racing, it would be followed up. The owner may or may not be able to then have any more registered dogs with the GBGB. There is a method for monitoring that.

Mark Ruskell: How many such cases have been brought forward?

12:00

Mark Bird: To date, none.

Professor Campbell: We introduced that a year ago, when we published the welfare strategy. We are not aware of any cases so far.

Mark Ruskell: No cases have been brought forward.

Karen Adam: We have spoken a lot about the regulations. Can you tell me a bit more about the differences between the regulations in Scotland and in England and say what effects the regulations have had on animal welfare?

Mark Bird: Lots of things that we have been talking about all the way through the meeting, such as the requirement for a vet to be present and checks on residential kennels, come under the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds Regulations 2010. An awful lot of what we have been speaking to falls under those regulations, which are not currently applied in Scotland or in Wales.

Our view—it is our reason for being here—is that, although there are no GBGB-licensed tracks in Scotland any more, rather than going for a ban or a phased ending of greyhound racing, perhaps regulation could be adopted by Scotland as well. That could include regulations that are similar to, or the same as, those in England at the moment. The problem is that, as Paul Brignal said, that would be the death knell for hobbyist tracks.

Beatrice Wishart: My question follows on from Karen Adam's questions. I want to get your views on the SAWC report and its recommendation that a scheme that is independent of the GBGB is required to ensure the welfare of greyhounds,

"possibly through Local Authority regulation or under the auspices of the new Scottish Veterinary Service".

Could I have your views on that?

Paul Brignal: I imagine that the SSPCA would be the ideal body to monitor our track, and we have invited it to do so. It has chosen not to, maybe because its workload is already too big. That is its choice.

Beatrice Wishart: But you would not have any problem with any kind of regulations as suggested by the SAWC.

Paul Brignal: We would not mind the SSPCA regularly checking our track. That would not be a problem for us in any way, shape or form.

Professor Campbell: We strongly disagree with the view that there is a requirement for additional independent regulation of GBGB-licensed racing. The board of the GBGB already has four independent directors, of whom I am one. The chair was previously the chief executive of the RSPCA and a director at the Dogs Trust. Among the other independent directors, we have one who served as the shadow environment minister and as a senior member of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, who obviously has a strong background in animal welfare. We have one who is a partner in a solicitors firm with

decades of experience in regulation around sports. We already have quite a lot of independent oversight.

We already also have a greyhound regulatory board, which is independent of the GBGB. It manages the rules of racing and everything that goes around that. We have an independent disciplinary committee with members including lawyers, a veterinary surgeon and experienced sports stakeholders. We also have under the United Kingdom Accreditation Service accreditation requirements an impartiality committee. Again, that includes a lawyer, a veterinary surgeon, a Greyhound Forum charity member and a senior animal licensing officer. We believe that there is already high independent oversight.

The Convener: Once again, it is difficult, because there are no GBGB tracks in Scotland and we are, in effect, scrutinising what happens in an area that we cannot get involved in, but it is important that we understand how you are regulated. Can you make it clear that the GBGB is not a statutory body but its members are generally made up from those who participate or have an interest in the sport and that that is the same for the regulatory board? It is not appointed by the Government or through legislation and it is a self-governing body. Is that correct?

Mark Bird: It is exactly that. We are self-regulated but, of course, we report to DEFRA and we report to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport as well. There is even governmental oversight of what we do.

Professor Campbell: We also report to the canine charities, through the Greyhound Forum. We interact with them regularly and we have undertaken—it is written in the strategy—to report on progress to them regularly.

The Convener: Christine Grahame.

Christine Grahame: I have run out of questions, except perhaps to ask whether we could see the form that is filled in on retirement. I asked about the form for animals that are put down.

Mark Bird: It is the same form.

Christine Grahame: That is all that I wanted clarification about.

Rachael Hamilton: Mr Bird, why did you say in your letter in response to the SAWC that the report was not objective and that there were some inaccuracies in it?

Mark Bird: I will defer to Madeleine Campbell.

Professor Campbell: The letter that Mark Bird and our chair submitted is detailed and probably goes a long way to answering that. We felt that a

lot of what was in the report was, as you will have seen in that response, based on outdated information and some factual inaccuracies.

Rachael Hamilton: We will go on to the parts about breeding in later questions, so I will ask a supplementary to that.

The Convener: The committee has noted that 91.7 per cent of respondents to the committee's call for views said that they supported a ban on greyhound racing in Scotland. I take on board the comments that you have made regarding those who completed the feedback, but could both parties give us an indication of the impact of an outright ban on or, potentially, a phasing out of greyhound racing in Scotland? What effects would that have, including any cross-border implications?

Mark Bird: We must not forget that Scotland had a licensed track, at Shawfield in Glasgow. That track was a casualty of Covid because, like most other tracks, it was not on a media deal. The racing was not shown in bookmakers' shops, so it relied on footfall. Sadly, because of Covid and the restrictions, it closed its doors and never reopened. That has left us with 23 Scotland-based trainers who now travel from wherever their bases are in Scotland to, most likely, Newcastle, Sunderland or even Pelaw Grange. The effect of a ban depends on the detail, but it may be that even Scotland-based trainers could not carry out what they are doing, assuming that they are doing it for payment, and come over the border to England.

Our view has always been the same. You are aware of what is happening in the Senedd in Wales on the petition for a ban there. Have both Governments done enough to look at the legislation and the regulation without having to go for a ban? To ban something outright would, from our point of view, drive it underground.

The Convener: I suppose that we have an example of how that might play out, because there was a licensed track that stopped dead. What happened to the dogs that you were licensing to race in Glasgow? What was the immediate impact of that?

Mark Bird: Again, most of the dogs that were at Shawfield were the trainers', and the trainers had probably two or three dogs. Few big owners were racing at the track. They raced only one night a week. As I said, it was not on a media deal, so there was no real incentive for trainers to have much in the way of dogs. Some of the trainers who do this as a professional living have transferred over. Other trainers have retired their dogs and are no longer racing.

The Convener: Paul Brignal, what would be the impact of an outright or phased ban on your track?

Paul Brignal: The injustices of banning greyhound racing would be terrible. I do not understand why you would want to ban greyhound racing. That is the first thing. No one has ever come forward with a good enough reason to ban greyhound racing, compared with other sports. However, if it was banned, we would have to close.

Alasdair Allan: Ultimately, we are not talking about Government proposals. We are talking about a petition. Today is your chance to respond to that. I preface my question by pointing that out, because this is not an accusation from me. The petitioners, however, have made an accusation and have raised concerns about drug use with dogs, specifically cocaine. My understanding is that the SAWC has not made that accusation, but the petitioners have. Can you respond to that, please?

Mark Bird: Obviously, cocaine would be used on a dog with a view to trying to get it to run faster. Other prohibited articles out there would make a dog run slower. Of course, with the testing regime that goes on, certainly at GBGB-licensed tracks, any class A drug used would show up. Either dogs can be randomly sampled in races or, if there is intelligence to say that something is going on, testing can be targeted. The percentage of those that come back positive is miniscule—it is less than 1 per cent. Of all the races in the last year—and there were 359,000 runs—less than 1 per cent came back positive, and the percentage that were positive for class A drugs was even lower.

This is one of the problems that we had when dogs were staying indoors, especially in London. If you look at some of the Shawfield positive test results, you see that they were for class A drugs or things such as beta blockers, which are used for people with heart complaints. The numbers are minuscule because the deterrent is there. The dogs can be tested.

Alasdair Allan: Mr Brignal, do you have any comment on that for your own track?

Paul Brignal: There is no requirement for us to test. I do not see any reason why anyone would want to cheat and use drugs at our track. What would they win? £50? £100? It is not the same situation. If you raced a dog at a GBGB track and you were inclined to try to cheat—although you would not get away with it, to be honest—you could potentially bet with hundreds of bookmaking companies and put thousands of pounds on. That is not an issue with us in any way, shape or form.

Alasdair Allan: Testing does not—

Paul Brignal: We do not test. As Mark Bird said, if you found cocaine in a dog from a GBGB test, more than likely it would be because the owner was taking cocaine and had stroked the

dog. The test is so sensitive that it will find the most minute traces. Even with poppyseeds in bread, a dog will fail because it will have opium from the poppyseeds. If you feed a dog poppyseed bread, it is likely to fail a GBGB test.

Professor Campbell: To pick up on Mr Brignal's point, that is exactly the advantage of not having dogs living in a domestic environment during the racing period of their lives, which is the way we do it in the GBGB.

The Convener: To follow up on that, whether it happens or not, there may be an incentive because of the return on betting to illegally enhance the performance of a greyhound that is racing at a GBGB track. However, at Thornton, the only bookmaking service available is the one bookmaker at the track and there is no external or online betting. Is that what you are saying?

Paul Brignal: Yes.

Rachael Hamilton: I want to pick up on one of the points that the GBGB made about the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission's report, particularly its emphasis on the concern about the welfare standards for breeding and the importation of dogs from Ireland. What are you doing to develop a harmonised set of welfare standards for breeding?

12:15

Professor Campbell: You are exactly right. That question spans the GBGB and Ireland. You will have seen in our welfare strategy that, as I mentioned earlier, we are working with the Kennel Club, which is developing a bespoke assured breeders scheme for greyhounds. That is currently in development and will shortly be piloted. That will then form the basis for our collaborating with Irish counterparts in making sure that standards are raised internationally.

In fact, that is part of a wider piece of work. In March this year, the GBGB hosted a meeting of international regulators that was specifically focused on welfare. That was the first of what will be a series of meetings. The Irish attended that, along with all the other main international regulators. The purpose of those meetings is to share best practice and align standards, and we now have an online platform on which to do that. Later this spring, a small number of members of the GBGB will go out to Ireland specifically to talk to our counterparts about breeding welfare and to make a visit there to understand better how we can all work together to make sure that standards are raised uniformly internationally.

Having said all that, our welfare strategy is also partly about our desire to drive British breeding of racing greyhounds, because, if breeding takes place in GB, the GBGB has oversight of it,

whereas that is not so much the case when it is in Ireland. In addition, that would mean that dogs would not be being transported. From a welfare point of view, we would prefer that they were bred and stayed in the same country. We have various pieces of work in place to support that. You will have seen that the number of British-bred racing greyhounds has increased substantially over the past few years. Indeed, by chance, this year the greyhound derby was won by a British-bred greyhound.

Rachael Hamilton: There seems to be an emphasis in the SAWC report on that aspect of welfare but, in the context of the petition, surely there are—I made this point to Cathy Dwyer in the committee session in March—current regulations and animal welfare standards that can deal with the aspect of animal welfare to do with the importing of young animals, the number of puppies that one animal has and so on. Will you comment on that? That part of the report concerned me considerably.

Professor Campbell: You are absolutely right. Everything that greyhounds do falls under general national canine legislation. As you quite rightly say, part of that relates to transportation and part of it relates to breeding. We have the breeding of dogs regulations, but who falls under those depends, among other things, on the number of litters the bitches have per year, for example.

This is an area in which we are collaborating with the Greyhound Stud Book and some of the charities in the Greyhound Forum, because they flagged up the issue when I first started developing the strategy. We are working to understand clearly which greyhound breeders in GB fall under which regulations and then to ensure, through our role as regulator, that each of them understands clearly their responsibilities under that legislation and ensures that they are compliant with them.

Rachael Hamilton: Given that this formed such a large part of your response to the SAWC report, I want to go back to my original question about whether the report was objective. I cannot find the reference to it now, but have you seen the report by the RSPCA, Dogs Trust and Blue Cross?

Mark Bird: No.

Professor Campbell: No.

Rachael Hamilton: Why has that not been published?

Professor Campbell: We do not know.

Mark Bird: Madeleine Campbell, our chair and I went to the RSPCA or Dogs Trust offices going on for two years ago and they said that they wanted to review their position on all greyhound racing—not just the GBGB racing, but the racing of the

independents. That was because they did not think that we were acting sufficiently quickly or that we had the money with which to do what we wanted to do. Madeleine Campbell had already embarked on doing the welfare strategy that was published last May. They even asked us to stall that strategy work while they carried out their own review, which we contributed to 100 per cent, along with some of the animal welfare charities.

We published our welfare strategy in May. They published—or rather, they declared the results of their report in September of last year, but they have not shared that report with us or any of the animal welfare charities. They have not even alluded to why their position has changed. They simply said that, in their book, greyhound racing was now cruel and abhorrent and that, therefore, they were going to call for a phased ban of greyhound racing. We have not seen the report. They asked for the ban to be put in place over a five-year period. They are heading towards the first year of declaring that to be their position, yet we have still seen no evidence whatsoever from their report or how they see a phased ban coming about.

Professor Campbell: It is a matter of frustration to me that we have not seen that report, despite having repeatedly asked to have sight of it. Indeed, the Greyhound Forum itself has asked to be provided with a copy of it and has not been.

That is a matter of particular frustration to me, because we are all in this together. All of us want to optimise greyhound welfare. When I set out to develop the strategy, I asked each of the charities that sits on the Greyhound Forum to fill in a form and send it back to let us know what they thought the current welfare issues were and what potential welfare issues they thought there might be. They all did that and I considered all those responses. All of that was incorporated in the welfare strategy. If they now say that we are still missing something, I want to know what it is so that we can do something about it, yet they will not let us see their report.

Mark Bird: Can I ask the committee if you have seen the report?

Rachael Hamilton: There is a summary as part of the SAWC report, but the full report has not been published or given to us.

Mark Ruskell: I want to go back to the nub of the argument that the petitioners are raising and the veterinary evidence that the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission reflected on, which is to do with the nature of a dog racing at 40mph around an oval track. As I understand it, the GBGB is doing research into track design. This might seem like a daft question, but are you doing research into straight tracks rather than oval tracks?

Professor Campbell: We are working as part of the international collaboration with other regulators that I described to look in detail at the evidence base, because some work is already being done in other countries. As you will have seen in the letter that we sent to the committee, the GBGB will ask Dr Richard Payne at the University of Nottingham to have oversight of all of that and to make recommendations to us on what further research needs to be done, which might inform future policy development in the area. There are repeated mentions in the strategy of track design.

Mark Ruskell: Is that a yes on straight track research?

Professor Campbell: We are looking at the evidence from all countries.

Mark Ruskell: All the veterinary evidence shows that the issue is the first curve and the impact that that has on legs, given the speed that the dogs are going at.

Mark Bird: When you say “all the veterinary evidence”, that report was done by Dr Andrew Knight, which is—

Mark Ruskell: To go back to my question, are you looking at straight tracks?

Mark Bird: As Madeleine Campbell said, we are looking at all the options, including straight tracks.

Professor Campbell: Yes. We are looking at the evidence from other countries.

Mark Ruskell: I have a question for Paul Brignal. There has been a bit of discussion this morning about comparing apples and pears and the difference between regulated and unregulated tracks. Is the design of your track the same as that of a GBGB track or is it fundamentally different in shape?

Paul Brignal: It is similar. The only difference is that it has an inside hare and all the GBGB tracks have an outside hare.

Mark Ruskell: But your track is not fundamentally different to Shawfield, for example, or any of the other tracks.

Paul Brignal: It is slightly smaller than Shawfield. It is probably a similar size to Sunderland.

Mark Ruskell: On that basis, is the inherent risk that a dog faces in running at 40mph around an oval track in Thornton the same as the risk that a dog faces in running around an oval track in London, Glasgow or anywhere else?

Paul Brignal: I do not honestly think that you are right in what you say about the oval shape.

Mark Ruskell: Why am I wrong?

Paul Brignal: Although there are reports that say that an oval track is slightly dangerous, there is no evidence to show that if it was a straight track, the dog would not still injure itself in pulling up at the end, because it would be hurtling—

Mark Ruskell: There is substantial veterinary evidence, which the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission has reflected on. Clearly, the GBGB will be looking at that evidence as part of its own review.

I come back to my question. Where is your evidence that what you have in Thornton, with dogs running round an oval track at 40mph, is different from dogs running round an oval track at 40mph at Shawfield? How are the inherent risks of a hobby sport any different from those of a professional track?

Paul Brignal: Obviously, they are not. However, I would say that, because we do not put on races quite so often, the track does not get compacted quite as often as a GBGB track would do. Other than that, I would say that it is very similar.

The Convener: Throughout the evidence, it has been implied that unlicensed or flapper tracks are more dangerous and more likely to have illegal activity or whatever. Is that the case? Is Thornton different from other unlicensed or flapper tracks in the UK?

Paul Brignal: Ours is the only unlicensed track in the whole of the UK now, apart from the one in Wales, which will become GBGB registered in 2024, I think.

Mark Bird: That could even happen this year.

Paul Brignal: Ours is the only unlicensed track in the whole of the UK.

Mark Bird: The one unlicensed track in England, which was at Askern in Yorkshire, has now ceased racing because it is looking to become a registered track as well. It is now building up its infrastructure in order to make an application.

The Convener: Is that something that you would consider Thornton doing?

Paul Brignal: Not in the immediate future.

The Convener: Thank you very much. That concludes our evidence today. Thank you for your participation. It is very much appreciated.

United Kingdom Subordinate Legislation

Plant Health and Phytosanitary Conditions (Oak Processionary Moth and Plant Pests) (Amendment) Regulations 2023

12:26

The Convener: Our next agenda item is consideration of a consent notification for the Plant Health and Phytosanitary Conditions (Oak Processionary Moth and Plant Pests) (Amendment) Regulations 2023, which is a UK statutory instrument. Do any members have any comments on the notification?

Are members content to agree with the Scottish Government's decision to consent to the provisions that are set out in the notification being included in UK rather than Scottish subordinate legislation?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Thank you. That concludes the public part of our meeting and we now move into private session.

12:26

Meeting continued in private until 12:46.

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