

For the attention of the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel

Despite being a long-standing member of the RJA, I can only surmise what the rationale behind the proposal is, because the general membership of the RJA has been totally excluded. In my opinion, this is a whole Island issue as well as the RJA membership. If I were to surmise the rationale, I would say it is purely commercially based i.e. those in favour think it will make farming more profitable, despite this being very unlikely. No consideration has been given to the real meaning of 'unique' in terms of the Island Jersey cow population, isolated and therefore protected for over 250 years and to be thrown away with no guarantees of anything except the loss of that uniqueness. A report by Defra in 2002 called "First Report on the State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources" (SoWAnGR), names the Island Jersey as a "Locally Adapted and/or Distinctive Breed". I quote from the report -

"In addition some native breeds have distinctive genetic characteristics (... e.g. genetic isolation of the Jersey Island population of cattle) and are considered to have high priority for preserving and managing their genetic diversity. ... Rare Breeds International (RBI) have been particularly active in highlighting the need to identify and conserve breeds of interest for both these reasons". This is RBI's website if you wish to see their activities and role in the conservation of genetic diversity <http://www.rarebreedsinternational.org/status.html>.

The basis for the milk production figures calculated by Dr Bichard, which says the Island Jerseys are lower is also subjective. In Dr. Bichard's report, he admits that in his comparison with the UK, only 13,314 animals were recorded in a probable total of 30,000 i.e. less than 45%. In Jersey, all animals are milk-recorded. He also says that his comparisons are not just based on genetics, but also nutrition and management. How then can we make comparisons with these figures? Nutrition and management are known to have significant effects on productivity.

I don't deny that the dairy industry is going through hard times, but it has been ever since I can remember! It is nothing new, but it is not the efficiency of the Island Jersey cow that needs to be questioned, but the inefficiency of all the other areas that make up the local dairy industry. I fail to see how importing semen will change the situation. Those in favour are claiming they will not survive if we don't import right now, yet they say it will take 10 years for the so-called benefits to be evident. This presumes they can survive for the next 9 years, so how will they do this? There will be the additional costs of importing so-called genetically superior semen. If it is so good, it must surely be very expensive. Feed costs will also increase if the animals become larger – larger animals need more feed to be able to produce more milk. As we know, feed costs for both humans and animals have escalated, particularly in the last 6 months. Have any recent cost analyses been done on this?

The RJA maintain that the pedigrees of the animals by imported bulls would be pure, but there is no foolproof guarantee of this. There are several risk factors -

a) it has become very popular in overseas countries to crossbreed animals with Jerseys and in these countries (e.g. USA, Canada, New Zealand) it is the accepted norm. After several generations, the offspring can be 'graded-up' until they become known as pedigree Jersey. Even with DNA testing, there is still a risk that a non-pure Jersey could be imported.

b) mistakes have been made in the UK and other countries. I have been told of instances where a Jersey gave birth to a black and white calf, where the sire was supposedly Jersey. Just one mistake can destroy everything – it is too great a risk to take.

In addition, the proposal allows for other breeds, so there is nothing to prevent a farmer from cross-breeding. If the law were changed, the farmer would not be doing anything illegal, but the purity of the cow in Jersey is lost. The only way to be 100% sure is not to allow any import of semen.

Liquid milk imports are another serious concern not to be taken lightly. Dr. Bichard's brief specifically excluded the liquid milk imports issue – if he had been asked to include it, would he have come to the same conclusions? The case for prohibiting uncontrolled import of liquid milk is

based on “high health” status and “unique genetic purity”. If semen is imported, there is a serious risk of disease and a certainty of the loss of unique genetic purity. If liquid milk imports were to become a reality, it would undoubtedly destroy the local dairy industry.

I met two UK cattle breeders at the Island Cattle Show last Saturday, who had been part of the World Jersey Cattle Bureau Conference visit. They were speaking to me about their strong reservations if Jersey were to lift the ban on importing semen. They told me that at a major show this year in the UK an Island bred cow, brought over from Jersey two years ago, won the Inter-breed Championship - indeed a great achievement considering this class is open to all breeds of cattle, including UK Jerseys. The Island Jersey, even today, is clearly not under-achieving as has been suggested. These two cattle breeders have used Island bulls extensively in their herds and one of them was immediately very interested in buying a bull from my cow, which earlier in the day had for the second year running won the Supreme Championship over the Island.

In conclusion, I would maintain that the island of Jersey has been given the duty and privilege of safe-guarding the Island Jersey cow, internationally famed for its purity, diversity and unique status for over 250 years. How can such a minority of some 10 – 15 farmers have the power to destroy this for ever?