

# STATES OF JERSEY

## Corporate Services Sub-Panel Importation of Bovine Semen

**FRIDAY, 20th JUNE 2008**

**Panel:**

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan of St. Helier (Chairman)

Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier

Connétable P.F.M. Hanning of St. Saviour

**Witness:**

Mr. R. Le Boutillier

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan of St. Helier (Chairman):**

Good afternoon, Richard.

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

Good afternoon.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

We do not have a detailed question plan but we are here to listen, and if there is anything you can add at all.

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

Okay, I am going to be fairly brief because I do not want to repeat what a lot of other people have gone over.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

I do have one question that we missed from the previous witness which I am sure you can -- because you are also a cattle breeder of some note. The question we wanted to ask was about the confirmation of the Jersey Island cattle and any defects, particularly the confirmation of the udder -- how do you think that has come about?

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

I will certainly comment on it but I am not a well travelled -- I have had the comments from all the people who visited the Island at the conference, which they almost universally commented on the lack of

dairyness in the local cattle.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

What do you mean by dairyness?

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

Dairyness is a cow that is built to milk, the udder attachment, the legs, the frame, the ribcage.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

That was a generality, that was a general comment from breeders around the world?

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

That was a general comment from the visiting breeders, yes.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

Okay. Sorry, we missed it and I apologise.

**Mr. R. Leith:**

I may have answered it better.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

If you would like to give us -- just on that one question, Mr. Leith. Shall we just return Mr. Leith just to confirm that one, if you would not mind. So Mr. Richard Leith, for the record. Can you just tell us why you think that has happened?

**Mr. R. Leith:**

It has happened because over the years we have tried to be all things to all men. You know, we have been put into impossible positions, you know, the bulls available over here have given you milk or type but not both. What we mean by dairy character is flatness and sharpness of bull, athletic looking. The reason that the cows look like they are today is that people are feeding cows more and more for milk production. This is why they are getting fat. They are being fed beyond their genetic capabilities, so instead of putting the bulk of the feed they have been given into producing milk, they are putting it on to their backs.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

Okay, thank you very much. Okay, sorry, Richard, back to you.

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

The arguments in favour of maintaining this ban on semen importation do appear to be seriously underpinned by the concept of continuing and possibly increasing government support and protection.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

Financial?

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

Financial. In the 28 years that I have been involved in dairy farming I have never once known government or States Members to show the slightest support for anything other than helping the dairy industry to become more efficient. Why are we spending so much time right now debating the possibility of the opposite of that. Unless a rejection of this proposal is accompanied by a substantial commitment for extra funding to the industry then I - and I suspect virtually everyone in this room and a whole lot of others - will seriously consider their future. Up until this point we have never been given any indication that extra funding is being considered. I think that is a point that everyone ought to give some thought to. Another point I would like to make is I am very worried when I hear people like Deputy Duhamel at the debate at the Town Hall the other night making unsubstantiated claims on the outcome of changing this legislation. Likewise when D.E.F.R.A. (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) officials are quoted out of context by people at that debate. It seriously needs to be addressed. I would like to make the point which it is surprising to hear those comments being made, I would like to know how it is that people can go and consult with D.E.F.R.A. officials on what is basically policy of the Island. It is surely incumbent on government to address the point that was made and find out exactly what Ann Friedman, the D.E.F.R.A. official, did say, which I am sure you are going to do. I would like to also make the point that I am here as an individual farmer, I am also quite involved in Jersey Dairy and we are committed to building the new dairy. But any delay is, one, going to be a victory for the no camp because I am absolutely sure that delay part of their agenda and I am sure they are going to have many ways instigating that delay later on.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

Do you have any evidence to show that?

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

Well, the 2 points I have just made, Deputy Duhamel saying that he knows that a change in this legislation will definitely -- I do not know what his claims were based on but you just feel that at the last minute someone is going to turn up and say: "You cannot do this because it means that." I know that is why your Scrutiny Panel is here and I am sure you are going to have all the answers. I am just making sure. While a delay may not be the end of the world, the consequences for dairy farming in Jersey are not clear cut. I would strongly urge the members of the panel to carefully weigh up - I am sure you are not planning on a delay but if it did come up - the dangers of a delay. You know, if it was delayed we

could easily end up in a situation where we were committed to selling Five Oaks but had not started the move. We could end up in a no man's land between the 2 and that is a very dangerous situation. Because although the industry is completely committed at the moment, you could easily create a situation where doubt will crop up in people's minds. It is a danger.

**Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:**

You mean a delay of the decision?

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

A delay in the decision can only cause some people to seriously question their futures and if we suddenly end up in no man's land between selling Five Oaks and building a new dairy, it is a very, very dangerous time. That is when all that money is floating between A and B. In no way am I trying to sound threatening or anything like that, but there is a danger. I know there are people that say: "This must be done properly and delay does not matter because if you need 6 months, you need 6 months." But I just think there are dangers in a delay, committed as we are to seeing the Island have a new dairy.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

Do you feel that all of the existing dairy farmers, who I know must be under a certain amount of -- probably a very large amount of pressure for a decision, do you feel that the industry as a whole and all of those dairy farming participants have fully considered the history, the 220 years of no importation, all of those kinds of issues, the history and the dangers? How far do you think the purely economic pressures are having on the minds on all of the dairy farmers concerned? Do you feel that you have fully considered all of the history and the dangers, whatever they may be or not be? I am trying to seek out both sides of an argument here. I am sure you understand what I am saying.

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

I think dairy farmers have spent a lot more time considering all that than most people because it is their whole life, but they are also under serious financial pressure. Dairy farmers are under serious financial pressure period.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

Rather than me put words in your mouth, how long has this been going on?

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

How long has this pressure been going on? It has been slowly winding up for 10 years.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

So you feel that is plenty of time to consider all the implications?

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

You asked me how long the economic pressure has been building on farmers. So as the economic pressure builds that becomes more and more focused in their mind.

**Connétable P.F.M. Hanning of St. Saviour:**

Can I ask a general question really, it is probably not fair because I am putting you on your own spot, as it were. Given that nobody is perfect, no one's business practices are ever absolutely perfect, how much more improvement do you think you could get by husbandry means, by improving your husbandry as opposed to genetic means?

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

There is endless scope for improving one's husbandry and that is what we -- that is why we are farmers, that is what we endeavour to do all the time. I am possibly sort of more optimistic about the opportunities than some. I am a naturally optimistic person. There is new developments in agriculture continually, apart from a small number of costs which are quite serious in this Island, land costs, labour costs, we can achieve most of the economies that farmers can achieve in other parts of the world and our recent costings show that our variable costs are quite competitive with mainland farms. Which is quite surprising given the shipping costs and so on. So, the point I am making is that -- if you talk about the whole industry, you have always got to be talking about the more efficient farmers when we are talking about the efficiency of Jersey farming. The more efficient farmers compare very favourably with efficiencies achieved elsewhere in the U.K. (United Kingdom), but there is always room for improvement.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

Anything further to add?

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

I will make a few comments in summary once you have no more questions for me.

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Just as a farmer, and we asked Mr. Leith before, if it was a no vote and even if we did give extra subsidies to the industry, we would still have this problem that the -- you are still going to be killing loads of heifer cows probably at a time when we are told that there is need - and globally I would say --

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

A market, yes.

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

The population is growing, people have got to be fed, dairy is a staple. We would still have that problem but would that not be a problem to you? As long as -- would it be a disincentive is what I am trying to say?

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

What you are saying is if you did commit more money ...

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Yes, and so everything stays the same in monetary terms.

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

As far as I know nobody has ever suggested that.

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

No, no, I know.

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

Do you know any different?

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

No, no, as I said before, I think if we ever did offer -- the States as a whole needed to offer more money to keep the dairy it would have to be after you -- and with everything we could provide you with, that you had reached maximum efficiency. Now the argument is that to reach maximum efficiency now, you have done basically everything and you want to import semen. So one pulls against the other as far as I would be concerned.

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

Is the question what if there is a no vote with extra money?

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Yes. For everything else that we have heard, that certainly -- the heifer situation would not improve, our heifers would not be wanted?

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

That would not change at all. They would still be going. To answer your question, if there was a no vote with extra money committed, it is not just economic it is -- I am not sure.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

Investment?

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

No, just the whole idea of being told: "Look, we will give you extra money but sorry you are not allowed to import semen." Some people might like that. I would not.

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Well, it is hypothetical because there is not a proposition saying: "Well, if this does not happen you are going to get X amount." From what you are saying I would imagine it would have to be a very quick financial package put together.

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

It is a pointless financial package.

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

Okay, fine.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

Where this comes from is that it has been suggested by at least 2 witnesses that the Island should commit public money rather than do this. It has been suggested so what would you say to those people?

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

Was one of them the ex-Constable of St. Brelade?

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

Yes.

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

What would I say? I would say: "Forget it." I would say it is a bad idea. It is not just an idea that has ever been -- I have just never heard this given any credence from anyone from government. So why should it suddenly become a current idea?

**Deputy J.A. Martin:**

His other opinion was the public would not mind paying another 25 pence a litre. **[Laughter]** That was his opinion.

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

Let us see if they would mind it if something was on the shelf alongside it.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

You wanted to sum up, I think.

**Mr. R. Le Boutillier:**

Yes, just a few words. I came back to Jersey just before the last debate, a year or 2 before, and I had not been particularly involved in cattle breeding or anything before I came back to the Island and my inclination at that -- well, I had quite a strong inclination, I even wanted to go and speak at it. Just the desire to -- if that is what I was going to do, the desire to have the best tools available and have the opportunity to be the best if that is what you are going to do. My views remain pretty constant. I met my wife shortly after that. She came from a completely non farming background from the U.K. and her sort of view of all this is quite interesting. She came to the Island, she loved the Island, loved the cows, loved the farm and if you go back 10 years or so, she was really quite strongly anti the idea of importation, just through her affection for the Jersey cow. It is a thought process that is mirrored in a lot of perhaps people in the general public in the way they regard this whole episode. I smiled when you referred to me as a cattle breeder because in our family my wife is the cattle breeder and I tend to listen to her advice, and she has got very involved in it. She is completely fed up now with just -- there is just nowhere to go and she is losing heart. So to answer your question about a bit of extra money, would that be all right? No. No, it would not. She worked for you, Patrick, when she first came to Jersey selling the paint. That is about all I have got to say.

**Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:**

Well, I can understand why she is breeding cattle. **[Laughter]** Thank you very much, Richard, for you time.