

STATES OF JERSEY

Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel Proposed Importation of Bovine Semen

MONDAY, 16th JUNE 2008

Panel:

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

Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier

Connétable G.F. Butcher of St. John

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

Professor S. Hall

Ms. S. Power (Scrutiny Officer)

Witnesses:

Mr. M. de la Haye

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

Good afternoon to you.

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the panel, ladies and gentlemen.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Thank you for spending the time to come and talk to us. Introductions first, just for the sake of the recording. Could you just explain who you are, this is for the transcript and the recording and then I will introduce us although I think you know everyone.

Mr. M. de la Haye:

I am Max de la Haye from St. Brelade, a former grower and farmer.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Thank you very much. Deputy Judy Martin, Sam Power our officer, Connétable Peter Hanning, Deputy Patrick Ryan, Professor Stephen Hall, our adviser, and Connétable Graeme Butcher. Mr. de la Haye, could you first of all outline your concerns with the proposed importation of bovine semen in very general terms.

Mr. M. de la Haye:

My concerns are possibly health grounds, that an animal, which has left the Island, was a pedigree animal and no real diseases. Once it has been exported anywhere in the world, I am worried that semen may be infected with a virus of some sort. It may not even be known today, this virus, and if it is brought into the Island, I am afraid that will be the end of the Jersey breed that has been in this Island for over 200 years.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

So obviously that is a pretty doomsday type scenario that you are talking about.

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Yes, but who had heard of A.I.D.S. (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) 50 years ago.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Yes, indeed, okay, thank you. The converse, though, is that it has been claimed by many that without the importation of semen, the Island's dairy industry will not be able to maintain sufficient milk supplies generally. What are your views on that?

Mr. M. de la Haye:

I think, Sir, there are still some of those farmers in this Island and I think if they can get a just reward, which I feel they are possibly not getting at the moment because unit prices are not what they should be, because I know farmers do very, very long hours. It is totally hard work and they are really working on a small return for the capital they have invested in their farms so no doubt the price of milk to the consumer would have to go up. It is quite cheap when one compares it with other liquid commodities.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Yes, okay. You say the price of milk will have to go up.

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Yes.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

I think that is where you are coming to here as one of the steps needed to keep the Jersey cow in its current state. When looking at it from the public's perspective, what level of increase do you think that the public would be prepared to countenance?

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Within the next 2 years, I would look for a -- call it £1 at the moment. It is hovering around £1, £1.25 within 2 years.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

You would say a 25 per cent increase?

Mr. M. de la Haye:

We know that taxation has rocketed recently. Honestly, the public will complain, they always do, sort of thing, if you put a penny on a pint or even a halfpenny on a pint, but they will learn then that the pure Jersey milk will be ...

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

You think that is a price they will be prepared to pay and worth paying to keep the Island breed as it is?

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Oh, yes, yes, they will pay. Oh, yes, they will pay, yes, yes, and God help anybody who tries to import milk as well if that was your next question coming up.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Is there any other way to increase the productivity without importing bovine semen, to make that price increase --

Mr. M. de la Haye:

We are talking about animals here and you can push an animal -- I am no vet and I have no qualifications whatsoever, but you can push an animal so far but certainly no further. It is an animal we are dealing with.

Deputy J.A. Martin of St. Helier:

Well, you say in your submission that the price of milk will go up and you have just said people will pay. There is a certain group in the Jersey society who really struggle to pay the prices now so I do not - it is just my opinion - think everybody will pay to keep the Jersey milk. But the argument put to us by other people and on the legal side is that we need to keep the price of milk down, competitive with the U.K. prices which are going up because of the shortage of supply and that is one of the reasons we are keeping the Jersey herd and the Jersey milk and no importations. So I struggle with your idea that everyone will pay the price and it is contradictory to the J.C.R.A. (Jersey Competition Regulatory Authority) that you need to keep your price of milk reasonably competitive otherwise you will have a legal challenge on your hands at any big supermarket and we have no locally-owned supermarkets now and if one of them decided to challenge, unless we could prove that we are competitive, I think we would have a real problem on our hands but ...

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Then you would lose the cattle altogether, you would have no milk whatsoever produced locally and where would our countryside and Island be?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Well, we are looking at the evidence and this is where we are. We seem to be on a very fine line, damned if you do and damned if you do not, and we are looking for complete -- as I say, we are a Scrutiny Panel, we are supposed to be looking for evidence and you made a statement there and said: "God help anybody who tries to import liquid milk." Why did you make that statement?

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Why did I make it? We know there are other liquid refreshments that have gone up terrifically in the last 2 or 3 years. Milk has not and it is a basic food.

Deputy J.A. Martin:

What were you comparing, sorry, you said "other", what are we comparing?

Mr. M. de la Haye:

I was thinking of alcoholic drinks. We know that alcoholic drinks have rocketed in price over here and what good do they do, compared with milk?

Deputy J.A. Martin:

Yes, okay.

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

Could I take you back to your first concerns where you were saying basically that the main worry would be importation of unknown diseases.

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Yes, it is, yes.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Given the controls on semen that would be introduced, have you any basis -- I know you are saying A.I.D.S. was unknown 50 years ago but as far as we are aware, there are no other unknown diseases in the cattle in the world that we have at the moment and presumably the bulls would be monitored for diseases if they become apparent before the semen could be brought in or are you saying that there is something lurking there now that we do not know about and has not appeared?

Mr. M. de la Haye:

No, as I said, I have no qualifications on veterinary practices or any medical practices or anything like that but I am concerned that in the future one could turn up and if we can keep our Island free ...

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Have you had any experience of that?

Mr. M. de la Haye:

No, no, but the Jersey cows have always been in Jersey so it is unlikely that they would be exported, yes.

Professor S. Hall:

You are full of hypothetical situations.

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Oh, indeed, but it has happened too in the human race.

Professor S. Hall:

Yes, but against that, there is an angle on this where your own experience is decidedly relevant, if I may say so, and what you are saying is that a nasty disease coming in, okay, this hypothetical disease presumably has come from a population which is able to cope with it otherwise we would know about this disease, okay. If we are importing semen from other population and it is carrying nasty diseases --

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Yes, that is right, yes.

Professor S. Hall:

-- then that population that the semen came from is not showing the disease, okay, by definition, because --

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Yes, but what diseases have they got that we do not know about.

Professor S. Hall:

Yes, but this is the point where we can begin to be a bit more definite. Are you saying that the Jersey breed, because of its isolation, is liable to be particularly susceptible to imported diseases?

Mr. M. de la Haye:

No, they are not susceptible at the moment but what comes in with the semen may be and once it is in -- so like that we can keep our Jersey cow 100 per cent because there would be no other bovine animal or semen or call it what you wish, imported.

Professor S. Hall:

No, what I am getting at is what would be your view on disease resistance generally in the Jersey cattle population on this Island? Would you say that, in your judgment, it is likely to be more resistant to disease generally or less with other cattle populations elsewhere?

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Yes, I think -- as I say, I have no qualifications for this one, I just wanted to add that rider. We are free of disease now. There was quite a bit of T.B. (tuberculosis) years ago in cattle and before they were exported, they always had to be tested and I know my own experience with the T.B. is we sold a couple of cattle overseas, had them tested, and they reacted. I could not understand why. So all the farm workers and ourselves were all tested. One farm worker had a bit of T.B. and that was the cause of it. He did not know he had T.B. It was only when we all went through the test.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Taking that to its logical conclusion, the fact that the herd was in Jersey did not stop the infection.

Mr. M. de la Haye:

No, but T.B. is world-wide, not only in the animal kingdom. Unfortunately it appears in the human kingdom as well, yes.

The Connétable of St. Saviour:

Yes.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Well, thank you very much.

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Could I just add one thing. You have noted the other points that I brought out in my submission?

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

In your submission, yes, we have.

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Yes, fine.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

If there is anything that you particularly want to talk about --

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Yes, those are the ...

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

-- please do so now.

Mr. M. de la Haye:

No, that is it, just as long as you bring out the other points because I know of mistakes that have been made in the past which could have ruined sections of Jersey agriculture.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Right, we will certainly ...

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Just to bear those points in mind when you do your report.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Our report, yes. Okay, we will do that, thank you very much. Thank you very much for your time.

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Okay, gentlemen, ladies.

Deputy P.J.D. Ryan:

Thank you very much.

Mr. M. de la Haye:

Okay.