RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Friday 8 December 2000
(*Afternoon*)

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RURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
† 35th Meeting 2000, Session 1

CONVENER

*Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con)
*Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Mr Duncan Hamilton (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
*Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP)
Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Mr John Munro (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
*Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)
Cathy Peattie (Falkirk East) (Lab)
*Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO ATTENDED:

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)

WITNESSES

Mr Ralph Cobham (Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability)
Mr Bruce Cowe (Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability)
Dr Bob Crabtree (Macaulay Land Use Research Institute)
Earl of Dalhousie (Scottish Landowners Federation)
Professor Margaret Gill (Macaulay Land Use Research Institute)
Jonathan Hall (Scottish Landowners Federation)
Mr Ian Melrose (National Farmers Union of Scotland)
Ms Denise Walton (Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability)
Mr James Withers (National Farmers Union of Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Richard Davies

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Tracey Hawe

ASSISTANT CLERK

Jake Thomas

LOCATION

Easterbrook Hall, Dumfries

† 34th Meeting 2000, Session 1—held in private.

Scottish Parliament

Rural Affairs Committee

Friday 8 December 2000

(*Afternoon*)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 13:31*]

The Convener (Alex Johnstone): We have reached the appointed hour, ladies and gentlemen. The committee is delighted to be in Dumfries for the final day of the first wave of evidence sessions on the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Bill. We are here because the committee felt it important to take at least one day's evidence in an area that the bill might affect. After the committee made that decision, Elaine Murray was especially keen for us to visit her constituency.

We begin by taking apologies from committee members John Munro, Duncan Hamilton and Des McNulty. We believe that Cathy Peattie had intended to be present, but has been tied up by other business, so she has been added to the list of apologies. In addition to the committee members, we have as our guest David Mundell, a member of the Scottish Parliament. He is not a member of the committee but is entitled to sit in on any committee as a member of the Parliament. It has been the committee's tradition that visiting members are welcome to take part in proceedings.

Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Convener: Item 1 on the agenda is evidence taking on the Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Bill, in preparation for a stage 1 report. The first panel to give evidence contains the Earl of Dalhousie, representing the Scottish Landowners Federation, and Ian Melrose, representing the National Farmers Union of Scotland. They are accompanied by Jonathan Hall, on behalf of the SLF, and James Withers, on behalf of the NFUS, as advisers. I invite the Earl of Dalhousie to make a short opening statement, to be followed by Ian Melrose.

Earl of Dalhousie (Scottish Landowners Federation): Thank you for asking the SLF to give evidence to the committee. I will make two points in my brief introduction. First, good keepering is essential for biodiversity. That includes not only fox control, but all other aspects of the management of an estate. Secondly, if we are to employ keepers to do that important task, they need to be able to produce an income, which has traditionally come from letting and shooting. I will briefly mention my home, Invermark, which employs five keepers and two trainee keepers. It costs £230,000 a year to run and, without the revenues from let grouse shooting, we would be unable to survive and keeper it.

Mr Ian Melrose (National Farmers Union of Scotland): On behalf of the NFUS, I thank the committee for the opportunity to give evidence. The committee already has the union's submission, which outlines our views on the bill. My purpose and main concern is to draw attention to the bill's impact on the practical application of pest control in farming, particularly in Scotland's more remote areas. Much has been heard about the animal welfare aspect of the bill. Farmers do not seek to eradicate the fox population. They merely wish to obtain a clearly defined legal framework in which to control that population. It is precisely for reasons of animal welfare that effective control is necessary—to protect stock from unnecessary suffering. We believe that the use of dogs underground is a necessary control measure in extended rough country.

As the committee knows, the Scottish Executive released the latest income figures for Scotland's hill farms a week ago. They make stark reading. The Executive forecasts that the average hill sheep farm in Scotland's less favoured areas will have to survive on an income of £700. That is not our figure; it is the Government's. After a year's work, a hill sheep farmer will have £700 with which to make a living and reinvest in his business. I ask that we discuss the implications of criminalising the legitimate means by which farmers seek to protect their stock in the context of that income figure. It is Scotland's hill sheep farmers who are most at risk from the measure.

The Convener: We now have an opportunity to question the witnesses.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Have the witnesses seen the new report from the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute? It estimates that the impact of the bill might be a loss of up to 332 jobs. Do the witnesses believe that that is an accurate figure? If not, will they say what they think would be the bill's impact on employment in Scotland?

Earl of Dalhousie: I do not believe that the figure is accurate, because it relates mainly to the hunting scene and, as we know, fox control goes way beyond hunting in the rural economy. As I said, if foxes could not be controlled on an estate such as mine, grouse shooting could become unviable. Three keepers might be lost, leaving only two. If the younger keepers left, four children at the local school might leave. The local school has only 13 children anyway. That would mean that the schoolteacher might be lost, and part-time

employment at the school, such as driving the school bus, might be affected. The village shop might become unviable. The knock-on effect is large. However, to be fair to the MLURI, I should add that it was asked to produce the statistics at short notice and without the right briefing, in my opinion. The statistics were honestly produced, but I do not think that they show the effect on the rural environment.

Mr Melrose: There is another dimension to the economic situation that the hill farming sector faces. As the union's legal adviser, I regret to say that many of the employment law queries that members send me concern redundancy procedures. That is a fact of life nowadays, given the review of the economics of farm businesses overall, but particularly in the hill farming sector, which is suffering severe depression in its margins.

Mr Rumbles: Am I right to say that neither the SLF nor the NFUS has produced an estimate of the economic impact other than anecdotal evidence?

Mr Melrose: That is correct for the NFUS. We cannot be quite as precise as that.

Jonathan Hall (Scottish Landowners Federation): There is always deliberation about the professionalism of any study and the integrity of statistics. However, when we consider income and job losses of the order of 200 or 300, we are not so much concerned with the absolute figure, which is minimal in terms of overall Scottish rural employment, as with the relative impact on remote, disparate, rural communities, which could be severe. The Earl of Dalhousie has already alluded to the fact that the bill could lead to two or three men in his employ losing their jobs, which would have a dramatic effect in what are acute circumstances. We should all be concerned about the relative, rather than the absolute, impact of employment loss.

Mr James Withers (National Farmers Union of Scotland): On the economics of hill sheep farms, Ian Melrose mentioned the Executive's figure of £700—that is this year's forecast income for a hill sheep farm to reinvest in the business, which the farmer will live off. Hill sheep farms have a lamb production rate of roughly 75 per cent to 80 per cent. That figure can decrease to 50 per cent in cases where fox predation is bad. It does not take a rocket scientist to work out that that figure of £700 could be cut dramatically were the fox population to increase.

The Convener: Before moving on to the next questioner, I encourage everyone with a mobile phone to ensure that it is switched off. That goes for members of the committee as well as for members of the public.

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): I welcome fellow members of the Rural Affairs Committee and our guests to the Dumfries constituency. I am sorry that, because of the weather, they have not been able to appreciate the full beauty of Dumfries, but I hope that they get some idea of what the constituency is like and, in particular, of what this facility at Easterbrook Hall—which is now a university site and a business park—is like. I am pleased that they are here.

Evidence has been submitted to the committee by supporters of the bill that predation by foxes is not really that much of a problem for sheep farmers and that the foxes are picking up dead animals, not killing live ones. What is your view on the correctness of that evidence?

It has also been suggested that there are alternative methods of fox control. In particular, lamping has been suggested as an appropriate alternative. I would appreciate your comments on the appropriateness of that technique of fox control on the type of terrain on which you operate.

Mr Withers: On the statement that foxes do not take lambs on farms, I have a case study and, if members will bear with me, I will show the committee some photos. They are not designed for shock value; they show the practical consequences and dangers of foxes coming into farms. The pictures are of a farm in Sanquhar, Dumfriesshire, not far from here. They show some of the damage done to lambs on the farm. One fox killed 53 lambs in 14 days—and the lambs were not sick or ailing. The bottom photo—I will pass them all round—shows a red mark on the back of a lamb's neck. That was put on the lamb by the farmer when the lamb was moved, fit and healthy, from its original holding when it was three days old. With your permission, convener, I will leave the photos for committee members to look at in their own time.

Dr Murray: You would therefore not agree that foxes are just picking up dead lambs.

Mr Withers: I certainly would not agree with that. I also dispute that all 53 of the killed lambs were ailing.

Mr Melrose: Part of Dr Murray's question was about different techniques for management of the fox population. We would consider lamping and shooting with rifles to be the most efficient way of controlling foxes. Nevertheless, because of the difficult terrain in the south-west of Scotland—and indeed in the western Highlands—we consider the use of terriers underground still to be essential, notwithstanding the reservations of the promoter of the bill about that method of control. We are anxious that that efficient method of control in difficult terrain be maintained.

Earl of Dalhousie: I have two points on Dr Murray's question. First, foxes attack healthy lambs and they also have a serious impact on ground-nesting birds, including those special and precious birds—not just game birds—that live and breed on the moorland edge. The biodiversity argument for controlling foxes is therefore very important.

Secondly, although lamping is a key element in fox control, it is not practical in forests and some other areas. If a vixen has been shot and if her cubs are in a den, the most humane method of dealing with that seems to be the use of terriers. Otherwise, the cubs will just be left to die of starvation.

13:45

Dr Murray: Could you say more about what happens when terriers are used? There has been some dispute about whether the terriers are fighting with the foxes below ground. In the terrain that you are managing, how are terriers used?

Earl of Dalhousie: It is a great myth that terriers are used for fighting the foxes underground. By and large, terriers are pets as well as working dogs. I gather that members have been to Invercauld and have seen the terriers there. They will note the great pains that gamekeepers take to avoid having the terriers fighting with grown, adult foxes—it can be a serious problem. The story that has been put about does not reflect gamekeepers' practice. It is certainly true that some very small cubs are killed by terriers underground, but that does not involve any serious damage to the terrier.

Mr Melrose: We should disabuse people of the notion that fox control is a leisure or sporting activity. It involves skilled men using a particular kind of dog for an express purpose. As well as being skilled, the men are also very patient, because they have to endure rotten weather and attend to the earth for a considerable time. In addition to lamping and shooting, farmers need that other element of fox control. The use of terriers is essential in the areas that we have been discussing.

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): We are here today to discuss the economic impact of fox predation. Does the NFU have any figures to show the annual economic impact on the hill farming industry?

Mr Melrose: Not as such, but we have figures for individual farms. When we took evidence from our branches before submitting our views on the bill, we received accounts about the economic impact, an example of which I can give you now, if you wish. It is from our Argyll branch and demonstrates the impact of fox predation. James Withers has already alluded to the rapid depletion in lambing production as a consequence of fox predation. That is repeated in evidence from various branches, not just in economically fragile areas such as the western Highlands, but from throughout Scotland.

Alex Fergusson: Lord Dalhousie mentioned biodiversity. In some of the evidence that we have received over the past three weeks, some people have maintained that the bill would have an extreme effect on the biodiversity of upland and mountain Scotland. Other people have maintained that alternative methods of fox control are available, which would mean that the bill would not have such an impact. I invite you to comment on that and, if you could, on what the economic impact might be.

Earl of Dalhousie: This is an argument about the straw that breaks the camel's back. The bill would seriously affect fox control management in various areas of Scotland, especially where there is a great deal of forestry—on Deeside, for example, where there are also many grouse moors.

If hill packs and terriers could not be used in such areas, there would be a serious impact, although more open country might be able to survive slightly better with lamping. However, that brings the moral dilemma of whether to leave fox cubs in a hole. A total ban on fox control during the cubbing season would have a serious impact on the ability to manage foxes, as that is the time when nearly all hill foxes are managed.

This is a difficult matter, and we have to be quite specific about it. Once we get below the critical mass—when there is no longer any viable sporting use for an estate—there cease to be gamekeepers, because people cannot employ people for no return. That is the critical moment.

Deeside is one area in which the bill would have a rapid result. Other areas are more open, and probably could survive a bit longer, but foxes will start coming out of the afforested areas. There is a snowball effect—eventually, the bill would have a devastating effect on upland management. Many organisations, such as RSPB Scotland, control vermin such as foxes, crows, stoats and weasels. It is essential to biodiversity to have those controls and proper keepering.

Mr Melrose: On the bill's economic impact, in my opening words I mentioned the income forecast for the specialist hill sheep sector. Pest control, which is a means of limiting damage, is imperative. It does not take much to imagine the effect of its withdrawal. The way in which less favoured areas receive subsidies has been reviewed—subsidies will be calculated no longer on a headage basis, but on an area basis. That is creating a lot of difficulty, as you can imagine, in

refining the way in which the sector is supported, as decreed by Europe and applied in this country. As the Earl of Dalhousie said, we are talking about the straw that breaks the camel's back. The income of £700 this year for sheep farmers is a lot better than the income of £100 last year, but it is not sustainable.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I will pursue the impact on the Borders economy if Mr Watson's bill is passed. Just before this meeting opened formally, committee members had the chance to hear first hand of the impact that the bill would have on a number of locals and local businesses. We heard from Wendy Turnbull, who is a groom and whose job is entirely dependent on hunting. She said that she would lose her job. She was also concerned about losing her home, which is a tied house. I was not previously aware of the large number of tied houses in the Borders that are occupied by tenants whose jobs are dependent on hunting. Would it be too alarmist to say that, under the bill, we could face a mini lowland clearance of people who will be cleared from their tied houses?

Earl of Dalhousie: That is a new one to me and, I suspect, to our rural policy adviser. Clearly, where tied houses are involved, we may see what you suggest, although we have no research on the number of those houses.

Jonathan Hall: We do not have a clear indication but, to use the jargon, there is a multiplier effect. If the hunt disappears in the Borders, Dumfries and Galloway or any location, those who are employed directly or indirectly will feel the pinch. In this instance, that pinch is life changing. If you could lose your job and your house, the bill will clearly have a dramatic effect on your future.

Fergus Ewing: I also wish to ask about the impact on local businesses, representatives of which spoke to us just before this meeting. One of those was Marjory Renwick, whose livery business depends entirely on looking after horses that are used for hunting. The impact on local businesses would be widespread. Indeed, it is hard to identify local businesses that will not feel the impact of the bill one way or the other. What is the view of the NFU and the SLF on the impact on local businesses that are not directly engaged in providing hunting services?

Mr Melrose: I come from Peebles. I was brought up in the village of Broughton in upper Tweed. My ancestors were all shepherds in the upper Tweed area. I am conscious of the economic shrinkage in our area as traditional employment, such as that provided by the mills, has gone. We are becoming a dormitory town for Edinburgh. That kind of economic depression is reflected elsewhere in the Borders, as a consequence of the decline in traditional mill employment, so any economic impact bears disproportionately heavily on these communities. Sadly, the Borders as a whole faces that situation.

Fergus Ewing talked about employed people losing their houses. I mentioned earlier the extent to which our members are inquiring about reviewing their businesses and making employees redundant. If there is continued pressure on hill farms, I am afraid that single shepherds will go. That is serious for local schools and so on.

Fergus Ewing: My wife spent much of her childhood in Broughton, so perhaps I can speak to you later about that.

I have a final question, which I wish to be clear about for the record. From the NFU submission, it is plain that the union believes that it is essential that foxes are controlled. Does the NFU also completely oppose Mr Watson's proposal to ban fox hunting on mounted horses for sport?

Mr Melrose: Yes. Forget the panoply of the mounted hunt. A lot of the people involved in that will not see the fox; they may not even see the hounds. We still need the hunt as an element of fox control, together with lamping and shooting and terriers underground. The hunt can also take fallen stock and a huntsman with a few hounds can flush out foxes. The issue is not just about the panoply of the hunt.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Your evidence stresses the impact of an increase in fox numbers. We have been given evidence that foot packs and hill packs will not be affected by the bill. We have also been given evidence that hill packs dispatch 90 per cent of the foxes that they find, whereas mounted hunts dispatch only 10 per cent. Do you feel that you may be overestimating the impact of the bill in disregarding the evidence that it will not affect hill packs?

Earl of Dalhousie: As I understand it, hill packs will be affected by the bill, unless it is amended. That is a serious consequence. It is always difficult to give a precise figure, because we are speculating. Cumulatively over the years, however, if you take away people's ability to manage the fox population efficiently, you will cause serious damage to agriculture and the environment and destroy rural jobs. There may not then be enough hill keepers to manage deer effectively, which will mean that you will require more draconian measures to do that. The whole thing will start to fall apart. It is difficult, once you start meddling with a system that is established and works, to know the full consequences of those actions. The bill meddles with the system so substantially that, unless it is amended beyond all recognition, there is a risk of fox populations becoming completely out of control.

Mr Melrose: We have to remember that, where they are necessary, hill packs are the effective means of control. To control foxes in rough country by lamping and shooting is not practical, which is why we are concerned by the proposal to outlaw hill packs.

Rhoda Grant: We have been told in evidence from Mike Watson and others that hill packs are the best way of dispatching foxes. The bill may need to be amended at stage 2, but they said that it is not their intention to ban hill packs. Does that change the opinion that you have just given?

Earl of Dalhousie: Hill packs are one way of managing foxes. The method is particularly important where there are forests. On open hills, it is less relevant. Terrier work is also a vital part of fox control. If you say that it is all right to hunt with hill packs but not with other packs, it seems to me that the bill is falling apart, but that is for you to decide.

Rhoda Grant: As I understand it, hill packs use dogs to flush out foxes to waiting guns. That is the difference.

Earl of Dalhousie: Normally they flush the fox out. From time to time they catch the fox. They also sometimes use dogs to catch wounded foxes that have been shot and not killed. Foot packs, made up of hounds, kill foxes, although foxes are often shot.

Jonathan Hall: The fact that there is a range of fox control methods indicates that Scotland has a diverse landscape. The different methods have evolved over generations, because they are the most practical and effective forms of pest control available to those with the responsibility for land management in particular locations. If we take away those options, we will remove people's ability to fulfil their responsibilities, which extend to the maintenance and preservation of biodiversity in Scotland's landscapes.

14:00

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I want to address the economic impact of a ban, should the bill be passed. We know that mounted hunts are not particularly efficient at controlling pests. However, they do kill foxes. If mounted hunts were banned in the Borders, would landowners employ more gamekeepers to control the foxes?

Earl of Dalhousie: You would have to put that question to individual landowners. In some circumstances, they probably would. Many foxes are killed at cubbing time, early in the year. Farmers would also have to take more responsibility for fox control. Many farmers do not have gamekeepers and must do the job themselves. Estates that are trying to keep a shoot going might have to employ more gamekeepers. It is difficult to say without being estate specific.

Mr Rumbles: From the evidence that we have received, I understand that the bill would not cover foot packs. Although the bill allows people to stalk a wild mammal and flush it from cover with dogs, it does not say anything about dispatching it—which is what happens with foot packs.

In the evidence that we have received so far, a distinction has been made between land management and predator control—which was emphasised by the Scottish Gamekeepers Association—and fox hunting for sport. We will, therefore, have to consider two issues when we deliberate on our stage 1 report—predator control for the effective land management of Scotland, and hunting foxes purely for sport. I would like both the SLF and the National Farmers Union of Scotland to say whether they believe that there is any difference between the economic impact of banning predator control and that of banning hunting for sport. Members of the committee will have to wrestle with that question, as there appears to be a difference between those two things. Do you believe that to be the case?

Mr Melrose: Our organisation is not involved in the sporting side of land management. There is some co-operation between farmers and hunts, in that farmers have made provision for hunts to pass through their land by shifting stock out of the fields through which a hunt is likely to go, and by opening and closing gates and so on. Huntsmen, for their part, may come with dogs to flush out a fox if a farmer is concerned that there is one on the hill.

The notion that foot packs exist solely for sporting purposes is open to question. As I said, huntsmen are skilled men who are brought in because farmers do not have the means or the skill to kill a fox themselves—although often they do.

Mr Rumbles: I will refocus my question, as I think that you have misunderstood slightly what I meant. Many of us regard the activities of the foot packs and the gamekeepers as practical land management. However, I would like to focus on the mounted hunts, particularly in the Borders. Some of the evidence that we have received suggests that those exist for sport. The committee could draw a distinction between hunting as pest control and hunting for sport, although I have no idea whether it will. Would the economic impact of a ban be the same for both activities, or would it be greater in the case of one than in the case of the other?

Jonathan Hall: I would hazard a guess that it would be difficult to compare the two. However,

even if a distinction were made between hunting as a sport and hunting as practical land management, it is beyond dispute that the impact of a ban on the economy and on employment would be significant and real—as the committee has heard at this meeting and previously. That applies both in the Highlands, where there would be a loss of gamekeeper employment, and in the Borders hunts. It is not a question of comparing the two activities—a ban on either would have a negative effect on rural economies.

Dr Murray: I want to follow up on the same point. Had Lord Watson introduced a bill that sought purely to ban mounted fox hunting as a sport, what difference would there have been between the economic effect of that and the economic effect of the bill as it stands? Do you think that if Lord Watson had decided to target only mounted fox hunting as a sport, that would still have had a significant economic effect?

Earl of Dalhousie: The effect of the bill would have been more limited if it had been restricted to mounted hunts. However, it would then have been entirely political and would have had nothing to do with animal welfare.

Fergus Ewing: On 14 November, we took evidence from Mr Douglas Batchelor of the Scottish Campaign Against Hunting with Dogs. I asked him whether he accepted that foxes are pests and that they frequently kill lambs and game birds. In reply to that question he said:

"My experience was that loss is caused by the weather, the nutritional state of the ewes and the general quality of shepherding. The fox did not feature on the barometer of problems." —[*Official Report*, *Rural Affairs Committee*, 14 November 2000; c 1321.]

What is the NFUS's response to that?

Mr Melrose: I reject it totally. I accept that there may be unfortunate instances of bad husbandry. However, it is in the interests of the farmer and the shepherd to ensure that their stock is cared for, for obvious economic purposes, even though their current margins are pretty minimal. I do not accept that bad husbandry is the cause of excessive lamb losses.

Earl of Dalhousie: Where there is effective fox control, there are comparatively few losses of lambs to foxes. At my home, we have effective fox control and it is quite rare for lambs to be taken by foxes. They are more likely to be taken by visiting dogs. However, in other places, where fox control is not in place, there can be a huge loss of lambs. That is well documented and beyond doubt.

The Convener: As there are no further questions, I thank the gentlemen from the SLF and the National Farmers Union of Scotland for helping us with our investigation.

It is my pleasure to welcome Ralph Cobham, Denise Walton and Bruce Cowe, who are here on behalf of the Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability.

Mr Ralph Cobham (Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability): I thank the committee for inviting us to give evidence. I begin by introducing the chairman of the Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability, Bruce Cowe, and the co-ordinator, Denise Walton. I represent the foundation as a consultant.

I have a short introduction. We are independent and impartial consultants, and were asked to examine hunting in the Borders in a rather different way—to look down the telescope in the opposite direction. Our primary focus, as part of a larger research project, has been to consider ways of conserving and generating jobs in the Borders that relate to the rural economy. At no time have we had a specific remit to consider the impact of a ban on hunting, although in the course of our work we have considered some sensitive areas. Members will see in our report that we have considered issues relating to seemingly vulnerable trades and to a category of participant that is often overlooked, namely the non-mounted followers—people who follow hounds for pleasure on foot, or by car or motorbike. There are many non-mounted followers.

We were required to take account of particular features of the rural economy. First, we considered the conservation and creation of all types of job, including part-time, casual and seasonal jobs. Secondly, we considered the retention and enhancement of opportunities for recreation, leisure and sporting and social activities in the countryside. Our research has drawn attention to the fact that many hunt activity days happen in the inclement winter months, when little else goes on in the countryside. Finally, we considered the contribution that countryside sports and other rural activities make to the highly valued landscape of the Borders as a means of attracting tourists and businesses and providing enjoyment to the people who live there. We have not considered the impact of a ban directly, but we have estimated the total number of full-time equivalents—the total number of jobs associated with hunting as it was practised in 1998-99—that would be affected.

Mr Rumbles: Will you remind us of the estimate of the total number of full-time equivalent jobs that would be put at risk if the bill were passed?

14:15

Mr Cobham: If members read the paragraph on employment in our submission, they will see that we estimate the total number of full-time

equivalents that are sustained by direct employment by the seven hunts and the mounted subscribers and by the trade and service organisations in the Borders to be between 127 and 156. That translates to between 255 and 325 jobs.

We are not saying that all those jobs would be lost automatically if there were a ban on hunting, because we did not ask that question. We did not ask people how many of the people they currently employ would lose their jobs in the event of a ban—with one exception. We asked 54 major trade and service organisations how many of the people they employ would be at risk. We identified about 15 or 16 full-time equivalents in those organisations that would be at risk, which translates to about 21 jobs.

Members will have picked up from our report that mounted participants purchase goods and services from many trade and service organisations. We identified 650 such organisations in the Borders and a further 400 outwith the Borders. The seven hunts in the Borders also purchase trades and services from organisations in addition to those patronised by the mounted followers. The total number of trade and service organisations from which goods and services are purchased in the Borders is probably in excess of 700. The 51 organisations from which we received specific information about vulnerable jobs—the 15 to 16 FTEs—do not represent the total picture. However, they give an indication of what the principal organisations—the most favoured farriers and most frequently used vets and livery stables—would lose.

Mr Rumbles: If the committee recommended the bill to the Parliament and the Parliament voted in favour of a ban, it would therefore have a significant effect on many organisations.

Mr Cobham: Many businesses would, to some extent, experience a downturn. They would have to make adjustments, to diversify and to look for other clients. They would have to consider providing other services. The specific organisations that we identified, such as livery and farrier businesses, would be affected significantly. Unprompted, two of the organisations said that they would seek compensation. Other businesses said that they would seek assistance from the Government for retraining for diversification. Those comments were totally unprompted—we did not pose a specific question on that.

Dr Murray: The paragraph on farm diversification in the submission says that equestrian activities feature

"in the top ten on-farm income-generating diversification activities."

It also states:

"For the 60% of farmers who propose to diversify over the next three years, equestrian activities dominated the list of the most promising forms of diversification."

That survey was carried out in 1998-99.

Before the meeting, we heard from a groom and from someone who owned a livery stable that specialised in hunting activities. They felt that their activities would be threatened by the bill. How will the bill affect equestrian-related diversification? When the survey was conducted, there must have been a feeling that a bill of this type might be introduced.

Mr Cobham: People have diversified into three activities that are related to hunting: livery services; provision of grazing; and the provision of straw, hay and feed.

We had discussions of approximately one hour with 105 randomly selected farmers from across the Borders. They were selected using six transects—five north-south and one east-west along the Tweed. They told us that the supply of hay, straw and feed is seen as a means of diversification for the future, as is the provision of grazing lands and the provision of livery for casual riders and people who hunt. Increasingly, there has been a move away from direct employment on a mounted follower's premises to the use of livery yards.

Dr Murray: When they thought about areas into which they might diversify, were people identifying hunting-related activities or other possibilities?

Mr Cobham: They were all considering diversifying into general equestrian activity, but some were considering hunting in particular. Hunting is perceived by farmers who are interested in diversification as being one of the components of expansion into equestrianism. If hunting were to be stopped, the aspirations of those wishing to diversify into the equestrian fields would be diminished—usually, at least one member of the family has an ability with and knowledge of horses.

Dr Murray: Do you have an idea of the amount of money that would be involved or what the knock-on effects might be?

Mr Cobham: Not to hand.

Richard Lochhead: Clearly, your organisation is concerned only with the rural economy in the Borders. Given that the economic difficulties of the area have been in the news a lot recently, I would like to know where hunting comes in the pecking order of all the activities that make a contribution to that economy.

Mr Cobham: That can be considered in a number of ways. One of those ways relates to the

trade and service organisations. We have estimated that approximately 25 per cent of the total number of trade and service organisations that operate in the Borders are involved in one way or another in servicing people who hunt, either because they are mounted followers or because they provide hunting in one of the five local hunts—there are seven hunts in total.

Another aspect relates to the number of recreational or activity days. We have estimated that between 18,500 and 26,500 activity days take place in the Borders as a result of hunting in a year. That compares directly—and amazingly—with the amount of activity that takes place in the Borders for people of 16 years and over in rugby and sailing and other water sports. That gives an idea of the relative importance of the activities. Hunting makes up about 10 per cent of the time devoted to outdoor activities in the area. It is not a major sport, but neither is it an insignificant one.

Richard Lochhead: Where do those statistics come from and how old are they?

Ms Denise Walton (Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability): The reference to the proportion of Borders industries that are affected by hunting comes from the Scottish Enterprise Borders census of employment of 1995.

Mr Cobham: The statistics about the relative standing of the various activities came from sportscotland and also from a UK day visitor survey that was published in 1998.

Richard Lochhead: I would like to put hunting into a historical context. How does the significance of hunting to the Borders compare with the significance that it had 10, 50 or 100 years ago?

Mr Cobham: The research that I have undertaken related to a specific year. I point out in the conclusion that decision makers need time series information to answer a question such as the one that you ask. I do not have an answer to that; my colleagues might.

Ms Walton: We have no information on that.

Richard Lochhead: What is your gut feeling? Is hunting more or less popular in the Borders now than it was 100 years ago?

Mr Bruce Cowe (Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability): I think that the supply of feed to the hunting community could be becoming more important to farmers, given today's economic situation. I cannot answer your question on quantity. I should point out that hunting-related activity provides the farmer with winter business, which would disappear if the hunting fraternity were not there—the horses would simply be roughed off.

Mr Cobham: We know that the number of farmers has been declining. As farmers leave the land, the number of people who are involved in hunting will probably decline. Hunting is a significant activity of farmers and might almost be viewed as one of the perks of the job—indeed, for many people, it is the only perk of the job. Balancing that, as other sectors of society have become wealthier and as the UK Pony Club—the training ground for many young hunters—has become more active, there has been an increase in the number of non–farmers hunting.

On balance, because of the post-war trends, I would say that there has been an increase in hunting activity. That is my gut feeling.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): As I have not been a part of the inquiry from the start, I did not feel that it was appropriate for me to ask the sort of detailed questions that other members have.

I would like you to clarify a point that I do not think has come across. The phrase "the Borders" is bandied about in the Scottish Parliament as having a much wider meaning than the definition that you are using. When your report refers to the Borders, it means only the Scottish Borders local authority area. It does not refer to Dumfriesshire, where we are today, or to Galloway. Can you confirm that the numbers that you identify in your report apply only to that one part of the south of Scotland? How do you think your report's findings would apply to Dumfries and Galloway, which is a much more rural part of Scotland? People in this area do not have the opportunity to commute to Edinburgh for work or for social activity.

14:30

Mr Cobham: You are absolutely correct. The research that we have undertaken relates specifically to the statutorily defined Borders region. It is particular to that statutory definition. The research that we undertook related to the five local hunts within that statutory area, and to the two north Northumberland hunts that use the Borders region country for part of their hunting activity. To that extent, people living outside the Borders have been covered in the research.

David Mundell: You have quoted numbers for that geographical area, but the south of Scotland covers a much larger area than the Borders. Is it likely that numbers across the south of Scotland would be much greater when Dumfries and Galloway are taken into account?

Mr Cobham: I shall ask my colleague to comment on that.

Ms Walton: By implication, the answer would be yes. However, land use in Dumfries and Galloway is different from that in the Borders. We decided to

focus on the Borders because we are Borders farmers and land managers. The Borders lends itself beautifully to a study of this type, and the thrust of our project was a detailed audit of what makes the Borders countryside tick apart from the production of food and timber.

I understand that there are only two foxhound packs in Dumfriesshire, but there is also a great deal of shooting. If you wanted to consider the situation in Dumfriesshire, it would probably be more accurate to get some indication of the impact on shooting from what we have done than to use our research on hunting. However, I would warn against taking the results for a region that has a different demography and land use and superimposing them on another area to get a guesstimate of indications for that region. It has been suggested that the methodology that Ralph Cobham has helped us to produce could be used in other areas of rural Scotland. I know that that does not answer your question specifically. I would warn against making direct comparisons, but what we have done might give some useful indicators for Dumfries and Galloway.

Rhoda Grant: You have obviously carried out a great deal of work on economic development. If hunting were banned, what other activities could take its place?

Mr Cobham: That is all part and parcel of the diversification study that we undertook at the outset of our study of hunting, shooting, angling, tourism and recreation in general in the Borders. We have identified the top 10 diversification activities that have already occurred and the aspirations of farmers for new diversification. With considerable help from the Scottish Borders Tourist Board, we have identified that bed and breakfast is an already saturated market, so we have been trying to divert farmers' attention away from bed and breakfast unless they have something very special to offer that other bed-and-breakfast operators are not already offering.

Self-catering accommodation, wildlife viewing from hides and farm open days are among the non-equestrian and non-hunting diversification opportunities that farmers and their wives and families have indicated that they are interested in. However, the equestrian dimension, including hunting, has stood out as being a major focus of interest for farmers and their families.

Rhoda Grant: Have you considered drag hunting, riding or any other equestrian activities that could take the place of hunting?

Mr Cobham: We have had no intimation from any of the farmers whom we consulted that they were interested in diversifying into drag hunting.

Ms Walton: Drag hunting was not part of our project. We were conducting an audit of what currently exists and giving farmers the option of telling us how they feel they could diversify in future. We did not carry out that work because of an impending ban on hunting, but we carried it out simply because of the downturn in farm incomes.

Dr Murray: In your answer to Rhoda Grant, you mentioned tourism. How much tourism is being brought into the Borders by country sports, and how does that divide between hunting and shooting?

Mr Cobham: At the moment, I do not have figures for shooting, because we have not completed that research. However, we know from the research that we have done that in 1998-99, in round terms, 50 visitors came to the Borders for hunting from overseas. Those people spent approximately 150 days in the Borders. I cannot give you the figures for shooting yet, but they will eventually be available.

Alex Fergusson: Denise Walton mentioned the methodology used in the report. How significantly did your methodology vary from that of the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute, and is that significant in assessing the economic impact of a ban on fox hunting?

Ms Walton: I shall ask Ralph Cobham to answer that, as he is the one who deals with economics.

Mr Cobham: In our research, we adopted the approach of sampling all the hunts and all the participants. We chose to do that by postal questionnaire. We produced the questionnaire in draft and discussed it with the hunt secretaries to determine that it made sense.

My understanding is that the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute produced a questionnaire and sent it to a sample of participants as well as to the hunts about a week in advance of a telephone interview. MLURI used a telephone interview as the basis for obtaining the data, but in relation to a pre-advised set of questions. There was clearly more opportunity for interaction with respondents using that approach. Some people in professional market research would say that that was a good thing; others might say that such an approach introduces an element of bias, as it means that questions can be asked incrementally. For example, someone might be asked, "Your expenditure on such and such was X, but what was your expenditure on A, then B and then C?" I am not in any way suggesting that MLURI's approach contained any elements of bias; however, that provides a general basis for comparison.

People have claimed—indeed, I think that MLURI has claimed—that the BFRS's methodology was biased, as it gives people an opportunity to manipulate the figures. The data

collected by the two surveys indicate that the average expenditure for each subscriber household identified by MLURI was some £1,700 higher than the BFRS survey's results, which suggests that there has been no upward bias by the BFRS. Although I do not want to suggest that the MLURI data are wrong, the answers that MLURI obtained came from a much smaller number of mounted subscriber households in the Borders than in the BFRS survey, which might be partly responsible for the differences in the estimates of expenditure and employment.

Alex Fergusson: With reference to the five Borders hunts, the final paragraph of MLURI's update report states:

"Many subscribers to these hunts do not live in the Borders but travel to hunt there. Their impact on the Borders economy is less than if they were residents."

Do you have any comment on that? In our earlier informal meeting, we heard from Ms Renwick, who stated that, in her business, 10 per cent of the horses that she kept in livery were used by outside people coming to hunt in the Borders area. That suggests that although the impact of outsiders—if I can call them that—coming into the area to hunt might be different, it is equally significant, because they are making use of many of the services that supply employment in the Borders.

Mr Cobham: I have to say that I raised an eyebrow when I read that assertion in the MLURI update. We are extremely grateful that MLURI has reviewed its research results and undertaken additional survey work—indeed, in 30 years' research experience, I have never known another research organisation to go over its work again, and our organisation publicly applauds and thanks MLURI for doing so.

However, I was surprised by the statement, as it is qualitative and does not indicate the number of subscribers, how they were identified and the source of the information. We can take that only as a statement; if I had quantification, I would be able to comment more. Certainly, to the extent that outsiders come to the Borders to hunt, they will partly rely on local livery services and all the other trades such as vets, farriers and feed suppliers that those services support. The fact that people come from outwith the Borders to hunt should not be regarded as economically harmful; it is actually beneficial, although the expenditure is not quite so high per head as that of someone who resides in the Borders. That said, our research indicates that a number of the mounted followers who live in the Borders spend some of their money on businesses outwith the area. That economic leakage amounts to about 15 per cent. So there are swings and roundabouts.

14:45

Fergus Ewing: Am I right in saying that your research measured the expenditure generated by hunting activities as set out in page 42 of your report? Furthermore, did I understand your earlier evidence correctly in stating that your research does not specifically examine the impact on that expenditure that a hunting ban might have?

Mr Cobham: That is perfectly correct.

Fergus Ewing: Is my understanding correct that, in contrast, MLURI's approach was specifically to attempt to assess the impact of a ban on mounted hunts?

Mr Cobham: Yes.

Fergus Ewing: The second difference in the methodology of the two organisations is that the BFRS received responses from all seven hunts—with a 52.9 per cent response from all 406 subscribers—while MLURI adopted a sampling approach. Is that right?

Mr Cobham: Perfectly correct.

Fergus Ewing: In response to my colleague Richard Lochhead, you stated that, in the Borders, 25 per cent of trade and service organisations were involved in providing goods and/or services for hunting or in connection with hunting. Is that right?

Mr Cobham: Yes.

Fergus Ewing: I ask that question because some might argue that your report—and perhaps MLURI's report—exaggerates the importance of hunting to the economy or, in the case of the MLURI report, the perceived impact of any ban. In paragraph 7.14 on page 44 of your report, you state:

"Through telephone interviews with 54 of the main local trade and service organisations, it was established that over 25% considered that their businesses would be seriously at risk in the event of a ban on hunting."

Although I appreciate the fact that you mention over 25 per cent instead of simply 25 per cent, I wonder whether all the local trade and service organisations that are involved in providing goods or services for hunting or in connection with hunting perceive that their businesses are under threat, which is what your research seems to suggest.

Mr Cobham: No, we are not saying that. We have talked to only 54 of the 650 organisations. Indeed, 51 of those 54 chose to reply. That means we have insight into only 51 of 1,000 or more businesses within and outwith the Borders involved in servicing hunting activities. I say that to put the figures into perspective and am trying to indicate that our research suggests that 25 per cent of all business and trades in the Borders will

be affected to some extent. Although such an effect might be insignificant, there would be a loss of turnover, with an impact on casual, part-time and full-time employment for many organisations. As a researcher, it was fascinating to discover how many organisations in the Borders are touched by hunting.

Fergus Ewing: As I understand it from your evidence, a quarter of local businesses are directly involved to some extent in providing goods or services for the hunt. Is that correct?

Mr Cobham: For the seven hunts and the mounted followers, that is correct.

Fergus Ewing: If a quarter of all businesses benefit, what, if anything, does your research say about the other three quarters—those that are not directly involved in providing goods or services but that presumably do business with the 25 per cent that are?

Mr Cobham: In our report, we indicate the indirect and induced expenditure and employment. If you look at paragraph 7.10 on page 43, you will see that between eight and 12 FTE jobs have been identified as indirectly associated with hunting, as a result of the expenditure. What I am saying is that we have identified to some extent other businesses that would be affected outside the 25 per cent already referred to, but we have not precisely identified to what extent they would be affected.

Fergus Ewing: Are the 255 to 325 jobs that you have referred to—which, I believe, are shown on page 43, in paragraphs 7.9 and 7.11—the jobs that you have concluded from your research are directly, not indirectly, dependent on hunting?

Mr Cobham: Yes.

Fergus Ewing: Thank you.

The Convener: If there are no further questions, I thank Ralph Cobham, Denise Walton and Bruce Cowe for helping us with this issue.

Mr Cobham: Will you allow me to make one additional point of clarification?

The Convener: Indeed.

Mr Cobham: I should have made the point, in relation to the methodology particular to the BFRS, that the source of information on both the hunts and the conduit through which the surveys of the participants—the mounted followers—took place was, in every case, the hunt secretaries. They are really the only people in the hunting fraternity who have a knowledge of hunt business. They are a reliable source of information on the households that contain mounted follower subscribers. That is an important point.

Ms Walton: I want to make a quick point. Hunts in the Borders collect dead stock from more than 1,000 farm holdings in the area. It is an important service, which has considerable environmental health benefits.

The Convener: Thank you.

Our next witnesses are from the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute. They are Dr Bob Crabtree, the author of the report, who is now working independently, and Professor Margaret Gill, the director of the institute. I welcome you both to the committee and invite you to make an opening statement before we ask questions.

Dr Bob Crabtree (Macaulay Land Use Research Institute): I thank the committee for asking us to be witnesses today. I was head of economics at the institute when the original report was produced for the Executive. As the convener indicated, I have since set up a consultancy.

About a year ago, the Executive asked us to produce a report on the economic impacts of a ban on hunting with dogs. The remit was carefully prescribed by the Executive and covered three sectors. It started with the mounted hunts in Scotland and was extended to cover hill foot packs and gamekeepers on sporting estates. Our focus was the impact on the Scottish economy as a whole, especially the impact on expenditure arising from a potential contraction of activities and the impact on employment.

You have a copy of our three-page summary. Since the previous report, we have revised some of the figures for the mounted hunts. We had estimated—on the basis of information provided by the hunts—that there were 357 households with one or more subscriber to one or more of the Scottish hunts. However, we were told that that might be an underestimate, so, in the past few weeks, we have asked the hunts for another membership list and have compared those with the lists that we were originally given. We found that in some cases there was a misunderstanding—on both sides, I might say—about exactly what we had originally asked for. We have now arrived at a higher estimate of the numbers, resulting in about a 10 per cent increase in the estimated number of FTE jobs that would be affected.

Dr Murray: You will be aware that your report has been heavily criticised by the supporters of the bill, who feel that, because you asked people who had a vested interest and who might have given you the worst possible scenario, the evidence is rather subjective. How do you answer the criticism that your research is biased?

My second question relates to the impact on sporting estates. You will have consulted on the bill as drafted. Lord Watson has suggested that he would lodge a number of amendments, one of

which would remove the ban on rough shooting. From your analysis of sporting estates, can you give us an estimate of how much of the figure for the number of jobs that would be lost is due to rough shooting, which might be excluded from the bill, and how much might be attributed to terrier work, which will continue to be included?

Dr Crabtree: Your first point concerned bias in the report. What interests me is what alternative methodology could have been used. We used a basic survey methodology, which has been used by every study that has been carried out into the economic impact of a ban on hunting. There is really no alternative but to ask the people who are involved how they would respond to a change in legislation or regulation. One cannot simply invent figures.

We set up a methodology through which we tried to get the most accurate figures that we could from the interviewees. In some cases, there was no real problem. For example, it was obvious that the activities of the hunts would stop, so the impact was clear. The methodology is slightly more difficult in relation to the followers and the estates.

We chose a telephone system—as opposed to a postal system—so that we could use an interview methodology through which we could try to ensure that respondents were consistent. If they were inconsistent, we could bring that to their attention—we had them indicate a scenario that was consistent throughout the questionnaire. We believed that we were getting the most precise information that we could through any survey methodology.

You may expect respondents to give unrealistic information to further their interests, but a number of the estates said that they would increase employment if there was a ban, in order to maintain their shooting and so on. They did not produce outrageous answers; some of the responses pointed in a different direction from what might have been expected.

15:00

Dr Murray: Are the figures on the sporting estates based on the bill as introduced or do they take into account the possibility that rough shooting might be removed from the bill?

Dr Crabtree: We were not asked to explore variants on the bill. We were asked to explore the impact of the bill as it was drafted.

Mr Rumbles: An interesting point about the report is that it is criticised from both sides. One side says that it underestimates the impact and the other side says that it overestimates it.

My question focuses on your revised report to us. It states:

> "The main employment effects are on those with specialised skills connected with keeping horses and hunting. Impacts elsewhere in the rural economy would be very small."

That contrasts with the evidence that we have heard that 25 per cent of businesses in the Borders would be affected in some way. Do you still feel that the bill would have a very small impact elsewhere in the rural economy?

Dr Crabtree: The impact is primarily confined to the people who are closely connected with keeping horses. In the rural economy of Scotland, the impact on other businesses, such as the veterinary sector, is small. We asked a sample of the different business types about the short-term and longer-term effects on their businesses. It is evident from the table that we drew up as a result of that that the main impacts were on farriers and blacksmiths and on businesses engaged in horse purchases and sales, livery and stud, and clothing and tack repairs.

The Convener: Which table is that?

Dr Crabtree: Table 4.1 on page 19 of the original report. The various sectors in which the hunts and the followers make expenditure are set out on the left-hand side of the table. The right-hand side shows the FTE job losses as stated by the businesses. Those are the short-term effects. The highest number is 8.8 for livery and stud. The number for veterinary surgeries is 0; the number for vehicle repair is 1.4—that is, 1.4 jobs in Scotland.

Mr Rumbles: I will take as an example the village of Braemar, which some committee members recently visited. There are 200 jobs in Braemar, 10 per cent of which are gamekeeping jobs. According to your report, 13 per cent of those gamekeepers would lose their jobs. The evidence that the Scottish Gamekeepers Association gave us is that that 13 per cent may lose their jobs immediately. However, in terms of effective land management of places such as the Invercauld estate around Braemar, that would have a serious long-term impact on the local economy over five or six years. You are saying what would happen now, but did your report examine the longer-term impact of unemployment?

Dr Crabtree: The report examines both. We asked the businesses what the immediate impacts would be. We also calculated the relationship between expenditure and employment in each of the sectors to get a longer-term adjustment. For the mounted hunts, the figure is 30 short-term jobs and 56 long-term jobs. In another part of the report, we made the calculation for the estates. Throughout the report, we considered the Scottish economy. We were not considering specific

villages such as Braemar. A much more detailed and expensive study would have been required to arrive at that level of detail. That was not prescribed in our remit.

Mr Rumbles: Are you saying that the report is Scotland-wide but that some areas, such as the Scottish Borders or Braemar in my constituency, could be much more adversely affected than it seems at first?

Dr Crabtree: You might take that view, but the areas of Scotland that are affected by mounted and non-mounted hunts cover a large swathe of southern and western Scotland below the central belt. A map in the report shows where subscribers to hunts live. They are not concentrated around the location of the hunts; they travel long distances. The effects are not concentrated in small localities; they will be diffuse.

Alex Fergusson: I will continue on that theme. I am worried that what you have said does not tie up with what we heard before the meeting, when we met a group of tradespeople who described the impact that the bill would have on them—a vet, a farrier and someone who provides livery services told us that it would have significant job consequences for their businesses. I would like you to explain your methodology and why you believe that such a differential has occurred. I cannot believe that anyone is saying anything other than what they genuinely believe. What is the reason for the difference?

Dr Crabtree: I can explain the method that we used. We identified all the major suppliers to mounted and non-mounted hunts by name and location. We then carried out a random sample interviewing process—we randomly sampled four of the vets and did a telephone interview. We calculated a longer-term impact of three jobs and an immediate impact of no redundancies in those practices. That is how we did the survey, which I think was a consistent way to do it. We produced our estimates for the overall impacts.

Alex Fergusson: Why are people telling us that there will be considerably more job losses in related trades? Why is there a difference in what we are being told?

Dr Crabtree: You may have picked on a specific, small locality where the effects will be substantial. Our study covers all of Scotland and we worked out the numbers for the employment effects on the Scottish economy.

Alex Fergusson: You just said, I think, that there are areas in Scotland where there could be substantial effects.

Dr Crabtree: I did not say that.

Alex Fergusson: I am sorry—I thought that you did.

Dr Crabtree: Although what you suggest may be true, I said that we were not asked to work at that level of specificity, as that would have required a huge study. I do not doubt that it is true that you have talked to people who say that they will make people redundant. However, I am saying that we examined thoroughly all the data and came up with our own conclusions on the total number of job losses. I can both describe and, I think, defend the way in which we reached those conclusions.

Fergus Ewing: We are considering your research conclusions and we have also considered those of the Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability. Have you had an opportunity to study Mr Cobham's findings and methodology?

Dr Crabtree: I have looked at that report and compared the methodology with ours, but the context is rather different. We were asked to examine the impact of the 10 Scottish hunts and other sectors on the Scottish economy. The foundation examined the impact of seven hunts, two of which were not in Scotland, on the UK economy—there are effects on the English economy as well. We had a specifically Scottish focus and remit.

Fergus Ewing: I am not so sure about that but, be that as it may, it might be helpful if you were to have a closer look at the foundation's report in order to give us the benefit of your considered findings later.

It seems to me that your conclusions are not inconsistent with the main conclusions reached by the foundation. On employment and economic impact, the foundation estimated that 255 to 325 jobs were directly dependent on hunting, whereas your report, using a different approach, estimated that 183 to 208 jobs would be lost if hunting were banned. The two reports measured different things and one would expect your figures to be lower. Indeed, they are lower, but not by a huge margin. Would it be fair to conclude that the two reports are not necessarily inconsistent with each other in respect of the estimated impact on employment?

Dr Crabtree: It is difficult to make comparisons, because the foundation studied a different set of hunts from those that we studied. How can you compare seven hunts with 10 hunts, where five of the seven overlap with five of the 10?

Fergus Ewing: The figures do not differ widely, though, do they?

Dr Crabtree: I am not sure what one could conclude from that. One could examine the expenditure per subscribing household. The foundation estimated a figure that was related to hunting, whereas our approach was a more direct way of assessing the bill's impact. We said to people, "How would you change your expenditure

if hunting were banned?"

We appear to have come up with pretty similar figures for the changes in expenditure; that shows some consistency, which is fine. However, when one looks beyond that to employment, one sees that there are different numbers of households because the studies examined different numbers of hunts.

Fergus Ewing: However, your revised total was 420 to 441 and the foundation's total was 402. Those figures are not wildly different, are they? One would expect your total to be higher because you studied 10 hunts as opposed to seven. Your figures are slightly higher, but not hugely so.

Dr Crabtree: If one were to assume that the expenditure and employment effects per household are the same in the 10 hunts as they are in the seven hunts, one could reach that conclusion.

Fergus Ewing: The other headline figure was the estimate of the reduction in expenditure in Scotland by hunts and hunt subscribers, which you put at about £4.5 million to £4.75 million to £5 million a year, whereas the foundation's figures were £4 million to £4.7 million. Again, there seems to be some consistency between the two reports, which leads me to conclude that one could argue that the reports, although they pursue slightly different methodologies, are consistent with each other and perhaps even corroborate each other as to the broad validity of their findings.

15:15

Dr Crabtree: You could draw that conclusion, but I would be a little more cautious, simply because we are not dealing with the same people in the same areas or using the same strict definition of the economy. For example, we found that 15 per cent of the expenditures of followers and hunts took place in England, and so we chopped that proportion out. We also found that a proportion of people who were subscribers to the hunts in Scotland lived in England, and so we did not count them. Those are minor differences in technique and approach, and we are dealing with two slightly different studies.

Fergus Ewing: I appreciate that there are slight differences; we have examined a few of them in the short time that is available to us. However, I am concerned about the big picture. What will be the impact of a ban in the Borders and in Scotland? Most hunting takes place in the Borders and therefore we expect most of the impact to be in the Borders. It seems to me that the two reports show that the impact of a ban on hunting in the Borders would be substantial, running to hundreds of jobs and several million pounds lost to the economy, and affecting a wide range of businesses. Is that your conclusion?

Dr Crabtree: No, not precisely. We were asked to examine the impact of the ban on the Scottish economy, not specific parts of the Scottish economy, and we applied our results from Scotland to the Borders.

The big issue, which has been raised before, is that a lot of subscribers to Borders hunts do not live in the Borders—they live south of Edinburgh or travel from other parts of Scotland, sometimes over long distances. Would you attribute their expenditures as impacts on the Borders economy or impacts outside the Borders? For those hunts that are located in the Borders, our initial report treated everyone who did not have a postcode within the three administrative districts of the former regional council as non-Borders people. We concluded that only a third of the Scottish impact was located in the Borders. If one includes all the non-Borders people, the figure is increased. Of the total impact, including that of non-mounted hunts, somewhere between 20 per cent and 40 per cent of the Scottish effect is located in the Borders.

Fergus Ewing: Thank you for that answer, but I am not sure that it makes matters absolutely clear. I had the benefit, which you did not have, of seeing Denise Walton shaking her head at one or two points during your evidence. It would be helpful for me and perhaps for other committee members if some of the apparent discrepancies in the battle of the reports could be clarified following comments from the other witnesses, should they have any, and once the *Official Report* of the evidence is available.

Dr Crabtree: I am sure that the institute would be willing to provide a summary of the two methodologies, if that would be helpful.

Richard Lochhead: You said that some estates have said that if there were a ban on hunting, they would employ more people. Presumably, you took that into account when working out the overall net effect on employment of a ban.

Dr Crabtree: That is right.

Richard Lochhead: So those estates were able to tell you how many people they would take on as a result of a ban.

Dr Crabtree: The additional employment was offset against employment that would be lost to come up with a net figure.

Richard Lochhead: But the estates were able to tell you how many people they would have to take on if a ban came into force.

Dr Crabtree: That is right. We found variation in how estates felt they would respond to a ban. A minority told us that they thought they would take

on extra staff to compensate for the reduced efficiency of pest control that they expected as a result of the ban, but they still expected to keep their basic sporting activities operational. The majority of estates felt that the ban would have a negative effect—that their sporting activity would decline and that they would lay off staff. We put together that evidence to come up with a net figure. Our report contains a table that sets out all the job figures.

Richard Lochhead: Did the Scottish Executive ask you to produce your supplementary report?

Dr Crabtree: No.

Richard Lochhead: Did you ask the Scottish Executive whether you could produce it?

Dr Crabtree: The institute did the report on its own initiative, because we wanted to clarify whether our original 357 subscribing households were precise or whether there had been a problem in transmitting addresses and lists between the hunts and us. We took the initiative of phoning round the hunts and making the comparison. We then informed the Executive of the result.

Richard Lochhead: I am asking these questions because the decision to issue a supplementary report was controversial. Mr Cobham said that, in his experience, this was the first time such a report had been revisited. Who paid for the extra research?

The Convener: I ask Margaret Gill to reply to the last question first.

Professor Margaret Gill (Macaulay Land Use Research Institute): As the person responsible for taking the decision to revisit the data, I should point out that I took over as director in September, after the first report was submitted. On my own initiative, without consultation, I took the decision to revisit the data. Perhaps that reflects my background in livestock nutrition. I wanted to be sure that, before we appeared before this committee, we had re-examined the data. I did not doubt the accuracy of the previous data; I was merely reacting to the fact that, as Bob Crabtree has said, we were being criticised from both sides, either for underestimating or for overestimating the figures. I wanted to be absolutely sure that the data that we presented were accurate.

Richard Lochhead: So you did not have to ask the Scottish Executive for permission to issue a supplementary report, even though it commissioned the first report.

Professor Gill: I took the decision to go back to the hunts to check the original subscribers lists. I then passed those data to the Scottish Executive.

Richard Lochhead: So there was no extra bill for the Scottish Executive.

Professor Gill: There was no cost to the Scottish Executive.

Richard Lochhead: Did you contact the Scottish Executive only once you had obtained the extra information?

Professor Gill: Indeed.

Richard Lochhead: How many organisations challenged your original findings, and who were they?

Dr Crabtree: It was not a question of people challenging the original findings. As has already been said, we were challenged on all sides about the ultimate findings. The specific point at issue was whether the hunts had provided us with complete, unambiguous lists of the number of subscribing households. One group that challenged us was the Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability, which was interviewing five of the same hunts and had its own data set. Some of the hunts also approached us for assurance that the data were precise.

We were dependent on the co-operation of the hunts in supplying us with address lists of their subscribers, so that we could interview them. We were interested only in active members; hunts also have members who do not hunt. There was little point in our interviewing them. Some hunts had no problem in giving us their membership lists. In other cases there were issues of confidentiality, perhaps relating to the Data Protection Act 1984, which meant that hunts could not simply hand over lists—they had to contact their members first. Some hunts discovered that certain members did not want to be interviewed and did not inform us of that. We thought that we were getting complete lists, when names were missing. The interviewing was fine, but when we aggregated back we found that we were a few households short.

Richard Lochhead: The critics of the report will say that you asked people who are involved in hunting for information relating to a ban on hunting, and that it is not surprising that they painted the worst possible picture. Were you able to verify the information that you were given?

My second question relates to the reliability of the information that you received. Referring to the impact on horses of a ban on mounted hunts, the report says:

"Twenty-eight of the horses would be sold and 23 destroyed. The remaining 18 would be retained."

That is very detailed information. How reliable is it? How were the people who gave it to you able to plan so far ahead?

Dr Crabtree: The committee must make its own judgment on that. I have described the method by which we obtained information. We presented

people with the scenario that would result from the bill's being passed and asked them how they would respond to that. We went to great lengths to ensure that their responses were consistent, so that the overall results added up and made sense. One might come to the conclusion that some people had a vested interest in not being totally honest. I pointed out situations in which people were clearly giving us correct information because it ran contrary to the position that we might have expected them to take. A previous witness from the estates sector, the Earl of Dalhousie, said that if the bill were enacted he would make two or three staff redundant. I do not think that we interviewed him, but if we had and the information that he gave us was consistent and could be followed through, we would have included it. Beyond that, I see no way of verifying information.

Richard Lochhead: What about using other local economic agencies to find out about the impact on businesses?

Dr Crabtree: Perhaps I am wrong, but I do not think that there is an issue of verification there, although one might expect less reliable information from certain sources. For example, we asked vets to tell us how a change in expenditure of a certain amount would impact on their business, as well as asking them about the size of their business—their turnover and so on. There is an element of self-validation in that. The people asked would be unable to make outrageous responses, because such information would not add up. There is a high level of reliability for the information from businesses.

Dr Murray: You say in your submission:

"The main employment effects are on those with specialised skills connected with keeping horses and hunting. Impacts elsewhere in the rural economy would be very small."

Have you considered the impact of a ban on the tourist trade—hotels and so on? Before this meeting, hoteliers in the Borders told us that visitors associated with hunting bring in valuable trade during the winter months. Similar representations have been made to me in respect of shooting in other parts of Dumfries and Galloway, where visitors, particularly from overseas, provide trade during the winter months.

Dr Crabtree: We did not consider the impact on the tourist trade, as that was outside our remit. However, the member raises an important issue that would merit further investigation. We need to consider the impact of a ban not just on tourism, but on the estate sector. If it led to a reduction in shooting opportunities, there would be additional effects resulting from a decrease in the number of sport shooters who come to this area and spend money.

Dr Murray: So the economic impact of a ban would be greater than you have stated.

Dr Crabtree: The impact of a ban on the tourist trade was not within our remit. We considered only employment issues relating to gamekeepers. What the member is suggesting would have involved a larger study.

David Mundell: I would like you to clarify what you said earlier about classifying people as non-Borders. Did you automatically classify everybody who was resident in England as non-Borders, or did postcode adjacency criteria apply?

From an objective perspective, it appears that the previous survey was more realistic in including the activity in the north of England, as evidence shows that the economies of the south of Scotland, the Borders and the north of England are inextricably linked. Creating a false economic divide would not provide as accurate a picture as might have been given.

15:30

Dr Crabtree: We were asked to comment on the Scottish economy, not the English economy, so we went to some pains to try to separate the two by working out where the flows of expenditure went and where the employment was. The Executive was interested in the impact of hunting only on the Scottish economy and asked us to examine that: it did not ask us about impacts on the economies in Northumberland and Cumbria. People who live and spend most of their hunt-related expenditure in those areas were not included, as they would not have much impact on the Scottish economy.

David Mundell: Did you validate the idea that those people spend most of their hunt-related expenditure in those areas?

Dr Crabtree: People in Scotland spend most of their hunt-related expenditure where they keep their horses. We assume that the hunt-related expenditure of someone who lives in Cumbria and keeps their horses there would be focused there. Only a small percentage of people in our sample lived over the border.

Rhoda Grant: Your report says that the bill would affect 12 per cent of gamekeepers' work—the percentage of their work that they carry out with terriers. It also says that if terrier work was banned, that work would be carried out by shooting and lamping. However, the figures that you have provided for us show that 114 full-time equivalent jobs would be lost on sporting estates. Are some sporting estates saying that if they are not able to carry out terrier work, they will carry out no fox control at all and will give up game-bird breeding or whatever?

Dr Crabtree: Yes. That is correct. I said that estates would respond in a variety of ways. Some estates would increase employment, but the majority said that they would try to adapt, by using alternative methods, with some loss of employment. Some estates decided that the bill would have a major impact on them, and that it would lead to a complete downturn in their sporting activities and the loss of some or all of their gamekeepers. We received a variety of responses.

The 114 full-time job losses cover not only employment on the estates, but the knock-on impacts on suppliers to those estates: it is a total figure. We identified 61 full-time gamekeeper redundancies.

Rhoda Grant: That seems a high number, given the fact that they will be stopped from carrying out only 12 per cent of their work. Substituting another form of control for that percentage of their work ought to create more work. Do you feel that the estates gave you a true picture?

Dr Crabtree: I do not think that the percentage of their work that the bill would affect is necessarily the crucial factor: the effect of changes in the pest population on their sporting activities would be critical. A gamekeeper might spend only 10 per cent of his time controlling pests, but without that work the grouse shooting would be devastated and the effect on the business would be much greater than 10 per cent would indicate.

The method that we use is the most reliable that we could use. In all other economic studies of this issue, the same survey-type of approach has been used. We have presented the figures; it is up to committee members to interpret them.

Rhoda Grant: Are people who feel that they will be adversely affected by the ban a reliable source of the information needed to calculate the economic effects?

Dr Crabtree: We are in a difficult area because there are no precedents. If we had had lots of experience of the observed impact of bans, we would have another source of evidence to guide us. However, this is the first time; we cannot go back and consider other studies. We have to ask the people whom we expect to be affected in some way, because they are the people who will have the evidence. There is no other source of information. If you want to find out how the mounted hunts will be affected by the ban, I cannot see how you can ask anyone but the people in the mounted hunts. Their behaviour, and the ways in which it will be changed, are what is important.

The Convener: As there are no further questions, I thank Bob Crabtree and Margaret Gill for their help.

The second item on our agenda is consideration of any points that members wish to make in relation to our inquiry. One or two issues have been mentioned, and I would be delighted to hear of any others. The committee has previously decided that requirements for additional research might be investigated and that we should consider a bid for Parliament research funding at this meeting. We have had the chance to question the people who have conducted two major pieces of research. Having done so, do members feel that we need to do additional research?

Fergus Ewing: We have heard useful evidence today on two weighty and detailed reports. I would like to know a little more about the methodology and conclusions of those reports. I do not know whether we would need a researcher for that, but a researcher may be useful in order to liaise with today's witnesses. Although the reports were broadly consistent in concluding that the impact of a ban on fox hunting would be fairly serious, there were inconsistencies.

The Macaulay report has been the subject of considerable controversy, so it would seem sensible, before this committee reaches a conclusion at stage 1, for us to have the strongest and most robust evidence available to us. I would like us to do more work.

Richard Lochhead: It would be useful for us to have some information on the research techniques of the two reports, and their validity. This is a tricky subject and—as the previous witness said—this kind of study has never been done before in Scotland. It would be good to hear from any experts in this area.

Dr Murray: I do not want to prolong things, because the tradespeople we have spoken to need to know where they stand. The more things are spun out, the more uncertainty hangs over them. However, it would be useful to know more about the economic impact on auxiliary industries—tourism, for example. Not much research seems to have been done on that. I do not know whether such research would be easy or whether the tourist boards would be able to give us the information, but I would be interested in getting evidence on that impact—rapidly, if possible.

Richard Lochhead: It would be perfectly in order for the committee to get that information, if it is easy to get. However, if it cost money, or if we had to commission research, any result would be subject to the same concerns as the existing research. We should therefore wait for the results of the existing research before we think about new research.

The Convener: Perhaps we should ask a member of the parliamentary research staff to look

into the methodology and to give us some initial comments quite quickly, so that we can consider the issue at our next meeting, if necessary.

Elaine Murray asked about the impact on tourism. Should we begin by asking a member of the research staff to trawl through the evidence that we have taken so far, looking for correlation with tourism?

Dr Murray: It is clear that the Macaulay report did not consider the impact on tourism. I wondered whether the area tourist boards or the Scottish Tourist Board would have information that might be of interest in our inquiry.

The Convener: We will note your suggestion and talk about this again at our next meeting.

Fergus Ewing: Before this meeting started, it was extremely useful for committee members to hear from Peter Leggate, his colleagues and other people who live locally and will be directly affected if the bill becomes law. As the bill proceeds, I hope that we will hear more from people who will be directly affected. After all, research data are second-hand; I would like to hear more first-hand information from people whose lives and livelihoods would be affected should this bill become law. It seems reasonable to make that plea for information when you, convener, and I are here in the Borders.

The Convener: At previous meetings, committee members have suggested that additional oral evidence could be taken during the preparation of a stage 1 report; but we have not yet made a decision on that. Do we need additional oral evidence?

Alex Fergusson: I think that we need to consider that very seriously. Today's meeting has been criticised because views felt by some bodies to be valid have not been heard. Last week, we considered the need to talk to Scottish Natural Heritage; and the lurcher men feel strongly that they have not been represented. I feel that we should have what I might call a sweeping-up meeting, perhaps after the Christmas recess. That could be done without unnecessarily prolonging the drafting of our stage 1 report.

If things had gone to the original plan, we would have heard from the minister today. That is another reason for having that meeting in January—to fill any holes in our month of evidence taking.

Rhoda Grant: I do not agree with that: it will not be possible to speak to everyone who wants to give evidence. However, people who have listened to the evidence that we have heard so far should write to us saying whether they support or oppose the points made. If we then decided that we needed to question people further, we could write to them or—in extreme circumstances—call them to the committee. We have taken a lot of evidence. The more supplementary evidence we take on top of that, the more likely we are to make others feel that they have not been consulted.

Fergus Ewing: I do not see how we can be criticised for adopting a thorough and comprehensive approach. Our job is to do precisely that, and to ensure that we take evidence from everyone who has relevant experience or who will be affected. To second what Alex Fergusson said, Scottish Natural Heritage has an obvious responsibility and should give evidence. I believe that the Forestry Commission should give evidence so that we can find out whether it uses methods of pest control and, if so, what they are.

The RSPB should give evidence on the methods of pest control that it employs in places such as Abernethy. One organisation has described the proceedings of the Rural Affairs Committee as filibustering. That is absurd. We should take a thorough, robust and comprehensive approach to taking evidence; we will be criticised if we do not.

15:45

It is essential that the Executive and ministers should not be coy about giving evidence. After all, they are not coy about giving their views on every other matter. I find the sudden coyness of the Liberal-Labour Executive somewhat perplexing. The committee should ask the Executive to give evidence, not least because the Executive owns a lot of land and sporting rights. I would like to know whether the Executive uses methods of pest control that would be made illegal by Mike Watson's bill and, if so, what its views on that are. The public at large have a right to know.

Dr Murray: It is unfortunate that Fergus Ewing has injected that note into our proceedings. At this stage in a member's bill—a member's bill is a special case—the Executive can give only factual evidence; it cannot give an opinion. The Executive does not have an opinion as such until Parliament has an opinion. The minister could give only factual evidence.

There is a case to be made for one extra session. I am aware of the rather scurrilous accusations that have been made about the committee filibustering and people trying to pervert the course of justice and so on. I greatly resent them. Given that last week we were informed that the RSPB does not use dogs in fox control, perhaps we need to consider how it controls foxes and compare that to other methods.

Richard Lochhead: There is a case for having another session of oral evidence, taking into account some of the organisations that have been

mentioned, such as Scottish Natural Heritage and the RSPB. Has the National Trust for Scotland banned fox hunting on its land? Perhaps we should hear from that organisation. It would be worth getting the minister before the committee because the Scottish Executive owns much land in Scotland. The Executive could provide valuable factual information. I suggest that we have one further session of oral evidence, to hear from those organisations and the minister.

Rhoda Grant: It is clear that the majority of the committee wants to have another session. I am quite happy with that, but could we ask those organisations for written evidence to consider before the meeting?

The Convener: It would be sensible for us to take a decision in principle to have another evidence session early in the new year. Several suggestions have been made about whom we should invite to give evidence. I propose that we put together a list and circulate it to members for discussion at next week's meeting. We can then finalise whom we want to invite to give evidence at the additional session and put a date to it.

There is also the question of the minister or the Executive giving evidence at this stage of the bill. There are two issues. In my view, the Executive is not required to have a position on a member's bill. In that respect, it is difficult for the minister to give any response. However, I believe that a case has been made to take evidence from the Executive—and possibly the minister—on its current practice on land it owns and manages. I will ask Richard Davies to make the appropriate contact and so reopen discussions to ensure that the minister can give evidence at the additional session. I propose that we do that quickly, to allow us to discuss the matter at our next meeting.

Fergus Ewing: Could we establish that we have agreed that the committee believes that the minister should give evidence to us?

Dr Murray: Only if it is factual evidence. At this stage we are not asking for opinion.

Fergus Ewing: Yesterday, Her Majesty's Government at Westminster decided that it had an opinion on fox hunting and that steps should be taken to change the law. It is slightly strange that the Government's colleagues in Scotland have no opinion and it is rather odd that we should be deprived of the opportunity to ask the minister whatever questions we wish. We should not have to go through some pre-assessment procedure on the relevance of our questions. That would put a fetter on the committee and would certainly impede our work.

The Convener: If the minister comes before the committee, she is able to refuse to answer questions on a particular element. As convener, I would ask members to confine their questions to matters on which the minister is competent to give evidence at that time. It has proved to be the case that the Scottish Executive is not bound by decisions made by the Government in London—there can be different policy in Scotland. I would have thought that Fergus Ewing, of all people, would be prepared to accept that position.

Fergus Ewing: I can tell that you enjoyed saying that, convener.

Richard Lochhead: I have one final point. I know that Northumberland should be part of Scotland and that it produces excellent water, but perhaps the Scottish Parliament should be drinking Scottish table water.

The Convener: A lot of points are being scored today.

I thank members for attending the committee meeting. Any further points can be raised at our next meeting.

Meeting closed at 15:51.

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