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Chair: Mr. Kody Blois



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• (1100)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 94 of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

I will start with a few reminders. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. Just so you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee. Screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, January 31, 2024, and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 8, 2024, the committee is resuming consideration of Bill C-355, An Act to prohibit the export by air of horses for slaughter and to make related amendments to certain Acts, an act to prohibit the export by air of horses for slaughter and to make related amendments to certain acts.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the first panel.

From the Canada Border Services Agency, we have two officials with us. First, we have Graeme Hamilton, acting director general, traveller, commercial and trade policy directorate, strategic policy branch.

[English]

We also have Cathy Toxopeus, director general of commercial programs in the commercial and trade branch.

No stranger to this committee, from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, we have Dr. Mary Jane Ireland. Thank you for being back. She serves as the executive director of the animal health directorate and as the chief veterinary officer for Canada. Joining her today is Dr. Rick James-Davies, director general of western operations. Thank you both for being here.

We also have Ms. Shannon Nix, assistant deputy minister of the strategic policy branch, with the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food. Thank you for being here today.

We're going to allow five minutes for opening remarks from each organization. I'm going to start with the Canada Border Services Agency.

It's over to you for up to five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Graeme Hamilton (Acting Director General, Traveller, Commercial and Trade Policy Directorate, Strategic Policy Branch, Canada Border Services Agency): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the committee's study of Bill C-355.

We are present today to share with the committee the roles and responsibilities of the Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA, in monitoring the export of terrestrial animals, including horses.

[English]

As many of you already know, the CBSA facilitates the flow of billions of dollars of legitimate trade, and administers more than 100 acts and regulations at our borders. These efforts are designed to support the economic prosperity of our country while also keeping our country and Canadians safe. The CBSA plays a supporting role in verifying that other government department requirements are met for goods being imported into or exported from Canada, as well as administering the Customs Act.

Given the wide variety of acts enforced at the border, the CBSA works very closely with a number of government departments and agencies to ensure that the goods being imported to and exported from Canada are compliant with any act of Parliament that prohibits, controls or regulates their importation or exportation. In the context of agricultural imports and exports, we work very closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, which establishes the requirements for importing and exporting food, plants and animals into and out of Canada. CBSA officers follow its guidance and instructions and will detain goods when imports or exports fail to meet the requirements under the governing act.

This concludes my opening remarks. I'll be happy to take any questions you may have.

• (1105)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll turn it over to the CFIA, please.

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland (Executive Director, Animal Health Directorate, and Chief Veterinary Officer for Canada, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): Thank you very much.

I'm very happy to appear before this committee as part of your study on Bill C-355.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency regulates horse exports under the Health of Animals Act and health of animals regulations. I would therefore like to describe the CFIA's current role in the process.

The Health of Animals Act and its regulations establish the requirements on the export of live animals. This includes the requirement that livestock, such as cattle and horses, being exported from Canada are inspected by a veterinarian and accompanied by an export health certificate that is signed by a CFIA veterinarian. The export health certificate is a legal document confirming that an animal complies with the sanitary requirements of the importing country.

The regulatory requirements for the humane transport of animals were updated in 2019. The goal of these amendments was to prevent avoidable suffering of animals throughout the transport process by setting out the conditions for humanely transporting all animals by all modes of transport.

Exporting a horse is a multistep process that requires the CFIA to certify that the horse meets all requirements for Canada and those of the importing country.

First, the exporter notifies the CFIA of their intent to export a horse. Import requirements may vary by country. Many countries require that the horse begin an isolation period before it can be exported. During this period, the CFIA tests the horse to confirm that it does not carry any diseases that are of concern to the importing country, which are listed on the export health certificate.

Once this testing is complete and the horse is found to meet all the requirements, a CFIA veterinarian provides the exporter with a signed export health certificate. The horse is loaded into a livestock trailer to travel to the airport. At the airport, CFIA veterinarians confirm that the horse is properly certified, is not showing any signs of distress and is fit to travel, and will be humanely transported based on Canadian regulatory requirements. Once a horse has landed in the importing country, the CFIA does not have any control or authority over its treatment and care.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you today on the CFIA's role in regulating the export of live horses.

I welcome any questions the committee may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Ireland.

Colleagues, the bells are starting to ring, but as we on this committee have generally done in the past, we want to make sure we maximize our time here in committee. I'd like to ask for unanimous consent to use my discretion. I'll make sure you have proper time. We'll vote, and we'll make sure everyone is taken care of. Is that okay?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We'll now turn it over to the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada for any comments.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Shannon Nix (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy Branch, Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for inviting me to be part of your discussion on Bill C-355.

[*English*]

The issue of the export of horses for slaughter has garnered significant public and social media attention, and the Canadian public has expressed concern over the practice. Through letters received by the department from Canadians, petitions presented in the House of Commons and public opinion polls, it appears that many Canadians are opposed to the practice of the live export of horses for slaughter.

In June 2021, petition e-3187 was presented to the House of Commons. It is one of the most signed e-petitions on record, with over 77,000 signatures. More recently, petition e-4190 was presented in February 2023 and garnered over 36,000 signatures.

[*Translation*]

As you know, this bill addresses the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food's mandate letter commitment to ban the live export of horses for slaughter.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, or AAFC, has been working closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, or CFIA, and the Canada Border Services Agency to analyze the bill.

This is a complex issue that touches on a number of key considerations, including legal obligations; international trade commitments and relations; acts and regulations involving animals more broadly; and mechanisms for implementation and enforcement.

Given the complexity of the issue, I will provide some quick data points and context that I hope will be helpful for your review.

• (1110)

[*English*]

According to Statistics Canada, in 2023 about 2,500 horses were exported from Canada for slaughter, valued at about \$19 million. Foals aged between six and nine months are sourced from Canadian horse breeders and transported to one of about five feedlots in Canada, where they're raised until about the age of two. The horses are then flown overseas from Edmonton, Calgary and Winnipeg. Once the horses reach the country of destination, it is the authorities in that country that are responsible for regulatory oversight.

Compared with other meat sources, such as cattle and pigs, the horsemeat sector is relatively small and data is quite limited. As this is a relatively small sector with very little available information, gaps in knowledge do exist, including the degree to which indigenous people participate in the trade. Within the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food, we've been working hard to gather additional data and information to better understand the sector.

As part of the department's work to provide advice on the minister's mandate commitment, we reached out with CFIA to key stakeholders in the sector. We connected with most exporters, a major freight forwarder, several animal welfare organizations, individual producers and indigenous organizations.

Our initial discussions with industry point to about four active exporters of live horses for slaughter in Canada. These exporters purchase horses from a few hundred producers and keep the horses on feedlots until they're ready to be exported.

The producers operate many different types of farms. Some are far more dependent than others on the horse export market. While some horse breeders raise horses specifically for the live export market, it appears that most horse breeders supplying this market mostly breed horses for other purposes. Some of the producers told us that the export market provides a valuable secondary market to support their businesses.

We will continue to engage and consult as needed to better understand how this bill could impact producers and the sector. From the correspondence that our department has received and from our conversations with animal rights organizations, it's clear that many Canadians view horses differently from other livestock.

To conclude, I'd like to note that our department considers very carefully any policy change that impacts agricultural producers. As I noted at the outset, this is a complex issue. As Bill C-355 moves through the parliamentary process, we will continue to work closely with CFIA to identify any potential impacts and provide advice to the government to mitigate any unintended consequences.

I hope this overview is helpful. I welcome any questions the committee may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Nix. We'll go to exactly that.

Mr. Barlow, you have up to six minutes.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's good to have officials here to shed some light on this legislation.

Certainly, I hope we aren't governing by the number of petitions. Well, maybe we should start. There's a petition in the House with 350,000 signatures asking for an election. If we're going that route, then I would say we'd better follow that one too.

Dr. Ireland from CFIA, thank you very much for coming. I want to highlight a letter from the previous agriculture minister to the Métis Nation of Alberta on this bill specifically. The letter from Madam Bibeau at that time said:

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is a science-based organization. Therefore, the Agency would only ban the slaughter of a species on the basis of a significant body of strong, peer-reviewed evidence. In the absence of such a body of evidence, there are currently no plans to ban horse slaughter in Canada.

Is the CFIA in possession of a strong body of peer-reviewed evidence to support the banning of the export of horses for slaughter—or any other animal, for that matter?

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: The agency is a science-based organization. The regulations we have for humane transport under the Health of Animals Act and health of animals regulations oversee the export and transport of animals into, within and out of the country. The aim of those regulations is to ensure that we prevent avoidable suffering. These regulations were updated in 2019 to reflect the best available science and international considerations after many years of engagement with stakeholders. The regulations are relatively new. They provide enhanced protections for animals being transported.

I would agree with the question in the sense that CFIA is a science-based organization. We regulate based on information. The regulations regarding transport were published in 2019, coming into effect in 2020.

• (1115)

Mr. John Barlow: With that in mind, in your opinion, Dr. Ireland, is this legislation based on any scientific evidence that there's any undue harm or risk to these horses? Is this bill based on any scientific evidence that you know of at CFIA?

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: I won't speak to the bill specifically. I will say that our rules ensure that animals are treated humanely while they're being transported. However, as part of the regulatory requirements, transporters are required to report to the agency when horse deaths or significant injuries occur as a result of transport, and that applies to any animal.

The rules for horses with respect to their movement, their transport, are the same regardless of whether the horses are destined for another country for whatever purpose. Whether it's for show purposes, a competition or a feedlot, the same rules apply.

Mr. John Barlow: We've certainly heard through evidence and from the proponent of this legislation that, basically, the Health of Animals Act and CFIA are not protecting horses that are being transported by air. Would you say that statement is correct?

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: As I've said, the regulations were amended in 2019 to offer additional protections and measures to prevent avoidable suffering in animals that are being transported, including horses. There are provisions for air transport also.

The regulations provide for adequate space and for proper training of those transporting, as well as speak to container closure and a reporting mechanism to CFIA should something go wrong during transport that results in death or significant injuries.

I have confidence in these regulations, but as I said before during the study on electronic logging devices, transporting animals is complex, and unforeseen events do happen. Contingency plans are required of the transporter, and there are times when the regulator and the transporter or regulatee must make decisions in the best interests of an animal's welfare.

Mr. John Barlow: Thanks, Dr. Ireland.

I have just two more quick questions, as I'm running out of time.

Since the regulations were updated in 2019, have there been any fatalities of horses being transported by air? Do you have statistics on the number of injuries in horses transported by air?

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: As we have reported forward-facing on our website, since 2013 there have been five fatalities out of the about 47,000 horses that have been exported. That's a mortality rate of about 0.011%. I'm not aware of other instances of significant injuries. The requirement for the regulated parties is to report mortalities and significant injuries.

Mr. John Barlow: Just for context, in that same amount of time, there have been 250 fatalities of pets on airlines, so that's quite a difference in numbers.

To CBSA, this legislation is going to put an extreme new onus on CBSA. Right now, does CBSA have the resources to take on what is being asked of it as part of this legislation? Does CBSA have any role as of right now in regulating the transport of horses?

Mr. Graeme Hamilton: I appreciate the question in the sense that CBSA does play a very important role in ensuring the movement of goods across the border for both import and export. We are often the agency that enforces other government department regulations at the point of crossing the border.

As it stands right now, as you heard in the testimony of my colleagues from CFIA, CFIA plays a very heavy role in the export of live horses. CFIA officials take a lot of care and attention with respect to the export of those animals, and officials ensure that they accompany those exports to the point of departure and the point of export, as it stands right now.

CBSA plays a very minimal role in facilitating that transaction. The bill as currently drafted does foresee a role for CBSA in ensuring that certain documentation is provided upon export. That would be a new enforcement responsibility for the agency. However, we've not yet worked with CFIA to define the standard operating procedures and how those would play out at the border, so I'm not in a position right now to articulate any further what sort of additional burden this would place on the agency and whether or not those resources are in place at present.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hamilton.

Thank you, Mr. Barlow.

We'll turn it over to Mr. Louis.

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here. This is not the first time, nor certainly will it be the last. It's very important to have you here. Mostly, as a committee, we have been doing more reports than legislation, and your testimony for those reports really helps shape what's going on. We really appreciate that.

At the same time, when legislation comes, it's important, because you are the ones on the ground. It's really important for us to hear about that. It's why I appreciate you coming in and being here right off the top for this important study.

I will start with Ms. Nix, the assistant deputy minister for Agriculture.

You mentioned off the top the correspondence that Agriculture has received. I'm sure all of us have heard this in conversations at home in our ridings. There have been lots of petitions, and many people have been talking to us.

Can you give us a sense of the nature of that correspondence, how much of it was supportive, how much was against it and what common concerns you have heard from Canadians, as all of us have?

Ms. Shannon Nix: As I noted off the top, it's an issue that has garnered significant attention. The department has received letters in the order of tens of thousands. The majority are in favour of the ban and are expressing a few common concerns. I would say that stress and the size and type of crates horses are exported in are the two most common reasons cited.

Mr. Tim Louis: Can you also speak about some of the other countries or jurisdictions that have legislation similar to what's being proposed in Bill C-355? Do you have insights into their rationale and their implementation process as well?

Ms. Shannon Nix: We are aware of other jurisdictions that have implemented or are considering implementing similar bans: New Zealand, Australia, the U.K., Germany and Brazil.

I would note that New Zealand, for example, banned the export of animals for slaughter in 2008. More recently, they implemented a prohibition on the export of livestock by sea. In December of last year, a bill was introduced in the U.K. House of Commons to prohibit the export of certain livestock for slaughter. That, I believe, is at second reading in their House of Lords right now.

Mr. Tim Louis: In the last few years, have you started working in conjunction with CFIA or CBSA about what steps you might take if this bill passes? Can you share some of the co-operation you're doing and the communication you're having?

Ms. Shannon Nix: I noted at the outset that data in this area is quite limited. We've conducted research on the horsemeat industry more broadly. It's not an area we had a lot of expertise in. We've examined the considerations with respect to a potential ban.

Consultations with various stakeholders have been very important to gain a better understanding of the impacts. We've spoken with representatives from industry, the provinces that would be implicated, animal welfare advocates and indigenous groups.

Mr. Tim Louis: Thank you for that answer.

As the sponsor of the bill, I've spoken to many stakeholders myself, including exporters. It sounds as if you did too. There are about four active exporters, and you said there are a few hundred producers and breeders.

Can you expand on the percentages? You said some are breeding for export but most are for other domestic markets. Can you give a sense of the scope of breeders selling horses? How much of that percentage-wise might be for overseas slaughter versus domestic?

Ms. Shannon Nix: We know that about 2,500 horses were exported for slaughter last year, in 2023. Those were almost exclusively going to Japan. For context, last year we exported about 10,000 horses to the United States by land. About a tenth of those were for breeding purposes and the rest were for sport and recreation purposes. I hope that gives a sense of the differences.

I would also note that probably a couple of handfuls of horses have been exported to countries other than Japan and the United States. We think they've primarily gone by air.

• (1125)

Mr. Tim Louis: Thank you.

The Chair: You have one minute if you want it, Mr. Louis.

Mr. Tim Louis: I think I'm good for now, because I would like to switch and there would be no time.

The Chair: Okay. Perhaps we'll allow some additional time next round.

[Translation]

Mr. Perron, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. I sincerely apologize for not being able to attend the meeting in person.

The witnesses' expertise is very important. I especially want to extend my warm regards to Ms. Ireland, who often takes part in our meetings and has become a friend to the committee.

I have some questions about the transport conditions. I don't know which of the witnesses is in the best position to answer them.

Are the conditions for transporting horses exported for slaughter really different from those of horses that are transported by air for other purposes?

[English]

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: That's a very good question.

The rules and regulations for the transport of horses by air—frankly, just the transport of horses—are not different depending on what the horse is going to be used for.

The requirements for a horse to be transported to another country for the purpose of a feedlot or food production are not different from the requirements for a horse being transported by air, for example, to an athletic event. The feed, water and rest time, or the interval at which an animal must be provided rest, feed and water during transport, is 20 hours regardless of the outcome for that animal.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much for your clear answers, Ms. Ireland.

I see the conditions are no different. However, people in the industry or people who want us to pass Bill C-355 tell us that the transport conditions are vastly different. We are told that horses are in much smaller wooden cages, that several animals are placed together and that they have less room to move around or absorb shocks upon takeoff and landing.

I'm curious about cases where people transport animals in different ways. For example, when a person transports a horse to a competition alone in its crate and accompanied by someone, does that mean that the person has gone beyond the standards? Have I understood correctly?

[English]

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: Some horses may be transported individually and some may be transported together.

On the requirements of the regulations, for stocking density or space to avoid overcrowding, for example, our regulations refer to the International Air Transport Association live animal regulations, which outline specifically the square footage that each animal must be provided when being transported. They also require that the animals be compatible, and there are some elements of the container: how it should be built, what it should be made of and what the specific details of the container are.

The regulations in some cases refer to International Air Transport Association live animal regulations, but in the case of the spacing, they are quite prescriptive, depending on the size of the horse, obviously. The larger the horse, the more space per horse should be provided.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Okay. If I understand you correctly, Ms. Ireland, people who transport horses in individual crates are in a class of their own because they go beyond the standards.

You say there are standards for animal compatibility. This is a point that has been raised in a number of documents. People say that horses are placed together in transport crates without necessarily checking the animals' compatibility.

Are you telling me that there are regulations on this and that someone is checking? Are you instead telling me that some associations have regulations on this, but that they do the monitoring, not you? I don't know if my question is clear.

• (1130)

[English]

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: Maybe it's worth pointing out what CFIA does at the airport.

In this case, the CFIA at the airport ensures that animals are healthy, are fit to travel are not overcrowded and are compatible. We do a visual inspection to verify the horses can stand comfortably naturally and that they don't come into contact with their container cover when they're standing naturally. CFIA inspectors are present when the horses are loaded.

When I say that we ensure animals are compatible, we consider things like their size, making sure there is a relative uniformity in their size in a particular enclosure so that you don't have one very large animal and one very small animal, for example, which would cause issues during transport.

I think it's worth pointing out that CFIA inspectors and veterinarians are at the airport when the animals are off-loaded from the trucks, put into the containers and put onto a plane, to make sure they are fit to travel, are healthy, are not overcrowded and are compatible.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you for your clear answers. What you have just told us is very enlightening.

You check the physical compatibility of the horses, but their temperament and whether they're going to fight on the plane are very difficult things to assess in the few minutes before the flight. Have I understood correctly?

[English]

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: These animals have been raised together. They have been transported on trucks together. They're off-loaded, and as they're loaded into crates, the loading staff and the CFIA veterinarians and inspectors—who, as I have mentioned, are present—work together to ensure the regulatory requirements are met: that they're compatible, that they have the right amount of

space, that they're in containers that are appropriate and that they're fit to travel.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Perron and Ms. Ireland.

I will now give the floor to Mr. MacGregor.

[English]

Just before you begin, we are going to run up against the vote, so I'll stop you 30 seconds before the vote to allow everyone to vote. I'll hold your time, and then we can make a decision on how we want to move forward.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): I was wondering if I could complete my six minutes, because there's a 10-minute voting period. Would that be okay?

The Chair: As long as everyone is okay with that. Are we all good?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay, go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for helping guide us through this study.

Dr. Ireland, I'd like to start with you. Welcome back to the committee.

As a counterpoint to the question that came from my colleague Mr. Barlow, I understand science-based decision-making is very important. Our committee has possession of a letter that was written by 20 experts—veterinarians who have many years of experience in animal welfare and veterinary medicine. I'm going to read their conclusion into the record:

While the Health of Animals Act and regulations provide some protection for horses during transport, they do not prevent horses from experiencing some of the most severe negative affective states during transit. Because there are significant stressors inherent in the transportation of horses from Canadian feedlots overseas for slaughter, it is not possible to continue this practice without causing significant animal suffering.

It is important to put that on the record. There are people with many years of experience in this field who are raising very legitimate concerns. That is based on their scientific assessment of the practice.

I don't want to focus too much on that. I want to go to your opening remarks where you said the CFIA was responsible for making sure that horses were meeting the export requirements of Canada but also the import requirements of the host country. It's my understanding that when the horses land in Japan, that's where our jurisdiction ends.

If, upon arrival in Japan, there is a discovery of injured horses—horses who obviously had medical distress—how do we collect that data? Are we depending on the goodwill of the Japanese? Do they take it from that point? I'm wondering how the oversight transition happens at that point.

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: The regulations do require the transporter to report fatalities or significant injuries to the agency.

• (1135)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Is that even upon arrival in Japan?

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: Our expectation is that the transporter report to us injuries and mortalities, even if the plane was landing in another jurisdiction. We would have several opportunities. In addition, we have connections and communications with Japanese authorities, so there are a number of ways that information may be shared with us. Our regulations are clear in terms of asking the transporter, the regulated party, to report to us those instances.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

Ms. Nix, I'd like to turn to you.

Since the ministerial mandate letter at the beginning of this Parliament, your agency has had a lot of time to consider this question and the policy implications of it. You've talked about the consultations.

In the meantime, we have two bills. We have Bill C-355, which is before this committee right now, but we also have a bill from Senator Dalphond in the Senate. We have two different legislative approaches. We have private members' bills looking at this.

In all of the time the department has had to consult the major stakeholders and really dive into the implications of this, the implications of the ministerial mandate letter and now two bills, what was the AAFC's preferred policy approach in dealing with this and executing the ministerial mandate letter? Do you see a path through Bill C-355? Is that what the department was considering? Was it Bill S-270, or was it something completely different?

Committee members would really like to judge this piece of legislation against what the department itself was considering.

Ms. Shannon Nix: As I noted in my opening remarks, this is a complex issue, and as you've stated, we've spent a considerable amount of time studying it and talking to stakeholders.

In the intervening period, obviously we have had this bill in front of us. We've turned our attention to watching its progression through the parliamentary process, understanding the impacts it could potentially have should it be the will of Parliament that it pass and being ready to provide advice to the government on how to implement it in such a way that mitigates any unintended consequences.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'm sorry. Correct me if I'm wrong on this. I want to be clear. You have been observing this bill's progress through the parliamentary process. It's still very early. Is that to say that AAFC, in the meantime, did not develop its own draft legislation or was not considering that? Were you going to rely purely on a private member's bill to execute a ministerial mandate letter? I just want to be clear on that.

Ms. Shannon Nix: To be clear, since the mandate commitment was given in December 2021, we have spent time doing our due diligence to better understand the sector, to better understand the implications of a ban and to meet with implicated stakeholders. In that intervening period, the bill in question today was tabled.

We've turned our attention to following that bill and understanding the implications so that we're better able to provide advice to the government should it be the will of Parliament to have it implemented.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that clarification.

The Chair: Colleagues, the vote is going to happen momentarily. I'll seek your guidance on this. It has been suggested to me that we allow every member to vote virtually. When we're satisfied that everyone has cast their vote and we're good, we can proceed while we have officials here in order to be efficient with our time.

Is that how we would like to proceed, on a UC basis?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. We'll do that.

The vote is now up. I'll give everyone a couple of minutes. We'll confirm people have voted and we'll proceed from there.

We're going to suspend for two minutes and then we'll come back.

• (1135)

(Pause)

• (1140)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Colleagues, we'll continue, with everyone's consent. Are we all good?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. I'm going to go to Mr. Steinley for up to five minutes, please.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I'm going to make a quick comment on one of the points Mr. MacGregor made about the 20 veterinarians who sent a letter to this committee. Of those 20 veterinarians, only two were not small animal vets. The other 18 were vets of cats and dogs. When we look at that, I'm not sure if that is exactly the point being made. I just want to make everyone aware that a lot of those vets don't actually work with horses or large animals.

I want to focus my comments around consultations, because Ms. Nix said she consulted with the provinces.

Who has consulted with indigenous producers, like the members of the Métis Nation of Alberta, who will be disproportionately affected if this bill is put through?

Ms. Shannon Nix: At the department, we have consulted with both the Métis National Council and the Manitoba Métis Federation. In addition, we have consulted with one Métis producer in the province of Alberta.

We've also consulted extensively with government officials from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, and, as I noted in my opening remarks, with exporters, feedlot operators, freight forwarders and animal welfare consultants.

• (1145)

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you for that.

What was their input? What did the Métis nation breeders in Alberta say? Did they support this bill or not?

Ms. Shannon Nix: They appreciated that there was an indigenous component to this. A number of indigenous people participate in this industry. I think there wasn't a strong sense of understanding the order of magnitude of how many indigenous people participate in this industry.

Obviously, there were concerns with—

Mr. Warren Steinley: I don't have a lot of time. I appreciate you tap dancing.

Was it a yes or a no? Did they support this bill or not?

Ms. Shannon Nix: I would say they raised concerns with the bill.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you very much.

I will move to the CBSA.

My colleague talked about some of the onerous tasks that are going to be foisted upon you. Did the government consult with the CBSA at all on this bill? Are they aware of how much more responsibility the CBSA is going to have if this bill goes through?

Is there a cost to that? How much extra cost will there be, if this bill goes through, for all the extra work you're going to have to do?

Mr. Graeme Hamilton: We've had ongoing discussions for almost the past year with representatives from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and CFIA. Because this is a private member's bill, CBSA was not consulted specifically on the language within the bill, but we have been consulting closely with the department and the agency—in particular since the bill has been tabled—in looking

at how we would start to administer the framework as described within this particular bill.

It's really difficult for us right now to determine what the associated costs would be for the implementation of this at the agency. Some of it is just going to be what this does to the market itself, if the bill does have the effect of reducing the number of live exports of horses. Obviously, that would factor into the amount of resources CBSA would need to apply in order to enforce this legislation as drafted.

There are lots of factors that go into that, but the work is still in very early days. There's an 18-month implementation in the bill. Once it receives royal assent as drafted, it wouldn't come into force for the following 18 months. During that period, we would anticipate concluding the work of understanding how this will be enforced at the border.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you for that.

I'll just do a follow-up. There are still going to be many other horses transported, not for slaughter but for sports, for athletic events, for the Olympics, for showing and for breeding purposes, so that will put an extra onus on your employees. That will have a large effect, and they will need to do a lot more.

Do you believe that in 18 months they could be equipped to handle these extra tasks? I ask because horses will still be transported, just not in one specific area.

Mr. Graeme Hamilton: You're absolutely correct. I think Ms. Nix quoted some of the stats earlier in her testimony. Thousands of horses are exported annually. This is something we would continue to work through to try to determine how our resources would be allocated against this new enforcement priority for the agency.

Mr. Warren Steinley: You did mention about 10,000 horses are exported to the States each year for various other reasons. Are there data points on how many injuries have occurred with animals being exported by truck and trailer?

Mr. Graeme Hamilton: On this particular one, I would defer to my colleague.

Ms. Shannon Nix: I don't actually have that information in front of me. I'm happy to take that back to the department and see if we have information on injuries sustained.

Mr. Warren Steinley: I appreciate that. If you could bring that back so the committee could see it, it would be an interesting way to compare.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Steinley, and thank you, Ms. Nix.

We'll now turn it back to the Liberal side with Mr. Louis or Mr. Carr.

Mr. Tim Louis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate everyone's patience throughout our voting.

I also appreciate my Conservative colleagues comparing horses to other companion animals, like cats and dogs. That's one of the reasons Bill C-355 is a stand-alone bill specifically targeted to end this practice and ban the export of live horses for slaughter. It does not affect any other sector. Putting food on the table I fully support.

I would like to direct my questions to Dr. Ireland, who is no stranger to this committee, from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

There is a big difference between the conditions for horses exported live for slaughter versus those for breeding horses, racing horses, horses for pleasure riding or horses for non-competitive entertainment. From my understanding, I think there's only one airline left that will export live horses for slaughter. The other airlines are no longer interested in doing that.

Is there any way that exporting live horses for slaughter could be mistaken for the exporting of breeding horses, racing horses or horses ridden for pleasure or competition?

• (1150)

Dr. Rick James-Davies (Director General, Western Operations, Canadian Food Inspection Agency): I'll take that for my colleague Dr. Ireland.

The standards and requirements are the same. They're laid out in legislation. Our veterinarians apply them every day. They speak to stocking density. They speak to the conditions of the animals in transport. To a question from earlier, whether individual exporters are exceeding those or not because they're simply not moving as many animals, that is certainly a possibility.

Mr. Tim Louis: I appreciate that answer. That is a distinction. You're saying the standards are the same, and what this bill is doing is changing legislation to change this practice.

The conditions don't necessarily have to be the same. We'll hear from Racetracks of Canada Inc. and Equestrian Canada; they're coming up. Would you say those conditions are quite different in the transporting of horses?

Dr. Rick James-Davies: I would come back to the existing legislation that allows permitted activities. Our veterinarians are there to monitor that every day, as my colleague has said. Our veterinarians are there on the farm when the loads are prepared. They're there at the airport when the trucks arrive for the crating of the animals, up to the final loading of the aircraft. As we've touched on earlier, any significant events causing death or mortality are reported back to us.

Our veterinarians apply those regulations fairly and transparently. Our veterinarians do a very good job of balancing the legislative requirements and their own professional ethics and beliefs, with the default being the protection of the horses that are travelling by air.

Mr. Tim Louis: You say that the CFIA has no control once the plane lands in another country. Does the CFIA accompany the planes overseas, or is it more like at that point, when wheels are up, the CFIA has no way of verifying other than an honour system? It

sounds like the exporters are supposed to report injuries. Is that correct? Is there no way of verifying other than an honour system?

Dr. Rick James-Davies: It is our expectation that those incidents are reported to us. The commercial shipments that go by air are accompanied by a member of the industry who has care and control of the horses, so they're certainly there to monitor the condition of the horses.

As Dr. Ireland has said, it is a very multistaff, complex activity where CFIA interacts routinely with industry and the people who are involved in this.

Mr. Tim Louis: Is it truly an honour system? Do you have to wait to be told? Is there no other way of verifying if the horse was injured during the flight?

Dr. Rick James-Davies: It's a legislative requirement for them to report—

Mr. Tim Louis: Right, but it's not enforceable. You're enforcing exporting at this point. This is a long journey for a horse to go, thousands of kilometres, and it seems that about 95% of it is unattended and not overseen, which is something this legislation, if this practice were banned, would fix. That's no shot at what you're doing. You're there during many stages of this, but it sounds like when wheels are up, that's the end of what our country can do to enforce this. Is that correct?

Dr. Rick James-Davies: The legislation certainly covers the entire journey and sets the feed, water and rest interval at 28 hours. It sets a reporting requirement on the industries involved, as we've said, regardless of end use. That's currently our legislative requirement, and we would expect industry to comply with that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Louis.

Thank you, Mr. James-Davies.

[Translation]

Mr. Perron, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to go back to the CFIA officials.

There is a lot of talk about transport conditions. Some people may exceed the standards, but I've understood that your regulations are well monitored.

That said, given all the complaints and protests from so many people about the transport of animals by air, has the CFIA looked at raising the transport standards? Have you ever worked on that, either in a committee or in some other way?

• (1155)

[English]

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: As I mentioned earlier, the regulations were amended and published in Canada Gazette, part II, in 2019 to come into force in 2020. They reflect and reflected at the time the best available science, information and stakeholder feedback.

As a regulatory authority and as a science-based organization, we continue to monitor information and science, and if we consider the regulations to be outdated or requiring additional measures, we always contemplate that. We would consider the additional information and make amendments if appropriate.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much for the clear answer, once again.

If Bill C-355 were to be passed, it would require people who export horses for purposes other than slaughter to provide a certificate proving that.

If I understood the opening statements correctly, this type of certificate already exists, so would it really increase the administrative burden?

[English]

Dr. Mary Jane Ireland: We are obviously following the bill as it moves through the process, and we will discuss implementation. The agency will work towards the full implementation of any new rules or laws that fall within its mandate.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much.

I have only a few seconds left, so I will end with a question I've been wondering about. If the government instructed the minister, in her mandate letter, to make this change, why is it being done through a private member's bill, which will be dealt with less quickly?

I can always ask the next panel.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That may be less of a question than a comment or an open question.

Mr. MacGregor, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Nix, I'd like to turn to you to drill down into your consultations. We heard that last year's export was approximately 2,600 horses, at a value of approximately \$19 million. How many farms or individual breeders are those 2,600 horses coming from?

Ms. Shannon Nix: I believe it's somewhere in the order of 350 different individual breeders.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Out of those 350, does the department have a breakdown of whether these horse exports for slaughter are their primary source of income or a secondary source of income? Do you have those figures?

Ms. Shannon Nix: I don't have the specific figures in front of me. From our consultations, our understanding is that for the majority of them, the export is secondary to their overall farming business.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: In their overall farming business, are they raising other animals primarily?

Ms. Shannon Nix: They are raising horses and possibly other animals.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Then the majority are using this as a secondary income source stream.

Ms. Shannon Nix: That's our understanding from the consultations we've conducted.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Do you have an approximate number of how many are identifying as indigenous versus non-indigenous?

Ms. Shannon Nix: From our consultations with industry, we estimate that somewhere between 15% and 25% are indigenous, representing about 40% of the horses exported for slaughter.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: You said the consultations and the reaction to the bill were difficult, I think. If this bill comes to pass, are options being explored for a transition phase that would allow them to move to other areas of animal husbandry and so on?

• (1200)

Ms. Shannon Nix: As the committee knows, this appeared in the Minister of Agriculture's mandate letter commitment in December 2021, and as my colleague from the CBSA has already noted, as it's currently drafted there's an 18-month implementation period before it comes into effect.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you. I have one final question, Mr. Chair.

I was wondering, Ms. Nix, if the department could formally table with this committee a summary of those consultations so that we as committee members can use them to better inform ourselves about this bill.

Ms. Shannon Nix: I can take that back, yes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Colleagues, that brings us to the end of the first panel.

There are a couple of housekeeping issues. You would have received from the clerk a proposed budget for both this study, Bill C-355, and the horticulture sector. We're seeking unanimous consent to approve the budget as distributed.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I recognize my good Maritimes colleague Mr. Long, from Saint John—Rothesay, who has graced us with his presence here today on the agriculture committee.

Thank you to the officials for joining us here today and for your work on behalf of all Canadians.

Colleagues, we'll suspend for two or three minutes to bring up the next panel. Thank you

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: We're going to move forward, colleagues.

We have with us today, as part of the second panel, Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell from Animal Justice, who is the director of legal advocacy.

Welcome. Thank you for being here with us in person in Ottawa.

From Equestrian Canada, we have Melanie McLearn, director of marketing and communications, who is joining us by video conference.

Welcome, Ms. McLearn.

From Racetracks of Canada Inc., we have Ms. Katherine Curry, who is the president.

Thank you so much for being here.

You have five minutes for opening remarks. Then we're going to turn to questions.

We will have to handle some votes in the back half. Hopefully, we can continue to work on good UC and keep moving forward.

Go ahead, Ms. Mitchell, for up to five minutes.

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell (Director, Legal Advocacy, Animal Justice): Good afternoon. Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before the committee today to speak to this incredibly important issue.

As Canada's leading national animal law organization, Animal Justice wholeheartedly supports Bill C-355, which would end the export of live horses from Canada for slaughter overseas. This is a relatively new practice, which appears to have started less than 20 years ago, when an American company relocated to western Canada.

Exporting live horses to Japan for slaughter causes significant and unnecessary suffering to horses. For this reason, the vast majority of Canadians from all provinces and of all political stripes support a ban on this practice.

Horses shipped to Japan for slaughter endure an extremely long and stressful journey and are subjected to conditions that are much worse than those sport and show horses see when transported to and from events. I've observed these shipments with my own eyes many times at the Winnipeg airport. I have watched as workers jab horses with poles to get them off the trucks and have seen them loaded into small wooden crates barely larger than their bodies. Once they're in these open-sided crates, they wait on the noisy airport tarmac to be loaded onto the planes, even during frigid winter temperatures.

In contrast, Air Canada's equine transport service ships a maximum of 18 horses per flight, ensuring spacious conditions and humane conditions for transport. Horses transported for slaughter are often loaded onto flights that carry 100 horses—or even more—at a

time. You heard a lot this morning about how the rules are the same, but in practice the conditions are different.

The committee has before it clear and compelling scientific evidence showing that the way horses are exported for slaughter, the way they are treated, is completely unacceptable and puts them at risk of fear, panic, extreme thirst, hunger, fatigue, injury and illness. Some have even died en route.

Tragic incidents of horses dying during transport or becoming seriously injured are deeply concerning and highlight the dangerous nature of this practice. However, I want to be clear that even when horses survive the journey without any apparent injuries, their welfare can still be severely compromised, as the expert evidence before you clearly shows. These are animals with a high centre of gravity, highly sensitive hearing and strong flight instincts. Recent scientific research shows that even short road trips of three or more hours can affect horses' endocrine and immune functions.

The time to end this practice is now.

I've heard some committee members suggest that our existing laws are enough to protect horses exported for slaughter, but as an animal protection lawyer, I would like to be absolutely clear that this is not the case. Provincial animal welfare laws and the federal Criminal Code are seldom used in the agricultural context. They are primarily applied when someone is deliberately cruel to an animal, such as beating an animal or starving them. Suffering caused by standard industry practices, including transport overseas, is exempt.

The health of animals regulations prohibit transporting horses for more than 28 hours without food, water and rest, but even that meagre limit is not always enforced. Just this week, Animal Justice was in court in Winnipeg, where a judge agreed to lay a charge against a horse export company for a shipment that went well over the legal limit and during which at least three horses collapsed. The CFIA refused to take enforcement action.

We calculate how long these horses are denied food, water and rest based on when the plane touches down in Japan, as if the second they land they're given food and water and they can immediately rest. Of course, we know that's not the case. The reality is that the horses' journey is far from over at that point. After the dozens of horses are unloaded from the planes and taken out of their crates, they're loaded onto trucks and then transported to quarantine facilities. The fact is, I don't know how long that journey takes. We simply do not know how much longer the journey goes on after the plane touches down, but it raises serious concerns that many of these shipments may actually go over the 28-hour limit.

I urge you to support Bill C-355 and bring our laws in line with the values of Canadians.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mitchell.

We'll now turn to Ms. McLearn with Equestrian Canada for up to five minutes.

Ms. Melanie McLearn (Director, Marketing and Communications, Equestrian Canada): Thank you.

I'd like to begin by expressing my gratitude for the opportunity to address the committee. As the governing body for equestrian sport and industry in Canada, Equestrian Canada wholeheartedly supports initiatives aimed at safeguarding the health and welfare of horses. However, we do believe that certain aspects of the bill require careful consideration to avoid unintended consequences for an important sector of our equine industry.

We would like to highlight the importance of defining the term "export" as it pertains to the transport of horses, and I know this has been discussed at length at the committee today. It is important, however, to distinguish, perhaps in the preamble or in other definitions, that air travel is utilized for horses for other purposes in the sport sector. The transportation of sport horses by air for competition, sales and training is an integral part of equestrian sport and is a standard practice for other national equestrian organizations represented in our voting membership in the breed sector.

Travel difficulties can be a source of stress, and mitigating any delays and ensuring smooth transport for horses that are legitimately travelling for sport are a horse welfare issue. If delays are forced on horses by this legislation, that could be a significant deterrent to the practice of horses legitimately travelling for sport.

We'd like to stress the distinction between horses for slaughter and those involved in sport and breeding. Ambiguous language may hinder legitimate transportation, and we want to ensure that it does not impact the equestrian community negatively. We're also asking that there be some consideration for a comprehensive transition plan, if this were to go ahead.

Our jurisdiction only covers active equines in Canada, those involved in sport and recreation activities, but we do have concerns, under the fundamental values of our organization, about the love of horses and the requirement for us to advocate for the welfare of horses in the lives of all Canadians.

We acknowledge that the bill's intent is to protect horse health, but we would like to emphasize the need to recognize the implications of welfare and equine care without forethought and planning. The necessity of implementing a comprehensive plan to support the industry's transition away from the export for slaughter practice is highly important, as is the need to avoid unnecessary pain and suffering for the horses that will be affected by the transition.

We would like to propose a transition plan that would include financial support, education and resources for the horse owners, breeders and stakeholders who are involved in the current industry. We are open as an organization and willing to play a supportive and consultative role in this so horses can be transitioned to other purposes such as sport or recreation. This transition plan should aim to protect and care for horses that are affected by this transition.

We appreciate and would like to let everyone know that we understand this is about a dedication to animal welfare. That is reflected in the bill and the passionate response that led to it.

We are in support of measures to eliminate the export of horses for slaughter. However, we would like to advocate for a more nuanced approach that includes clarifying language, especially to highlight the diverse uses of horses travelling by air, but also to highlight that there are potential unintended consequences of immediately ending an industry without the proper support. We believe that a balanced approach is necessary to safeguard horse welfare overall and in a variety of circumstances.

I'd like to thank the committee for your time and attention to this and express my trust in your careful consideration of all aspects, including considerations that we've brought forward as the bill progresses through the legislative process. I encourage continued efforts to promote animal welfare while maintaining a balanced approach to the challenges faced by our equine community.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now turn to Ms. Curry for up to five minutes.

Ms. Katherine Curry (President, Racetracks of Canada Inc.): I'd like to thank the committee for inviting me to speak to you today with respect to private member's bill C-355.

I'm the president and chair of Racetracks of Canada. We're an industry association that represents the 30 racetracks across this country, including standardbred, thoroughbred and a one-quarter horse track in Ajax. Our mandate is to further the interests of the horse-racing industry and advocate for racetrack operations across Canada.

Canada's horse-racing industry represents \$5.7 billion in annual GDP, employs over 47,000 people and has over 45,000 active horses. We unequivocally support Bill C-355. Racetracks absolutely do not condone the slaughter of horses. In fact, each track has programs in place to prevent this procedure and practice with respect to racehorses.

Having said that, we want to ensure there's no impact caused by Bill C-355 with respect to the ability to transport horses into and out of the country for racing purposes. It may be as simple as a sentence in the bill that exempts either horses being transported for sport or horses being transported for horse-racing purposes.

I'm happy to answer any questions, and I thank you again for your time today.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll turn right to questions.

We're going to start with Mr. Barlow for up to six minutes.

Mr. John Barlow: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses for being here.

I'll turn to Equestrian Canada first.

You were talking about the concern regarding the unintended consequences of Bill C-355. You were talking about the potential consequences. What would be the financial implications if this bill were to pass unamended?

You were talking about the impact it could have on breeding and on horses coming to and from Canada for events, festivals and shows. Do you have any data on what the financial implications of this could be?

Ms. Melanie McLearn: We haven't looked at the financials, so I can't give you a number. However, I do know that based on the number of.... We have 15,000 members actively competing in horse sport in Canada and internationally. We have 1,200 FEI athletes—those who compete on the international stage. They are the ones typically transporting their horses for sport purposes. That happens multiple times throughout the year, depending on where they're going for competitions.

For our breeding sector and for anyone who is doing training or other breeding, the numbers for who is bringing horses in via air for those reasons would be much higher. There is no number we can put on it. For us, the main focus is on the horses' welfare and how it could cause concern on airport grounds. If that's hindering a horse from travelling to an event, it can also have unintended consequences at the event itself, potentially stopping an athlete from going to a competition that they need to be at to qualify for the Olympic Games this year, for example.

There are so many unintended consequences that are not about the dollar value for us. However, it would be significant, but I don't have the numbers in front of me.

• (1220)

Mr. John Barlow: Thank you. If you're able to do that, that data would be helpful.

You led to my next question.

I have Spruce Meadows in my riding. I have the Calgary Polo Club in my riding. What would be the impact, again, if this is not amended for international competitions? We have horses from around the world coming to ridings across Canada to show and compete. In your opinion, would this bill be an impediment to those international and national competitions, with international competitors not wanting to come to Canada to deal with the additional hoops they'd have to go through?

Ms. Melanie McLearn: Yes, one hundred per cent.

We had an instance, in fact, recently when we were trying to host a Nations Cup event in Bromont, Quebec. Actually, we weren't hosting it, but we were helping with the sanctioning and support of one of our big event venues. We had some challenges with the ability of teams from different countries to come in due to some legislation.

We also experience this when the teams are not willing to come because they're concerned about what will happen when they leave. This would be the identical situation. There would be some potential for athletes from other countries not wanting to come if they felt they might get stuck or had concerns exporting their horses when leaving the country. A lot of times, people who are going to international competitions, such as those as Spruce Meadows, would be coming from a variety of different areas and potentially going directly to another area in the world, with horses flying—

Mr. John Barlow: Thanks for that. I have a limited amount of time and I have a couple of other questions to ask.

If you can, answer this quickly.

We've had some discrepancy between the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the proponent of this bill and, I'm certain, the comments from Animal Justice. Some say there are different standards for horses being transported by air for slaughter and horses being transported by air for other events.

Is that an accurate statement? Are the standards the same regardless of the end use of the animal?

Ms. Melanie McLearn: I'm sorry. I'm not an expert and am unable to answer that question. All I know is how our horses are transported. I can't speak to the differences.

However, I can speak to the fact that most people are not aware of how those transports happen, and that is one of our major concerns. If the language is not clear in this legislation, things could be misinterpreted. That is one of our biggest concerns with the way it has been written.

Mr. John Barlow: Thanks. I appreciate that.

Ms. Mitchell, thanks for coming.

You're very adamant that the standards are different, but the CFIA was here saying the standards are exactly the same.

Do you have proof that the CFIA is judging one animal differently from the next when they are inspecting the loads before they leave?

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: I think it's very important to clarify that. I absolutely did not say the standards or laws are different. The law is the same—the health of animals regulations. It's the practice.

Mr. John Barlow: However, you said they were judging those things differently.

The rules are the same, and you were agreeing with that.

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: Absolutely. The health of animals regulations are there.

Mr. John Barlow: You said they were being enforced differently by the CFIA depending on what the end use is.

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: No, I'm not talking about the CFIA's enforcement. What I'm talking about is the way individuals ship these horses.

My understanding—and our two witnesses here could probably speak to this—is that whether they ship, say, 100 horses three or four at a time in small wooden crates on one plane for a sporting event... I'd be quite surprised. I've never seen any documentation of that and I have seen a fair bit of footage and seen photos of the many different ways these horses are transported. Those are all—

Mr. John Barlow: You're saying you'd be surprised, but you don't have.... The CFIA is the science-based department and the officials are saying the standards are the same.

Just quickly, would Bill C-355 ban the slaughter of horses in Canada?

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: No, Bill C-355 would not impact our domestic horse slaughter industry. It's specifically focused on the export of horses for slaughter overseas.

Mr. John Barlow: Are you opposed to the transportation of horses or other animals for any reason other than slaughter? Are you fine with transporting show horses by air and cattle by truck? Are those issues you support or oppose?

The Chair: We're at time. However, Ms. Mitchell, I'll give you time to respond.

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: I'd have trouble answering that question quickly, because you listed a bunch of different types of transport.

I try to take a very science-based position based on the facts. What I can say is that the way these specific horses are exported is completely unacceptable and causes significant suffering.

• (1225)

The Chair: I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Carr for up to six minutes.

Mr. Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Mitchell and our other witnesses, welcome. Thanks so much for being here.

I was a bit concerned about a couple of components in the testimony offered by Dr. Ireland and folks from CBSA and Agriculture Canada.

Specifically, the word “expectation” came up a lot. However, to Mr. MacGregor's question, I did not hear a lot that would satisfy a response to whether there is an enforcement or reporting mechanism in place. It makes me think as an educator of how we send our kids to camp. We wake up in the morning and everything is good. We get them dressed and pack their bags. The lunches are there. We have the emergency contact numbers, but we never hear from anybody at camp. Of course, the difference is that these kids come back from camp and the horses don't.

The point I'm trying to make is that it seems as though we're talking about things being done right up to a certain point. I think my colleague from the Bloc, Monsieur Perron, asked a very interesting question about whether there is a difference in the regulations for those travelling for slaughter versus those travelling for show. The difference, of course, is that show horses or those participating in other activities are going to come back.

Once these horses get to Japan, for example, they are being fattened up intentionally, and we don't seem to have any reporting mechanism. I take it that our Canadian regulators are saying there are rules in place for once the horse lands in Japan. I'm still not convinced, based on the word “expectation” alone, that this is actually happening in accordance with the law. Once the horse moves out of the sight and control of Canadian legislation and into the Japanese market, we don't seem to know.

Can you elaborate at all on what we know from the Japanese side of things—or any other country receiving a Canadian horse through export—in terms of how they're treated and what that looks like?

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: Unfortunately, we don't know too much. As you point out and as we heard this morning, the CFIA is certainly at the airport. I've reviewed hundreds if not thousands of pages of ATIP request documents that show what we know about them in transport. If, at the end of the journey, the flight lands and a horse is dead or has collapsed and is still down—of course, we don't know if they collapsed before the end—that information is reported back to the CFIA and we review it.

However, that's about where it ends. As I said, we don't know how long it takes to unload the horses. We don't know how many of them developed some of the illnesses that experts have flagged with this committee—pleuropneumonia, shipping fever, or colic—or how many have their immune or endocrine systems impacted by this journey. We simply don't know.

I agree with you that “expectation” is a very concerning word, because once the horses are in Japan, it's a bit of a black hole.

Mr. Ben Carr: Part of the focus of the argument from some of my colleagues who oppose the legislation has been around the Canadian side. It's fair that they are speaking to certain regulatory components that exist within Canadian legislation, but that completely ignores the second half of the process, which is that we are where the horse originates. The animal is ultimately being provided the opportunity, through this legislation, to get into the hands of a foreign market and then out of our control.

It's concerning to me that we're not spending more time talking about what's happening to these animals once they get to their ultimate destination, because we don't have the moral or ethical capacity to raise our hands and say we did everything right on our side, but now that they're over there, it's up to the Japanese, or whichever other receiver of those animals, to decide how they're going to be treated. It simply speaks to us doing a part of our role.

I want to turn quickly to another thing, though.

Some of my colleagues have poked at me a bit and said, "Ben, this is not something that matters to people. You're just bending to the will of animal rights advocates."

Ms. Mitchell, you're actually a constituent of mine. Could you speak to the degree to which you hear, in our riding of Winnipeg South Centre, about the concern from your neighbours, your friends, your family and the people I represent in relation to this particular practice?

• (1230)

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: Absolutely. As you point out, it is a matter that a huge number of Canadians—and polling supports this—are concerned about. You're right that folks in our riding—and I've spoken to many of them—have expressed concerns. My understanding is that this issue also crosses political boundaries. Folks in many of the Conservative members' ridings have some concerns as well.

The science is there and public opinion is there, so it's very much my hope that we'll see this bill move forward.

Mr. Ben Carr: Thanks very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Carr.

Colleagues, I'll have to jump out of the chair here in a minute, but I'll turn it over to Monsieur Perron.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

You'll be in good hands with Mr. Barlow for the rest of the meeting.

Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for joining us.

I especially want to thank you for accepting our invitation, Ms. Mitchell. I am sorry that I'm not there with you in person. This is one of the few times when I am not there in the room. I send my greetings as if I were there in person.

My first questions are for you, Ms. Mitchell.

There is a lot of talk about horse transport conditions, which are established by the CFIA. The agency says that the standards are the same for horses transported for slaughter as for other purposes. However, those who transport horses for other purposes take greater care or precautions.

The CFIA representatives told us earlier that the transport standards were reviewed in 2019 and implemented in 2021. Has that improved the situation?

[*English*]

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: Yes. When the regulations were revised in 2019, there were some improvements. I would probably describe them as modest improvements. We still have some of the worst animal transport standards in the western world. The limit is now 28 hours, not 36. The focus on only that time doesn't address so many other issues for these horses. We don't have temperature requirements, or really any details on the way they're transported.

There are others, like Air Canada for instance, that have taken steps to really heighten those standards and make sure the welfare of horses is protected above and beyond what our very limited regulations require.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: I see that it varies.

The bill seeks to ban the transport of horses for a specific purpose. Let's set aside the more emotional side of horse transport. Indeed, for many people, horses have a different status from that of other animals intended for slaughter. Wouldn't the solution instead be to review transport conditions?

Have you taken any steps in that direction? I would like to hear your comments on that.

If, tomorrow morning, we guaranteed that the transport conditions for all horses would be the same, regardless of whether they were transported for competitions or for other purposes, would that satisfy you?

[*English*]

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: I think I would have to look at the specific proposal. What I would say is that even based on geography, we're talking about feedlots located—I'm from Manitoba, so I'll focus on Manitoba—at least five hours from the airport. To get horses, dozens if not more than 100 horses at a time, from a feedlot to the Winnipeg airport in all seasons—summer, winter—load them on planes and land them before they cross the ocean to refuel is an incredibly long journey.

What I'm trying to say is that there's only so much we can do to minimize suffering if we accept that it is a journey these horses are going to take, and they are going to take it not one or two at a time but up to about 110 at a time. I can't foresee a way to create regulations that would allow for that to happen without causing suffering. Furthermore, we have to ensure that there are contingency plans in place so that if unforeseen circumstances arise over that entire long and complicated journey, they will absolutely be protected.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you for that. I gather that the possibility could be considered, but that, ultimately, it wouldn't really satisfy you.

In your presentation, you mentioned the needless suffering that horses undergo during transport, even on a short three-hour drive. You also said that the maximum transport time of 28 hours was sometimes exceeded.

Basically, the intent of the carriers and the standards in place is to prevent animal suffering as much as possible. I think everyone agrees with that.

To be very honest with you, Ms. Mitchell, I really wonder about the precedent that will be set if Bill C-355 is passed. Other animal species can experience difficulties during transport. Could we not end up, as is the case in other states, in a race to ban the export of other animals? There are a lot of industries involved. We export a large number of animal species, including pigs, cows and chickens. What do you think?

[*English*]

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: I've heard this argument come up a few times before at the committee, the slippery slope argument of what's next. I would say this bill is very targeted to one very specific practice. I have seen no evidence to suggest that there is a real risk of a slippery slope here. The bill is really science-based. We're talking about horses, which have very unique physiology, and we're talking about a very specific type of transport that scientific evidence shows us causes harm and suffering.

With respect, I really don't see any risk here of a slippery slope, and banning this one specific practice will not adversely affect any other agriculture industry in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Let's set aside other species. Do you not think that, in a year or two, this could lead to calls to end horse slaughter in Canada, for example?

My time is up, but can you give us a quick answer?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Barlow): Thank you, Mr. Perron.

[*English*]

Do you have a quick response? I'm sorry; I wasn't sure if there was really a question there.

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: I'll just quickly repeat what I said earlier, which is that this specific bill will not impact our domestic horse slaughter industry. I've been raising concerns about that industry for years, but I really see this as a completely separate discussion.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Barlow): Thank you, Mr. Perron.

[*English*]

Colleagues, we have a vote in about 14 minutes. I'm just looking for unanimous consent that we'll vote by app. I'll give you guys a warning in a couple of minutes.

We'll get your six minutes in with no problem, Alistair.

Do we have consent to carry on, and then we'll vote by app?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Barlow): Thank you.

Mr. MacGregor, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to the committee, Ms. Mitchell.

In your capacity as the director of legal advocacy.... Well, first of all, I've been very interested in trying to see the different legal forms this policy position would take. We have Mr. Louis and the bill before the committee. We have Senator Dalphond in the Senate with Bill S-270.

I did ask the department whether they made any legislative forecasts, but they have not yet arrived at that position. It would have been interesting to have seen what the department came up with in terms of legislation.

Mr. Louis has taken the route of creating a stand-alone federal act. There are some pretty detailed requirements for declarations and so on, whereas Senator Dalphond decided to take a route where he's amending an existing act, the Health of Animals Act. His bill is quite simple. It's just simply that no person shall export from Canada a horse or other equine for slaughter.

I'm wondering if you could inform the committee, with your expertise, of your opinion on the different approaches in order to help us better understand whether amendments might be necessary and what legal route might be the best way.

• (1240)

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: I fully support the bill as drafted. That said, I fully supported Senator Dalphond's bill. I think I was quite vocal to that effect at the time he introduced it. I am aware that there are other requirements around paperwork when you are exporting horses. My hope would be that this declaration can fit into the existing scheme without adding too much for the folks we've heard from today, who are exporting horses for other reasons.

However, as I said in my written brief—and I'm happy to give more information—I think you could also amend the bill and take out the requirement for a declaration entirely and still see the same end goal. That's really what we're concerned about. With these shipments, as I said, it's not one horse at a time or two horses at a time. We're talking about huge shipments of horses leaving airports in western Canada, generally by Korean Air Cargo. With a ban in place, I really can't see those shipments continuing to leave.

It really wouldn't be a concern for me. Whether it's the bill as drafted or it's a pared-down version of it without the specific paperwork requirements—I don't know if those are concerning—I think either would be fine.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

I want to turn for my next question to Equestrian Canada.

I was listening to the opening statement and your concern about unintended consequences of this bill and the delays that might come up. I am assuming—and correct me if I'm wrong—that if competitors from foreign jurisdictions are visiting Canada with their show horses and competition horses, you're worried that even though they're not originally from Canada and are here for a competition, they may be caught by having to sign paperwork, even though at first glance it's quite obvious that the horses are not designed for slaughter.

Am I reading you right, or can you go into a little more detail there? I'm really trying to explore what specific amendments might be necessary from your point of view.

Ms. Melanie McLearn: I think it's about any additional administration that's required. In the case of foreigners coming and then having to export their horses out, any delays that might be caused due to either a misunderstanding or, as we've been discussing, the number of hours a horse might have to sit in prescribed crates on the tarmac or in the airplane itself can cause increasing welfare concerns. With the way the bill was written when we first read it—and I know it's gone through some changes—it said very clearly that some sort of letter signed by the minister would have to be delivered directly to the pilot. That seemed to be the kind of clarification we were looking for. For any delays at the moment of transportation or delays in paperwork that might be additionally required for those coming and going or returning, anyone's schedule would be highly affected given the dates you need to be at a different competition by in order to give the horse time to acclimate to the new location.

There are many different consequences. I could go through different scenarios. The one you mentioned is one of them.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: You also mentioned that you'd like to see a transition plan. The bill as it's currently written has a coming-into-force section of 18 months. When it comes to a transition plan, are you asking this committee to consider an amendment specifying a requirement for a transition plan that speaks to people who are breeding horses for slaughter and offering financial support? Are you asking for that kind of specificity to be inserted into this bill as part of a transition plan?

Ms. Melanie McLearn: Well, that could be one option. We definitely didn't feel it was outlined that there would be any kind of transition plan. There was no form of support.

Our main concern is around the horses that are currently being raised for that purpose. What will happen to them in a transition of 18 months without specifying any other additional supports? To us, that potentially leaves things open for other concerns to happen that we don't think are planned for. We want to make sure they are.

I'm not a legislator so I don't know what you can do to put that in, but if there was a way to indicate that it needed to be done, we would support that.

• (1245)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Barlow): Thank you, Ms. McLearn and Mr. MacGregor.

Ms. Rood, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Mitchell, you mentioned in your comments earlier that standards for horses going for slaughter are different from those for horses going for sporting events. However, we heard from the CFIA and the CBSA that those are exactly the same standards. In fact, flights do not always have to make a stopover for refuelling. There are direct flights that go across the ocean.

I haven't seen you provide new scientific data anywhere to back up what your assumptions are, so I'm wondering about that. Is it fair to say that you doubt the expertise of the CFIA and the Canada Border Services Agency in regulating and enforcing the safe transport of live horses?

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: Thanks for the opportunity to clarify.

The health of animals regulations are not different for different types of exports. My position and the evidence are that, in practice, the way horses are exported for slaughter is different.

On the point about refuelling, I have never seen a shipment of horses that has left Canada for Japan that has not refuelled. Generally, they refuel in Alaska. Occasionally, there are other locations. My understanding is that due to the weight of the aircraft carrying so many horses, they do refuel. If there are examples where they haven't, I'd be very interested to see that, but certainly I've never seen an instance when that hasn't happened.

On the point about scientific evidence, I come before you as a lawyer, absolutely not as a scientist—I'm the first to admit that—so what I would say is that you have a brief before you from 34 leading veterinarians and animal welfare experts. I commend that brief to you. We've also put forward a more extensive report that sets out some of the scientific concerns, and I commend that to you as well.

Ms. Lianne Rood: Thank you very much.

Just to clarify once again, of all the veterinarians who signed that brief, only two were not small animal veterinarians. The rest of them were small animal veterinarians. It sounds like your objections to this bill, Ms. Mitchell, are not grounded in science but rather in a love of horses.

Why ban the whole practice entirely? Why wouldn't you just advocate for increasing the standards? Have you ever been on any of those flights? Have you witnessed the landing and the treatment of the horses while they're en route?

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: On the point about the letter's signatories, my understanding is that this is incorrect and many of those signatories do, in fact, have specific expertise when it comes to horses and horse welfare. There are also a number of professors from—I'm just going by memory here—the University of Guelph and other institutions who are themselves animal welfare experts. In any event, I can't google all their names at this moment so I won't give you specifics there.

In terms of whether or not to simply improve the regulations, as I mentioned earlier to MP Perron, the very nature of this transport, shipping 100 or 80 horses—whatever the number is—from feedlots in very rural areas in Canada to all the way overseas, is incredibly stressful and incredibly risky for these animals. Our position is that it is unnecessary suffering.

Ms. Lianne Rood: However, you don't have a problem with them being shipped over there for sporting events. It's yes or no; it's a simple answer.

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: Well, I don't know enough about the way they're shipped for sporting events to have a position. I do know that they're shipped in much better—

Ms. Lianne Rood: They're shipped exactly the same way they are if they're going to slaughter, and we heard that from testimony in the previous hour.

I just point out, for context, that there are over 15,000 practising veterinarians in Canada, and in the letter that was submitted by 20 veterinarians to this committee, only two of them were equine veterinarians or have experience with actual horses. The rest were small animal vets for dogs and cats.

With my last minute, I'll turn to Equestrian Canada. I'm just wondering if you could tell us how significant the sale of horse livestock for processing is to an owner's cost recovery.

Ms. Melanie McLearn: I'm sorry, but I can't answer that because our jurisdiction covers only active equines in Canada, so nothing in the food sector. Sport and recreation are what our jurisdiction covers.

Ms. Lianne Rood: You have no data to support any kind of cost recovery for your folks when these horses are at the end of their careers.

Ms. Melanie McLearn: Do you mean when a sport horse goes for slaughter?

Ms. Lianne Rood: Yes.

Ms. Melanie McLearn: No, we don't track data on what end-of-life plans happen for any sport horses, as typically it's done with their veterinarian and doesn't go through the same type of...for the horses we're talking about today.

I'm sorry. We don't cover that.

• (1250)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Barlow): Thank you, Ms. McLearn.

Ms. Taylor Roy, we're going to you for five minutes.

I want to let you know that we're voting in about two and a half minutes. If everybody is okay, we'll let Ms. Taylor Roy finish her

five minutes, and then we'll vote after that. That will get us close to one o'clock.

I won't have to interrupt you, Ms. Taylor Roy. Please go ahead for five minutes.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here.

Thank you, Ms. Mitchell, for being here in person. I'm sorry I'm not there today.

I want to go back to some things that have been stated as fact. My daughter is an equestrian and is familiar with both racetracks and the competitive world.

I do not know of any horse person or horse person who competes who would transport their animal, whether for breeding or competition, according to the standards that are set for both. Obviously they're the same whether it's equestrian or horses being transported for slaughter, but I don't know of anyone like that.

I know you're from both the racetrack and equine sector. I'm wondering whether you have ever heard of someone from that sector transporting three or four horses in a small wooden crate that go for 28 hours without food or water. Could you address that? If you have any anecdotes, that would be great.

That's for either Ms. McLearn or Ms. Curry.

Ms. Katherine Curry: I can certainly answer that.

I'll use Woodbine racetrack as an example because that's the largest one in Canada. Generally, between 15 and 20 horses will come in to race over the course of a racing season. Usually they come in groups of two or three. There are some that come in on private planes.

These horses are in padded stalls. They are bandaged up. They have straw under their feet. They are given access to food and water throughout the flight. They sometimes travel with a vet the whole way. It is a very different experience from what is being described here today.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you, Ms. Curry.

How about you, Ms. McLearn? I've never seen it in my experience, but mine is limited to my daughter's world. I'm sure you've seen a lot more.

Ms. Melanie McLearn: Yes, I would concur with the explanation of how it was laid out.

They are very large areas. They are fed, and they have water throughout the flight. I have loaded them personally onto their trailers on the way to the airport and have seen the care and concern done in that case, with the bandaging of their legs and all the care and concern that goes into the transportation.

Absolutely, one hundred per cent, it would be what she described in terms of transportation. It would not be in cramped quarters or in wooden crates.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: That's great. Thank you very much.

There seems to be this concentration on the standards being the same. We understand that the standards are the same. I think the question is whether the standards are humane for the transport of a companion animal, a very sensitive and sentient animal, that is being transported to their death. When they're not cared for and when no one is at the other end to greet them or to make sure they're well, I think there's a very different standard of care applied.

Ms. Mitchell, I was wondering if you could comment on Willjill Farms. My understanding is that most of the large exporters of horses for slaughter are from Ontario, although I understand that there are some Métis and indigenous farmers involved. The bulk of the transport and profit comes from these farms from Ontario, including Willjill Farms.

There was a case at Bouvry Exports that CFIA investigated. I was wondering if you could comment, Ms. Mitchell, on the treatment of the horses that were found, which were initially set to be exported for slaughter; the condition they were found in; and the standard of care that was applied to them versus what we just heard from both the racetrack and the sport sector.

Ms. Kaitlyn Mitchell: On the question of the nature of the industry, as we heard this morning, there are about four companies that are exporters. They are based in Alberta and Manitoba. Of those exporters, my understanding, mostly from media articles in the Western Producer and other agricultural sources, is that there are about two major breeders that supply those industries and both are in Ontario. Neither, to my knowledge, are indigenous, though I

don't doubt there are many other breeders across the country that are indigenous. Those two, the major breeders, I do not believe are.

As for the specific incident you're talking about, it was really quite shocking. We saw in September 2023 that the CFIA laid charges against Bouvry Exports Limited, which, of course, is one of the major players in this industry. My understanding is that the horses involved were originally destined for the export market, but because of their poor health, they were put into our domestic horse slaughter industry. It sounds like the conditions they arrived in were absolutely atrocious. I've seen the photographs myself of these horses collapsed on the ground. Some eventually died.

It's incredibly concerning. It seems like even within Canada, when these animals are coming from Ontario to these feedlots in Alberta and Manitoba, there are valid concerns about the way they are being treated.

• (1255)

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. John Barlow): That's time, Ms. Taylor Roy.

Thank you very much to our witnesses.

I'll just end it here, colleagues. We'll see everybody after the break.

The meeting is adjourned.

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