



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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**COMMITTEE FOR  
AGRICULTURE AND  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
(Hansard)

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**Welfare of Animals Bill:  
Countryside Alliance Ireland**

28 September 2010

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

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RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**Welfare of Animals Bill: Countryside Alliance Ireland**

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Stephen Moutray (Chairperson)  
Mr P J Bradley  
Mr Trevor Clarke  
Mr Willie Clarke  
Mr Simpson Gibson  
Mr William Irwin  
Mr Kieran McCarthy  
Mr Francie Molloy  
Mr George Savage

**Witnesses:**

Mr James Barrington )  
Mr Lyall Plant ) Countryside Alliance Ireland  
Mr Michael Watts )

**The Chairperson (Mr Moutray):**

Our next evidence session is with Countryside Alliance Ireland. I welcome to the table Lyall Plant, Michael Watts and James Barrington. Gentlemen, you are very welcome. I know that you were here earlier this morning, Mr Plant, so welcome back. I invite you to go ahead and present, after which members will have an opportunity to ask questions.

**Mr Lyall Plant (Countryside Alliance Ireland):**

Countryside Alliance Ireland welcomes the opportunity to address the Committee to outline our key issues in relation to the Welfare of Animals Bill. On my left is James Barrington, who is an ex-chief executive of the League Against Cruel Sports, animal welfare consultant to Countryside Alliance, and a member of the Council of Hunting Associations and the all-party parliamentary middle way group. On my right is Michael Watts, honorary secretary of the Society of Greyhound Veterinarians.

Our main issues in relation to the Welfare of Animals Bill are tail docking and clause 53. First and foremost, Countryside Alliance Ireland believes that an exemption for the tail docking of working dogs should be included in primary legislation in Northern Ireland. By working dogs, we mean spaniels, hunt point retriever breeds and terriers. We believe that that exemption should be made because tail docking in working dogs is a prophylactic or preventative procedure. It is not cosmetically based but is carried out purely to promote the dogs' welfare.

Tail docking is undertaken when the task that the dog is expected to perform, and the characteristics of the breed, predispose it to tail injury. It is carried out when a dog is between two and five days old and always before the dog's eyes are open. The shortening of the tail at that age causes little or no distress — certainly less distress than carrying out an amputation on an adult dog with a fully developed consciousness.

Tail docking has long been common practice in the management of farm animals. It is carried out in lambs to prevent faecal soiling and in adult sheep to prevent fly strike. Piglets' tails are docked on veterinary advice to prevent them being bitten and becoming infected. That is accepted as an essential aspect of animal welfare, and we believe that it is also the case for working dogs. The lifestyle of working dogs predisposes them to a high risk of tail injury. It is difficult for an injured tail to heal, and the injury is very likely to reoccur. The reoccurring injury often leads to amputation. The Airlie Bruce Jones survey indicated that 48% of dogs with undocked, full tails were eventually given a mature tail amputation.

Luckily, we have foresight in respect of the consequences of the tail docking ban. We can learn from studying the effects of the ban in Scotland, which came into force on 30 April 2007.

As Scotland differs from England and Wales in that it has no exemption for working dogs, a study was commissioned to deal specifically with Scotland. The Airlie Bruce Jones report of 2008-09 covered 450 working dogs and found that: dogs with tails under six inches long recorded no tail injuries; 6% of dogs with tails between six and eight inches long experienced a tail injury; 15% of dogs with tails between eight and 10 inches long experienced a tail injury; and 81% of full-tailed dogs, namely those with tails of between 10 and 20 inches, experienced a tail injury, 48% of which were given a mature tail amputation to cure the problem. The report also found that, after the tail docking ban in Scotland, 78% of full-tailed young dogs were injured while working in their first year. That can traumatise dogs and make them reluctant to enter cover or hunt as eagerly or enthusiastically as they did formerly.

Therefore, those working dogs are being caused unnecessary suffering, and their animal welfare levels have been diminished by the introduction of the ban. From that case study, we learn that the introduction of an exemption for working dogs in the Welfare of Animals Bill would be advantageous for the mental and physical welfare of those dogs. How can those facts be ignored when considering the Bill?

The study entitled 'Risk factors for tail injuries in dogs in Great Britain', which was sponsored by DEFRA and others, is not fully comprehensive. Indeed, it is fatally flawed in that only 12% of the cases in the study were working dogs, and, in the control group, a very small 7.7%, or 17 out of 220, of the dogs that were studied were working dogs. That, therefore, cannot be a true and realistic reflection of the factors and consequences involving tail docking, especially when it is taken into context with the Airlie Bruce Jones survey, which studied 450 working dogs.

The DEFRA survey was conducted through veterinary practices, and it does not take into account the many tail injuries that were treated at home. For those reasons, we cannot rely on the finding that 500 dogs' tails would need to be docked to prevent one tail injury. We must instead take heed of the more realistic and true findings from the Bruce Jones survey.

The absence of an exemption and a complete ban on prophylactic docking of working dogs' tails will result in unnecessary suffering for a large number of working dogs for many years to come. As such, it is extraordinary that a measure designed to improve animal welfare would, at

least for working dogs, have the opposite effect.

Countryside Alliance Ireland welcomes the inclusion of clause 53 in the Welfare of Animals Bill, which allows exemptions for hunting, shooting, coursing and fishing. The removal of that exemption would be detrimental to animal welfare. Those activities are all legal and sustainable countryside sports, and they have proved themselves to be sustainable by the fact that, for centuries, they have been taking place and are still taking place. They help to maintain the natural balance of Northern Ireland's environment and provide enjoyment for over 80,000 people in the Province.

The removal of clause 53 could restrict those activities and, therefore, all of the benefits that are associated with them. The use of scenting and sighting hounds has long been proven the most natural and humane method of wildlife management. Death is almost instantaneous, unlike other methods. No animals are wounded using hounds; either death occurs or the quarry remains unscathed. In the nature of wild animals, hunting and being hunted is an aspect of daily life. The animal kingdom is not a civilised society, and it would be arrogant and unproductive to try to turn it into one.

The hunting fraternity throughout Northern Ireland produces substantial revenue from the running of point-to-points and their influence on the export both of thoroughbred and sport horses. That industry has built a reputation that can only be damaged by restrictions on hunting. If the exemption were removed, angling in Northern Ireland would be irreversibly affected. That is a tradition that dates back to the fifteenth century, and, as it stands, there are an estimated 30,000 anglers in the Province and more than 800 full-time employees.

Northern Ireland has been described as one of the finest places for angling in Europe. Over the years, we have built up our reputation and, therefore, we have become a destination for tourist anglers. In fact, in 2005, they contributed £1.8 million to our economy. In 2008, fishing equated to 3% of activities undertaken by visitors to Northern Ireland. If fishing were restricted, tourism would undoubtedly suffer. Resident anglers contribute both economically and environmentally. In 2005, there was an economic benefit of £20.5 million from resident anglers. The rivers and lakes in the Province are monitored, and any signs of pollution are reported.

Private fisheries and angling clubs have proactively been involved in the development of nursery areas that nurture fish and other wildlife. For as long as there is fishing in Northern Ireland, there are environments that will be maintained properly.

The majority of our land conservation is undertaken by shooting clubs. In fact, 990,000 hectares are managed by those clubs. That also equates to approximately 640 full-time jobs in conservation that are funded by the shooting fraternity. Sporting shooting in the Province contributed a substantial £45 million to our economy in 2006 and provides full-time jobs for over 2,000 people. The Committee needs to question whether, in this current economic climate, the Province can really afford the loss of that revenue and the increased unemployment rate. We realise that the removal of clause 53 would not prohibit those activities, but it would severely restrict them.

In summary, Countryside Alliance Ireland's main concern is the welfare of wildlife and the many effects that legislation will have on our environment. Therefore, any attempt to introduce legislation that is counterproductive will be challenged. The docking of tails is a practice that needs to be stopped, but not in the case of prophylactic docking for working dogs, whereby animal welfare, and not aesthetics, is the issue. I outlined why clause 53 should not be removed. However, those were just a few of the reasons. Realistically, rural activities have proven humane and valid methods of wildlife management, and have been for many centuries. We realise that civilisation is evolving, but wild animals are not a civilised society. To properly preserve our wildlife, we have to understand the nature of wild animals and examine the longer-term consequences for them.

Airlie Bruce Jones conveys his apologies for not being able to be here today to give evidence in person, as does Barrie Wade from the National Working Terrier Federation. Both will be available in October should the Committee wish them to give evidence. I thank the Committee for listening, and we are ready to take questions.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you very much. You indicated that you wish to see an exemption for tail docking, as there is in England. The legislation in Wales is different to that in England. Have you made a

comparison?

**Mr Plant:**

No.

**The Chairperson:**

In May 2007, the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW) published a report into the welfare of greyhounds in England and Wales. It raised a number of concerns about the welfare of greyhounds and concluded that there was a need for stronger regulation and inspection. Do you believe that there are equal concerns regarding the welfare of greyhounds in Northern Ireland? If so, what needs to be done?

**Mr Michael Watts (Countryside Alliance Ireland):**

The Society of Greyhound Veterinarians made a submission to APGAW, which I presented. The greyhound industry in Northern Ireland differs substantially from that in England in a number of ways. The welfare issues in Northern Ireland are rather different, but they are ever present. Something like 90% of the greyhounds that race in England are Irish bred. There is a very small British breeding industry. Almost all dogs are imported as ready-made race dogs at 15 or 18 months of age. Conversely, on this side of the Irish Sea, very many young greyhounds are reared, go into basic early training and are then sold on.

Welfare problems in England tend to revolve around what happens to greyhounds that are too old or too lame to race any more and whose owners no longer want them. The problems arise here with a younger cohort of greyhounds that are not fast enough or are injured and are unable to start racing. We have a large number of young greyhounds that, in the nature of things, are perhaps not handled much, not very socialised and not house trained. In many cases, they do not make good pets. There are a large number of them, and what are we to do with them?

In England, there is a large number of older, retired dogs that were used to a level of human contact and to regular handling, and they are much easier to rehome. Furthermore, there are 60 million people in England who might like to rehome them, as opposed to about 4 million people in Ireland. Around 25,000 puppies are registered in Ireland every year. When I say Ireland, I

mean all 32 counties. The breeding of greyhounds in Ireland is regulated by the Irish Coursing Club, which considers Ireland, for better or worse, a 32-county entity. For that reason, we have no separate figures for Northern Ireland.

With England's much larger population, they have to rehome approximately 10,000 unwanted greyhounds per annum. Therefore, in a nutshell, we have more younger, less rehomingable dogs, and fewer homes for them to go to.

**The Chairperson:**

Given those comments, do you believe that there are more concerns around the welfare of greyhounds in Northern Ireland?

**Mr Watts:**

Absolutely. However, a difficulty arises because the Irish Coursing Club's figures are based on 32 counties, and it is impossible in practice to separate a Northern Ireland population of greyhounds from a Republic of Ireland population of greyhounds.

At the moment, there are only two greyhound racing tracks in Northern Ireland. One track is at Drumbo Park, which is outside Belfast, and the other is at Brandywell in Londonderry. We have a moratorium on coursing, so there are very few coursing dogs here. The greyhound industry in the Republic is very much larger, but dogs that are trained in the Republic race here, and dogs that are trained here race in the Republic, and it is very difficult to make a separation. One would imagine that the Northern Ireland greyhound industry is quite small, but it is impossible to put a figure on it. However, wherever there is greyhound racing, there are welfare concerns.

**The Chairperson:**

What happens to greyhounds that cannot be rehomed here?

**Mr Watts:**

They are put to sleep, I am sorry to say.



**The Chairperson:**

Euthanised.

**Mr Watts:**

Yes.

**Mr Plant:**

I will try to find out the number of greyhounds in the six counties and submit that information to the Committee.

**Mr Molloy:**

I do not know whether you heard the previous evidence session on docking dogs' tails. There was an indication that puppies up to 11 days old do not have a pain threshold and that docking of dogs' tails at that age does not create pain. Do you have any opinion on that from a veterinary point of view?

**Mr Watts:**

I have never seen any evidence or peer-reviewed research on the neurology of neonatal puppies. However, I am suspicious of that argument. I think that if puppies are going to be docked, they should be docked with an anaesthetic.

**Mr Molloy:**

What has been the experience in relation to working dogs that do not have their tails docked? Do they have injuries?

**Mr Watts:**

The types of working dogs that we are talking about are springer and cocker spaniels, retrievers and certain types of terriers. My colleague relayed the Scottish experience of the Airlie Bruce Jones study, which is that gun dogs that are not docked suffer a high incidence of injury. He was also able to demonstrate that, the longer the tail, the higher the chance of injury.

**Mr Molloy:**

In Scotland, has there been an increase in the number of injuries to working dogs since the introduction of the ban?

**Mr Plant:**

Yes, there has. It has been highly evident since the ban came into place in 2007. Indeed, in my submission to the Committee, there is a letter to a vet from one of our members who hunted with her dogs for years with no problem, but, when the tail docking ban came in, it resulted in recurring injury. Therefore, prior to 2007, most HPRs, terriers, springer spaniels and cocker spaniels were docked, and there was no problem.

**Mr Molloy:**

Can you give us some understanding of the consultation that your Department has had with your organisation and others like yours? What has been the response? Judging by the responses from the Department here, it seems that it is turning a blind eye to all the evidence and saying that it is not for changing. Have you had any communication with the Department?

**Mr Plant:**

Prior to the drafting of the Bill, we met the Department to express our concerns. We were in favour of prophylactic tail docking for working dogs. The consultation came out, and we responded to that. After the workshop, and prior to the Bill being issued, I submitted additional evidence. The Department stated that there was no evidence that there was a problem; it said that tail docking would come in, and that was it. I submitted more evidence, and I resubmitted my original evidence on HPRs from Sweden and a pre-publication copy of the Airlie Bruce Jones report. That is all that the Department concluded with me. I have worked closely with the BASC on the issue, and we will be willing to draw up guidelines with the Department, if it wishes to enter into discussion with us at a later date on an exemption similar to that in England and Wales.

**Mr Molloy:**

We talked about dangerous dogs this morning. Would it be better to have an exemption for certain dogs or to remove the ban? How many non-working dogs would have their tails docked if the ban were removed?

**Mr Plant:**

That depends on the breed standards of the Kennel Club. The exemption for working dogs will be beneficial, and we are not in a position to set breed standards or to say what the Kennel Club wishes to state on that. However, we will support it in the standards that it wants to set for its breeds.

**Mr Molloy:**

Would it be better to take the ban on tail docking out of the Bill altogether, or is it better to say that certain breeds should be exempt?

**Mr Plant:**

We believe that there should be an exemption for working breeds.

**Mr Molloy:**

The likes of a terrier, as well as a spaniel, for instance, could be a working breed.

**Mr Plant:**

That is correct. Barrie Wade from the National Working Terrier Federation is willing to come over and discuss that with the Committee at a later stage, as I said in my presentation.

**Mr T Clarke:**

I want to follow up on what Francie Molloy said. Given that there is confusion over dangerous dogs, would it not be easier to remove the tail docking ban from the Bill? Nobody will go through the expense of doing it unless they need to. Rather than cause confusion in defining what is a working dog, why not remove the ban entirely?

**Mr Plant:**

It would be up to individual choice.

**Mr T Clarke:**

But I am asking you for your opinion on that. Rather than having an argument at a later stage with some official about what breed is or is not a working dog, would it be better not to introduce

a ban on the docking of tails and allow it to be done by choice?

**Mr Plant:**

Yes. I support individual choice on that.

**Mr W Clarke:**

What other injuries do working dogs sustain apart from tail injuries? Do they get injured paws or become lame, for instance?

**Mr Plant:**

I have owned five springers. I am 55 years old. All of my dogs have been docked, and they have never had tail injuries. One had a cut pad, and another got a cut on its chest from barbed wire on a fence. I went to the vet, got the dog's chest stitched, and the dog was back out hunting the next day. They are a hardy breed, but it is the action of their tails and the hardness that they go through — the brushes, briars and heavy gorse — that causes the damage. It is not very nice to see.

**Mr W Clarke:**

I had a springer some years ago, and it was always getting its paws cut. That could have been down to bramble or glass due to the environment that I was in. It was regular for its paws to be cut. How prevalent is that?

**Mr Watts:**

I see quite a lot of gun dogs, particularly springers and Labradors, in my everyday practice. Springers are liable to get injured because of their tendency to go from nought to 60 over a few yards; they are very enthusiastic.

Obviously, the rough terrain over which much shooting takes place means the possibility of injury. As you said, foot pad injuries are common from cuts on sharp stones and, let's face it, unwisely discarded glass causes a problem too. Barbed wire fences are a very big problem for dogs that try to dive through them and end up cutting themselves around the chest, underbelly, and so on. That leads to a lot of winter Saturday afternoons spent stitching dogs up.

Going back to the precept that negative evidence means nothing, most of the working springers and cockers that I see are already docked, so there is not a huge issue with tail injuries. It is very difficult to say what the level of tail injuries would be if those dogs were not docked.

**Mr W Clarke:**

You are making the point about exempting working dogs, and I can see the rationale for including the cocker and the springer from different evidence that we have collated. You touched on the terrier. There is no evidence to support exempting the terrier; it is similar to me standing up and saying that terriers should be exempt because I think that it is a good idea. I do not see any figures before me that support their exemption.

**Mr Plant:**

It is similar to the HPRs. Most of them are already docked, and most of the ones that are going into Scotland are being bought from England, Wales or the Republic of Ireland. For instance, a lot of the pointers and setters that are used on the grouse moors in Scotland and Yorkshire are brought over from the Republic of Ireland.

As Michael Watts rightly said, just because there is no evidence of a problem does not mean that there is not one. The terriers are in that category, because the situations that they can be placed in would cause damage to their tails.

**Mr W Clarke:**

I agree that they are being imported to and exported from Ireland. We want to get good legislation on the island of Ireland to eradicate the problem that you described. We need a harmonised approach, because there are flaws in the Scottish and English legislation. We are trying to get the best legislation possible. That has to be done on an all-island basis. To do otherwise, as you have just outlined, does not make sense.

I have talked to colleagues in the South, and there does not seem to be a massive groundswell of support for exemptions. I am not hearing that, but maybe that is because the Bill has not passed through the Dáil.

**Mr Plant:**

Correct. The Bill has not passed through the Dáil yet. All members of FACE Ireland, the National Association of Regional Game Councils, which has over 35,000 members, ourselves and many others will be opposing a full docking ban in the Republic. The reason why you have not heard anything is because it has not even broached the surface of the water. However, when it does, it will go back into the Rural Ireland Says Enough! (RISE!) campaign, which nearly brought down the Government on the Ward Union hunt. That is how passionate they are down there.

**Mr W Clarke:**

It has to harmonised on the island of Ireland. No matter what we decide, we need good legislation on the island.

**Mr Plant:**

As an all-Ireland organisation ourselves, with members throughout the island of Ireland, that is our stance, and we will doing that in the Dáil as well before the Agriculture Committee down there.

**Mr Savage:**

I have listened all day to talk about dogs, and you would think that we were introducing a new animal altogether. I have worked with working dogs all my life, working with cattle and one thing and another. Dogs have as much sense as human beings, and far more sense than people give them credit for. We are making a mountain out of a molehill. Can you see much opposition to clause 53?

**Mr Barrington (Countryside Alliance Ireland):**

The potential is there for someone to try to use this legislation to ban hunting or coursing. The very fact that you made an exemption for those activities has a good and bad side. One side gives guidance on what the spirit of the law would be. The other side of that is that someone may say that those activities need special protection, as if something is wrong with them. It is a double-edged sword, in a way.

The example of the Westminster Hunting Act 2004 should weigh heavily on people's minds, because that Act has failed at every level. From a welfare standpoint, it starts without a principle. The idea of making wild animals suffer less, or raising animal welfare standards in respect of wild mammals, is an honourable one. However, to start by stating that only certain activities will be addressed, leaving the rest to fill that vacuum, is unprincipled. That is where the Hunting Act has failed miserably on animal welfare, notwithstanding the liberty and livelihood arguments.

**Mr Gibson:**

A number of issues arose from the Kennel Club's submission. The first was electric shock collars that are sometimes used to train dogs. The Kennel Club representatives strongly opposed the use of those collars. Does the Countryside Alliance have a view on their use?

**Mr Plant:**

Yes. We fully support the Kennel Club's views on electric shock collars.

**Mr Gibson:**

They also raised the issue of the sale and marketing of puppies. They were opposed to the Internet selling of pets, and suggested that pet shops required greater monitoring. Have you a view on that?

**Mr Plant:**

Obviously, all pet shops should be visited to ensure that their animal welfare standards are up to scratch and meet the requirements of the legislation. The Internet is a new avenue of communication. Legitimate canine breeders should be allowed to advertise their puppies online if they are responsible, above board and licensed. There should, however, be someone to try to weed out all those unscrupulous puppy breeding farms that we all want to see disposed of.

**The Chairperson:**

I want to bring P J Bradley in on that point, because I know that he has to leave shortly.

**Mr P J Bradley:**

Thanks very much for your presentation. I agree with quite a lot of what you said throughout

your presentation. However, I wish to pick up on one point that I do not think you mentioned — if you did, I missed it. I will ask you this question straight: does the Countryside Alliance not consider the Irish hare to be a threatened species?

**Mr Plant:**

We do not believe that the Irish hare is a threatened species under the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill. It has met the levels required by the all-Ireland species action plan, which means that it is sustainable in the present environment. In that environment, all hunts have been carrying out their activities in a legitimate manner under the special protection order. Irish hare numbers have not diminished but have actually increased over that period of time.

**Mr Gibson:**

I am interested in your point about the Irish hare. I am no position to disagree with you or to quote statistics that perhaps prove that the contrary is true. However, I know that there has been a drastic reduction in the number of hares in my own particular part of County Down. I do not know why that should be. On the basis of what you say, perhaps it is just a localised problem. However, I know that those hares have almost disappeared in my area.

**The Chairperson:**

I will cut that line of questioning there, because that is for another Committee and another day.

**Mr Plant:**

Were they brown hares or Irish hares? The Ards Peninsula is renowned for brown hares, which are an invasive species and have to be culled.

**Mr Gibson:**

My other question is about the destruction or euthanasia of animals, which is an issue that the Kennel Club raised. Its representatives felt that the Bill was perhaps not precise enough. The Bill talks about “destruction”, but perhaps that needs to be elaborated on a bit more. Given what we have heard about the number of greyhounds that are surplus to requirements, perhaps that issue should be looked at.



I am interested to hear your comments on, first, the method used for the destruction of animals, and, secondly, the appointment of a person to arrange for the carrying out of the order, which is talked about in the Bill, and whether or not that person needs to be further qualified.

**Mr Watts:**

In relation to the destruction of animals, we are talking specifically about dogs here. In almost all cases, the appropriate person to carry out the euthanasia of dogs is a veterinary surgeon. I am no lawyer myself, but I am told that, in law, the owner of a dog can destroy it, as long as he does not do so in a manner that causes suffering. However, I am not going to argue the point on that one.

Clearly, there may be exceptions. For example, in a shooting context where a dog is severely injured miles from help, it may be appropriate to shoot it on the spot rather than prolong its suffering by taking to a vet many miles away. However, these things will only crop up once in a blue moon. Generally, an injured dog or a dog in poor health that requires euthanasia should be taken to a vet — full stop.

**Mr Gibson:**

Absolutely.

**Mr Plant:**

The person appointed should be qualified as a veterinary surgeon.

**Mr Gibson:**

I have one further question to ask.

**The Chairperson:**

Very quickly now.

**Mr Gibson:**

I presume that you are a member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. What is its view on tail docking?

**Mr Watts:**

It has put us practising veterinary surgeons in an awkward position. It says that we should not carry out tail docking on ethical grounds. I have been a veterinary surgeon for 30 years, and I am not ethically permitted not to dock puppies' tails; I do not do it. On the other hand, I have paraded before me, for example, for vaccination, puppies that have been docked by a third party; in some cases by their owner, in some cases by veterinary surgeons in the Republic. I see dogs whose tails have been docked improperly — the job has been botched — and I think that if I had done that, I would have done it better. If puppies' tails are going to be docked, the vet is the guy to do it.

**Mr Molloy:**

In relation to the Scottish experiment, I see, for the record, that 81% of dogs with tails 10 to 20 inches long had a tail injury. That is quite dramatic. If the Department was interested in welfare, would it not be saying that we need to dock tails in order to maintain the dogs' welfare?

**Mr Plant:**

Yes; that is the simple answer. The Bill was designed for animal welfare, and I personally think that the Department is ignoring all of the evidence that we submitted.

**Mr Molloy:**

On the other issue, two things. Maybe the vet can give us some idea about one. I have never seen a terrier with a tail, but if a terrier grew its tail normally, what length would it be? The other issue is the dew claw, which has not been mentioned, but which I understand can be removed.

**Mr Plant:**

There is an exemption.

**Mr Molloy:**

Can the dew claw lead to more injuries?

**Mr Watts:**

Yes. Speculating about the length of terriers' tails is like asking how long a piece of string is.

Terriers are a mixed bag, including many cross-bred dogs, which come in all sorts of shapes in sizes, mostly small. An argument sometimes advanced is that the tail of a terrier should not be docked, because if it gets stuck down a rabbit hole you need something to pull it out by. I would not particularly like to see a dog pulled out of a rabbit hole by the tail; it strikes me as a very painful experience, but there you are.

**Mr Molloy:**

On that point, if a terrier goes down a rat hole or rabbit hole and cannot get turned because of its long tail, it is likely to get trapped.

**Mr Watts:**

Yes.

**Mr Plant:**

You have to dig him out.

**Mr Watts:**

I have never tried, but it strikes me as being easier said than done.

**Mr Molloy:**

What about the dew claw?

**Mr Watts:**

All dogs have dew claws on their front feet at birth. They are effectively a residual thumb. About 20% of them also have dew claws on their back feet, but many dogs are born without those. Those are toes that are gradually being lost, in effect, in the course of evolution. Many people think that they serve no useful purpose. I know that some greyhound vets say that they do not remove the dew claws because they believe that to do so upsets the natural balance of the dog's foot. On the other hand, I attend the Drumbo Park greyhound stadium in a professional capacity and from time to time I see greyhounds racing with muzzles on that have managed to hook their dew claw in the muzzle while running. That causes quite a traumatic injury, with the claw being more or less ripped off. It happens at 35 or 40 mph, so it is quite distressing.

**The Chairperson:**

The Department points to the recent report of the Royal Veterinary College and Bristol University, which concludes that the overall risk of tail injury to dogs is low — extremely low in working dogs — and that 500 pups would have to have their tails docked to prevent one injury. How do you respond to that?

**Mr Plant:**

I respond by saying that that is the Department and the Minister picking one survey that suits the way they are going to proceed, and ignoring all of the other evidence that has been presented. As I said in my presentation, that survey does not actually specifically look at working dogs but the wider population of dogs. Even if it is 500 to one, I hope that a caring Department that has animal welfare at its base would look after one dog to ensure that the other 499 were of the same standard.

**Mr Molloy:**

How many lambs' tails are docked to stop one lamb getting an infection? How many pigs' tails are docked to prevent other pigs from eating them?

**Mr Plant:**

You may as well ask the Minister how many people are claiming farm supplements.

**The Chairperson:**

We will leave it at that. Thank you very much for your attendance today.