House of Commons

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Tree health and plant biosecurity

Tenth Report of Session 2013–14

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Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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Plant disease and pest outbreaks in the UK can cause adverse environmental, social and economic impacts. The Government must develop its capability to predict, monitor, control and mitigate the impact of pests and pathogens on plants in the UK.

We endorse the recommendations of the Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Expert Taskforce but we expect the Government to complete its delivery of all the recommendations in collaboration with stakeholders through the enhanced plant health programme, to be published in Spring 2014.

There is currently some lack of definition of the roles and responsibilities of plant health authorities in the UK. The newly appointed Chief Plant Health Officer should address this shortcoming as a key priority. Communication and collaboration between organisations within the UK, and between the UK and EU member states, must also be improved.

The current review of the EU plant health regime is the ideal opportunity for Defra to negotiate a new regime more consistent with the UK Government's aims. However, the EU review may take several years, and in the interim the Government must consider strengthening the protection afforded to the UK by using existing legislative mechanisms.

One of Defra's four key priority areas is safeguarding plant health, yet we received evidence that it has become increasingly difficult to source UK funds for research on tree health issues. Resource constraints have led to a short-term fire-fighting approach to deal with existing disease outbreaks. It is essential that ring-fenced funding is provided for long-term research and development work that focuses on preparation for future plant health threats.

We welcome the Government's commitment to take action to address the declining number of experts in the field of plant health, but we expect Defra to provide us with a full list of immediate initiatives that are being taken, including clear timeframes for implementation and details of the funding that has been allocated. We recommend that funding is allocated to increase the number of university courses and research posts available in the field of plant health in order to secure new entrants and to maintain a suitable level of expertise. The UK needs a core of dedicated, well-motivated experts to provide evidence of emerging plant health threats and to be ready to manage them.

1 Introduction

1. The growth of global trade in plant materials has led to a marked increase in the volume and diversity of trees, plants and plant products entering the UK in recent years. This has led to a higher likelihood of harmful plant pests and pathogens being introduced into the UK. Disease outbreaks such as *Chalara fraxinea* may also be attributable to extreme weather events which can bring infectious spores into the UK from the continent. The growing number of disease and pest outbreaks in the UK serves to underline the reality of these risks. These outbreaks can cause adverse economic, social and environmental impacts.

2. In October 2011, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) published a Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Action Plan, which set out a long-term commitment to tackle biosecurity threats to Britain's trees and forests.[1] This commitment gained importance following the discovery of the fungus *Chalara fraxinea* in native UK ash trees in 2012. Defra subsequently published, in March 2013, a Chalara Management Plan (updating a control strategy published in December 2012).[2] More recently, Defra has identified safeguarding plant health as one of its four key priorities and committed to publishing a new plant health strategy in Spring 2014.

3. *Chalara fraxinea* (more commonly known as ash dieback disease) provides an example of the range of effects that an outbreak of disease can have. Cases of ash dieback disease were first identified in the UK in saplings in a nursery in Buckinghamshire in February 2012, and in October 2012 the first signs of the disease were detected in mature trees in the wider natural environment in Norfolk and Suffolk.[3] The outbreak of ash dieback disease has led to (but is not limited to) the following consequences:

— ash has been lost as a timber tree: the loss of income and changes required woodland management have been economically detrimental;

— for private owners, the cost of surveying, felling and replacing ash trees is high: the overall cost of managing ash dieback disease for the National Trust is estimated at £15 million;[4]

— losing a large number of ash trees could reduce the amount of carbon dioxide that is removed from the air, leaving more greenhouse gas in the atmosphere;[5]

— the environment has been negatively affected: ash has many associated species and is the sole food-plant for numerous species of invertebrate; and

1 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, *Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Action Plan,* October 2011

2 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, *Chalara Management Plan,* March 2013

3 Forestry Commission, *Chalara Dieback of ash,* accessed 20 January 2014

4 Q223

5 University of Edinburgh, *Fungus may devastate ash woodlands,* 6 May 2013

— ecosystems and biodiversity levels have been negatively impacted: nutrients are released from soil and habitats lost.

Our inquiry

4. In November 2012, in response to the outbreak of ash dieback disease and the wider failures in UK plant health protection that the outbreak exposed, we invited written submissions on Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity. The aim of this inquiry was to explore whether Defra policies such as the Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Action Plan were suitable. We used ash dieback disease as an archetypal example of an outbreak of disease in the UK, but we also looked at wider plant health issues and asked whether there are sufficient resources and adequate management plans to effectively prevent and manage disease outbreaks.

5. The twenty-nine written submissions and transcripts of three oral evidence sessions, hearing from representatives of government, landowners, farmers, trade bodies, wildlife, conservation and environmental groups are published on our website.[6] We also submitted written questions to the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP and received a total of five written submissions from Defra (incorporating input from the Forestry Commission and the Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera)). [7] We are grateful to all who provided evidence to our inquiry.

6 EFRA Committee website, Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity inquiry

7 Ibid.

2 Enhanced Plant Health Programme

6. As part of its plant health strategy, Defra asked its Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Ian Boyd, to set up the Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Expert Taskforce to provide an independent perspective on risks, costs and strategy related to tree health and related biosecurity in the UK. The Taskforce published its Final Report setting out the following recommendations in May 2013:

i) to develop a prioritised UK plant health risk register;

ii) to appoint a Chief Plant Health Officer to own the UK plant health risk register and to provide strategic and tactical leadership for managing those risks;

iii) to develop and implement procedures for preparedness and contingency planning to predict, monitor and control the spread of pests and pathogens;

iv) to review, simplify and strengthen governance and legislation;

v) to improve the use of epidemiological intelligence from EU/other regions and work to improve the EU regulations concerned with tree health and plant biosecurity;

vi) to strengthen biosecurity to reduce risks at the border and within the UK;

vii) to develop a modern, user-friendly, system to provide quick and intelligent access to information about tree health and plant biosecurity; and

viii) to address key skills shortages.[8]

7. Defra accepted recommendations (i), (ii) and (iii) over summer 2013[9] and the remainder of the Taskforce's recommendations in December 2013.[10] In order to deliver these latter recommendations, Defra is developing an enhanced plant health programme, details of which will be set out in a new plant health strategy to be published in Spring 2014. We understand that an initial version of the strategy was shared with industry and environmental groups at the Plant Health Stakeholder Summit on 20 January 2014.

8. **We recognise the value of the Taskforce Report and welcome Defra's acceptance of its eight recommendations.**

9. ***Defra must collaborate with all stakeholders to complete its delivery of all the Taskforce recommendations by creating a transparent, comprehensive and effective enhanced plant health programme. The Government must develop its capability to accurately predict, monitor, control and mitigate the impact of pests and pathogens in the UK.***

8 Tree Health and Plant Biosecuriity Expert Taskforce, *Final Report*, May 2013

9 HC Deb, 20 May 2013, col 54WS and HC Deb, 16 July 2013, col 78WS

10 HC Deb, 12 December, col 53WS

3 Access to information

Risk Register

10. The first recommendation of the Taskforce is to develop a prioritised UK plant health risk register. The Taskforce identified the purpose of the risk register:

> "to identify and prioritise the risks of those pests and pathogens that pose the greatest threat, including the probability of entry of exotics or the occurrence of new strains of indigenous species. [...] The risk register would inform choices and policy options, as well as identifying how best to deploy resources most effectively to manage a range of threats".

11. We heard general support for the risk register from witnesses. The Country Land and Business Association told us that the register will be:

> "extremely welcome, and, as long as it can be effectively used by people on the ground, i.e. it is easily searched by both disease and by species, we are sure it will be a great benefit".[11]

12. The Wildlife Trusts added that it "needs to be a useful document that evolves and develops over time".[12] Concern was expressed by the Country Land and Business Association, the National Farmers Union and the Woodland Trust that the register will only be useful if sufficient mitigation measures are identified and then firmly and effectively utilised.[13]

13. Phase 1 of the risk register was published online by Fera on 20 January 2014. Fera's accompanying summary guide states the purpose of the register is "to record and rate risks to UK crops, trees, gardens and ecosystems from plant pests and pathogens. It forms an agreed, evidence based framework for decisions on priorities for actions by government and plant health stakeholders".[14] Pests or organisms are searchable online by "preferred name", "synonym", "common name" or "host", and the register includes high-level information on mitigation measures and proposed actions.[15]

14. Defra informed us that the risk register will be reviewed and updated monthly by experts (including representatives from all UK plant health authorities) and on a quarterly basis involving stakeholders.[16]

15. **The process of updating the risk register is vital to ensure that the priorities set out in the register remain relevant.**

11 Q232

12 Q253

13 Q232 and Q253

14 Fera, *Phase 1 UK Plant Health Risk Register, Summary Guide*, accessed 12 February 2014.

15 Fera, *Phase 1 UK Plant Health Risk Register*, accessed 31 January 2014

16 Ev w49

16. ***It is essential that the risk register incorporates sufficient information and detail about relevant mitigation measures, proposed actions and their potential impacts. Defra must secure this level of detail in order to enable consistent application by stakeholders and to ensure that resources are effectively deployed to manage the particular threat in question.***

Co-ordination and collaboration

17. The Plant Health Act 1967 has resulted in plant health responsibilities being split between the Forestry Commission and Defra, which in turn delegate responsibility to Fera (although the Plant Health Policy Team transferred from Fera back to Defra in December 2012). Responsibility for plant health in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is devolved. Pest and disease outbreaks are the joint responsibility of Fera and the Forestry Commission, with roles agreed on a case-by-case basis, depending on where the sites are and what resources and capabilities are required to deal with the outbreak. Fera carries out inspections of plants and produce imported from non-EU countries and targeted monitoring of plants moving within the EU. Fera also carries out risk assessments for plant health (other than forest trees), diagnosis of pests and pathogens, and research on risk assessment, detection, diagnosis and control.[17]

18. We received evidence that the ash dieback outbreak exposed a lack of definition over the roles and responsibilities of plant health authorities in the UK.[18] Confor (a membership organisation for the forestry industry) observed that "the private sector finds it very difficult to engage effectively with so many levels and layers of groups and committees determining policy on plant health"[19] and that "there is a lot of confusion as to the cascade of governance for plant health into different administrations".[20] The National Trust told us that "things can easily fall between stools" and that "it does not feel [like] you get that cross-discipline approach that you do with, say, academics working together".[21]

19. The Taskforce recommended that a Chief Plant Health Officer (CPHO) be appointed to own the risk register and to provide strategic and tactical leadership for managing those risks. Defra advertised to fill this role towards the end of 2013 and have informed us that recruitment is under way.[22] The new CPHO will play a high-profile role in advising Ministers, industry and others about the risks posed by plant pests and diseases, and in ensuring that measures are in place to manage those risks and minimise their impact. We heard general support for this appointment, as it will remove the current uncertainty over roles and responsibilities for plant health.[23]

17 Ev w18 [Defra]

18 Ev w25 [Horticultural Trades Association]

19 Ev w2

20 Q184

21 Q234

22 Ev w49

23 Ev w2, Ev w27

20. **We endorse the findings of the Taskforce and agree that there is a need for a coherent line of authority identifying who has ultimate responsibility for the decisions made to address disease and pest outbreaks. Co-ordination and communication between the disparate organisations is essential for effective evidence generation and quick responses to new outbreaks.**

21. We looked at the lessons that can be learnt from other countries where a pest or disease has already spread or is spreading. The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board informed us that "good use of existing research and experience in other EU states e.g. Denmark, assists in prioritising activities and tackling the problem in the UK"[24] and Scottish Natural Heritage told us that "knowledge exchange about threats and how to manage plant pathogens, and non-native species more generally, plays a vital role in supporting responses to emerging threats".[25]

22. The Taskforce Report provides the example of the Asian long-horned beetle (*Anoplphora glabripennis*) outbreak in Kent in March 2012 to illustrate the benefits that can be gained through collaboration with EU member states. Before the discovery of this outbreak, Fera and Forest Research had learnt how to manage such outbreaks from other EU member states at the EU standing committee and via collaborative research projects. Following the outbreak, Fera scientists sought and received advice from countries with prior experience of running eradication campaigns against the pest.[26]

23. Defra informed us that, in relation to *Chalara fraxinea*, the UK has learnt from experience on mainland Europe and is a member of Fraxback, an EU-funded programme aimed to generate a comprehensive understanding of ash dieback through sharing of knowledge. However, the National Farmers Union are "concerned" that the UK has not learned from experiences at EU level; the National Trust "are not confident that we have learned yet"[27]; and the Woodland Trust told us that even with twenty years experience of *Chalara fraxinea* in Europe, "early action to reduce the rate of spread or implement mitigation measures was not taken".[28]

24. ***We urge the Government to ensure that the Chief Plant Health Officer role is clearly defined and supported. Responsibilities should include providing clear co-ordination and integrated delivery between the different organisations involved in plant health within the UK and improving the lines of communication between the UK and EU member states to aid collaboration and the exchange of pest and pathogen information.***

25. ***We invite Defra to indicate which EU member states provide the most useful and comprehensive information to the UK to assist with combating plant disease.***

24 Ev w53

25 Ev w75

26 Tree Health and Plant Biosecuriity Expert Taskforce, *Final Report*, May 2013, p27

27 Q246

28 Ev w46

4 Review of legislation

26. There is an established framework of plant health legislation in the UK aimed at preventing the introduction and spread of harmful diseases or pests, without preventing trade. At an international level, the UK has obligations under the World Trade Organisation Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures. At an EU level, specific control measures may be targeted at harmful organisms that are listed in the EU Plant Health Directive 2000/29/EC or at other harmful organisms previously unknown to occur in the EU but which are of potential economic importance.[29] If a harmful organism is found in the EU, the country concerned must notify the European Commission and other EU countries and eradicate or prevent the spread of the harmful organism. If there is an imminent danger of introduction or spread of a harmful organism, an EU country may temporarily take additional national control measures.

27. In accordance with the Directive, an EU country may request special protection for all or part of its territory (a protected zone) from harmful organisms listed in the EU Directive when: (i) the harmful organism is not present in that area despite environmental conditions being favourable for its establishment; or (ii) it is present, but under eradication.[30] Each protected zone is defined in specific geographic terms and in relation to a particular harmful organism.

28. A number of plant pests and diseases are classified as 'quarantine' organisms and therefore subject to further legislative control. A plant passport is required to facilitate the movement of a limited range of materials which are susceptible to 'quarantine' organisms. Where required, a plant passport is needed both for movements within and between member states, and additional requirements apply for movements into and within protected zones.

29. We received evidence that the ash dieback outbreak highlighted a lack of flexibility which prevented the UK from protecting its plant health status: ash imports continued because ash did not fall within the plant passport system.[31] The national measures taken by the Government regarding ash dieback disease were introduced under the temporary national control measures as *Chalara fraxinea* was not listed as a 'harmful organism' in the EU Plant Health Directive.

30. In May 2013, the European Commission proposed a new package of measures relating to (amongst other things) plant health and plant reproductive material.[32] The current review of the EU regime provides an opportunity for the Government to secure significant changes to plant health controls, and to negotiate a new regime more consistent with the UK Government's aims. Defra have assured us that they will negotiate for a new regime

29 European Commission guidance, *Plant Health Emergency Measures,* accessed on 12 February 2014

30 European Commission, *Protected Zones,* accessed 10 February 2014

31 Ev w26

32 European Commission press release, 6 May 2013

which achieves: faster decision making as plant health risks change and new pests arrive; better risk targeting, including regionalisation where appropriate, and a shift of inspection effort from plant produce to high-risk plants and propagating material; and more co-operation between plant health inspectorates across the EU and between plant health and customs services.[33]

31. **We support Defra's aim to negotiate a new and improved regime at EU level to enhance the UK's protection against pests and disease, and enable the UK to respond quickly to the arrival of new pests and diseases.**

32. ***We recommend that Defra supports the extension of the plant passport system during the review of the EU regime so that it applies to all commercially traded plants. We expect Defra to provide us with regular updates on its progress on negotiating the new EU plant health regime, including the specific EU proposals it is seeking to influence and any substantial conflicts between the EU proposals and the UK strategy.***

33. At a UK level, the Plant Health Act 1967 is the main piece of legislation governing the introduction and spread of pests and diseases. Defra have informed us that they have reviewed all UK plant health legislation as part of the Red Tape Challenge and propose to consolidate certain important regulations and consult on revoking others. **We welcome the specific new protection measures relating to the import of plane, sweet chestnut and pine implemented in November 2013 by the Plant Health (England) (Amendment) (No.3) Order 2013.**

34. ***In its response to this report, we expect Defra to identify the plant health regulations which it is proposing to revoke and to confirm that each of its proposals will be subject to full consultation to allow for proper scrutiny of the revocations and their effects.***

35. When looking at the role of industry, we heard that there have been instances where seed was sent abroad to be grown in other EU nurseries and then sold back to the UK as young plants. For example, despite being a native species, over four million ash trees have been imported into the UK since January 2009.[34] The Horticultural Trades Association agreed that this practice has "created a biosecurity risk"[35] but that "there is nothing that will stop that [practice][...]Not while we have such a volatile marketplace".[36] The Taskforce Report states that financial pressures on UK nurseries have led to many reducing costs by purchasing or growing stocks overseas, which has in turn led to a marked increase in the volume and diversity of plants and plant products entering the UK.[37] Professor Ian Boyd told us that reviewing the type of biosecurity that is placed at the UK border could help to monitor this sort of import/export process. It would "not necessarily stop it happening, but it would allow it to be properly assessed against the risks that occur in the locations where

33 Ev w49

34 *"Ash dieback could cost industry £2.5m"*, Redditch Advertiser, 27 November 2012

35 Q95

36 Q147

37 Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Expert Taskforce, *Final Report,* 20 May 2013, p10

the seed might actually be propagated".[38] **The plant and forestry industry has a role to play in reducing biosecurity risks by reviewing their import/export processes and contributing to the cost of managing plant disease in the UK.**

36. The new EU regime is subject to a co-decision process which may take several years. This leaves a gap in which potential threats to the UK may be left unchecked in the short term. **Whilst recognising the importance of trade to the UK plant industry, the Government must act now to strengthen biosecurity and ensure that any potential pests and diseases are kept out of the UK.**

37. ***In the period before the new EU plant health regime is implemented, we recommend that Defra consider strengthening the protection afforded to the UK by using existing legislative mechanisms, such as requesting protected zones for pests that are already present in Europe but not the UK or implementing new regulation where appropriate.***

38 Q5

5 Capacity and capability

Funding

38. We received evidence that it has become increasingly difficult to source UK funds for research on tree health issues over the past twenty years.[39] Defra has acknowledged that the overall budget on forestry research has decreased over the last five years, but emphasised that the amount spent on plant health research has increased.[40] The table below sets out the funding provided by Defra and the Forestry Commission over the past five years on plant health research, and the funding planned up to 2014/15.[41]

	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15
Defra Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Action Plan	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	£2m	£2m	£2m
Defra Plant Health Research (managed by Fera)	£1.3m	£1.4m	£0.7m	£2m	£1.6m	£1.4m	£1.3m
Forestry Commission Plant Health Research	£1.5m	£1.4m	£1.4m	£1.7m	£2m	£2.3m	£2.1m
Total	**£2.8m**	**£2.8m**	**£2.1m**	**£3.7m**	**£5.6m**	**£5.7m**	**£.5.4m**

39. By contrast, we have been informed that the estimated annual economic cost of tree disease alone (not including ash dieback disease) to the UK is nearly £172 million.[42] Ash trees are used for both hedgerow trees and woodland trees. When we tried to determine the total cost of ash dieback (both to the public purse and private landowners) to the UK, witnesses were not able to provide a definitive answer.[43] ***We invite Defra to provide us with an estimated overall cost of ash dieback disease to both the Government and private owners in the UK, including management, removal, replacement and protection costs.***

40. We heard concerns that where limited resources are diverted to address a specific threat after it emerges, longer-term preparatory work, such as monitoring and research, is further under-resourced. The National Farmers Union stated that "investment in preparation and monitoring services are critical to effective biosecurity"[44] and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology pointed in particular to the focus of Defra's Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Action Plan, noting that "it could be argued that the research element of this programme has a mainly short-term focus, responding to current problems, rather

39 Ev w73

40 Ev w8

41 Defra's budgets for 2013/14 and beyond are indicative only.

42 Ev w45

43 See, for example, Q221

44 Ev w32

than preparing for emerging threats and supporting research that will underpin a future UK response".[45] The Woodland Trust added that:

> "Resource constraints lead to a "firefighting" approach to dealing with outbreaks to the detriment of other work that in the long term would help build resilience in woodland and wider landscapes by enhancing biodiversity and enabling adaptation to climate change."[46]

41. Ongoing research and development work relating to threats to plant health in the UK is essential to enable an effective response. **We welcome the increased funding available for plant health research but we are concerned that the overall budget for forestry research has reduced over the past five years despite a marked increase in the overall level of risk and consequent economic impact. We are concerned that resource constraints inevitably lead to a focus on short-term "fire-fighting" leaving long-term preparatory work, such as monitoring and research, under-resourced.**

42. ***In line with Defra's key priority to safeguard plant health, it is essential that ring-fenced funding is provided for long-term research and development work that focuses on preparation for future plant health threats in order to ensure an effective response in the UK. This work should include monitoring; the development of control measures; developing a greater understanding of resistance; and researching other risk areas such as soil, untreated wood and insect pests.***

Expertise

43. There was broad agreement from our witnesses that there is a lack of relevant expertise in the field of plant health, both in terms of the numbers of people and their technical background. The Scottish Forestry Trust told us that the total number of tree pathologists in the UK is "probably about 5 or 6" and that they are mostly over 55 years old.[47] The British Society for Plant Pathology (BSPP) has carried out an audit of plant pathology training and education in the UK which found that the UK has seen a reduction in plant science institutes and that several UK organisations have reduced their cohort of plant pathologists over the last fifteen years.[48] The BSPP audit also highlights the problem that the age profile of specialists in this area is weighted towards the 41-60 age group and that "the great worry is that in 10 years' time, those specialists at the higher end of the age profile will have retired and take with them many years of accumulated knowledge, while there are insufficient new entrants".[49]

44. When questioned on the apparent delay in taking action to pursue a pest-risk analysis in relation to *Chalara fraxinea*, the Forestry Commission explained that:

45 Ev w57

46 Ev w45

47 Ev w73

48 British Society for Plant Pathology, *Plant Pathology Education and Training in the UK: An Audit,* September 2012, p7

49 Ibid.

> "The difficulty was that we were already dealing with a number of outbreaks of other pests and disease at that time. The record will show that the number of pathologists available in Britain to deal with some of these pests and diseases is very small at the present time. Ideally, we would have liked to have got the pest-risk analysis done more rapidly than we did do, but we were dealing with fires at home at the time."[50]

45. A report by The Woodland Trust identifies a key knowledge gap as being "how the disease will progress under UK conditions, how long infected trees will survive and what the response of the rest of the ecosystem might be".[51] Increased expertise in the UK is needed to plug this knowledge gap and build on lessons learned from the EU.

46. Defra have informed us that a range of immediate initiatives are being taken to address skills shortages. At a strategic level, the Government Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir Mark Walport, is undertaking a study alongside Defra's Chief Scientific Adviser, Professor Ian Boyd, to determine the UK's long term needs for capability in the provision of research.[52]

47. In order to provide evidence of emerging threats and to be ready to manage them, the UK needs a core of dedicated, well-motivated experts. **We support the Government's commitment to take action to address the decline of expertise and start to build up the UK's capability in this area.**

48. ***We invite Defra to set out in its response to this report a full list of the immediate initiatives that are being taken to address the lack of relevant expertise in the field of plant health, including clear timeframes for implementation of these initiatives and details of the funding that has been allocated; and an explanation of how Defra is co-ordinating its response with the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills to ensure that the most effective and collaborative solution is realised.***

49. ***In order to secure new entrants and to maintain a suitable level of expertise in the field of plant health, we recommend that funding is provided to increase the number of university courses and research posts, with a corresponding increase in the number of related university places in the UK.***

50 Q20

51 Report of a Woodland Trust Conference, *Chalara fraxinea and other threats to woodland* (2013)

52 Ev w50

6 Control measures

Resistance

50. One response to plant disease is to find naturally resistant plants. For example, a small proportion of ash trees have a certain degree of resistance to *Chalara fraxinea* which provides an opportunity to propagate or breed more resistant stock in the UK. Fera's Forest Research agency is part of a consortium awarded £2.4 million research funding to develop an in-depth understanding of the ash dieback fungus and the natural resistance of some ash trees.

51. However, as explained by Professor Boyd, "trees do not grow quickly, and I suspect that it will be a decade or so before that discovery will have a significant impact on both the trade and the silvicultural practice that there is within the UK."[53] In addition, studies carried out in Denmark between 2007 and 2009 have shown that there are significant differences in the susceptibility of cloned ash to ash dieback disease.[54] The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology provides another example of the drawbacks of focusing on resistance alone as trees that are resistant to Dutch Elm disease have taken over 40 years to develop and their use is restricted by patents.[55]

52. Another response to plant disease is to develop an antidote. However, in relation to *Chalara fraxinea*, while an antidote "would be the ideal"[56] the Country Land and Business Association told us that an economically viable, easily applied, workable and environmentally safe antidote is not available at the moment.[57]

53. ***In the longer term, the development of resistant strains of ash trees will provide the surest protection against the prevalence of Chalara fraxinea, but the resources diverted to this end must not be at the expense of other, more immediate, control measures.***

Environmental impacts

54. Diseases or pests can damage and kill plants which are integral to an ecosystem. Recent research into the impact that tree diseases and epidemics can have on ecosystem services[58] shows that as new trees grow to replace lost species, some ecosystem services (perhaps carbon storage or water purification) are regained, whereas others (perhaps the biodiversity supported by the diseased tree species) are permanently disrupted.[59] In

53 Q60

54 L.V. McKinney, I.M. Thomsen, E.D. Kjaer and L.R. Nielsen, Genetic resistance to Hymenoscyphus pseudoalbidus limits fungal growth and symptom occurrence in Fraxinus excelsior, *Forest Pathology*, Vol 42 (2012) p69-74

55 Ev w60

56 Q229 [The National Trust]

57 Q228

58 Ecosystem Services are defined by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Report as "benefits people obtain from ecosystems" e.g. food, water, energy, carbon sequestration, pollination, recreation.

59 I.L Boyd, P.H Freer-Smith, C.A. Gilligan, H.C.J. Godfray, The Consequence of Tree Pests and Diseases for Ecosystem Services, *Science Magazine*, Vol 342 (15 November 2013)

addition, control measures in themselves can have negative as well as positive impacts on wildlife. For example, the timing of tree removal and sanitation felling can cause disturbance to nesting birds.[60]

55. The Woodland Trust criticised Defra's Chalara Management Plan for failing "to adequately reflect wider biodiversity and social costs and the impacts of the potential loss of ash, particularly the estimated fifteen million ash trees in hedgerows and the wider countryside across the UK".[61] The RSPB told us that:

> "The current and future responses to *Chalara* ash dieback and other tree pathogens, pests and diseases need to be considered in respect to biodiversity and other public benefits, not just as commercial forestry problems that require research, survey, monitoring and control."[62]

56. The Living With Environmental Change Partnership set up a new initiative in October 2012 with the aim of generating natural and social scientific knowledge to address current and emerging threats to trees and woodland ecosystems from pathogens and pests. The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology told us that this initiative had the potential to address some existing limitations by having a more long-term focus on future health and resilience of trees and their ecosystems.[63] Defra has confirmed that environmental and social impacts, as well as economic impacts, were considered during the compilation of the risk register and that further developing these aspects will be an important element of refining and enhancing the methodology in 2014.[64]

57. ***The Government's approach to safeguarding plant health must encompass the protection and enhancement of public benefits, including biodiversity and ecosystem services. Mitigation measures and proposed actions in the risk register must include building resilience in woodlands and wider landscapes through conservation, restoration and expansion of our natural habitats.***

58. **This is an essential part of the response to plant diseases and pests in order to enable adaptation and robustness in our ecosystems.**

60 Q259 [RSPB]

61 Ev w48

62 Ev w39

63 Ev w58

64 Ev w51

Conclusions and recommendations

Enhanced plant health programme

1. We recognise the value of the Taskforce Report and welcome Defra's acceptance of its eight recommendations. (Paragraph 8)

2. *Defra must collaborate with all stakeholders to complete its delivery of all the Taskforce recommendations by creating a transparent, comprehensive and effective enhanced plant health programme. The Government must develop its capability to accurately predict, monitor, control and mitigate the impact of pests and pathogens in the UK.* (Paragraph 9)

Risk register

3. The process of updating the risk register is vital to ensure that the priorities set out in the register remain relevant. (Paragraph 15)

4. *It is essential that the risk register incorporates sufficient information and detail about relevant mitigation measures, proposed actions and their potential impacts. Defra must secure this level of detail in order to enable consistent application by stakeholders and to ensure that resources are effectively deployed to manage the particular threat in question.* (Paragraph 16)

Co-ordination and collaboration

5. We endorse the findings of the Taskforce and agree that there is a need for a coherent line of authority identifying who has ultimate responsibility for the decisions made to address disease and pest outbreaks. Co-ordination and communication between the disparate organisations is essential for effective evidence generation and quick responses to new outbreaks. (Paragraph 20)

6. *We urge the Government to ensure that the Chief Plant Health Officer role is clearly defined and supported. Responsibilities should include providing clear co-ordination and integrated delivery between the different organisations involved in plant health within the UK and improving the lines of communication between the UK and EU member states to aid collaboration and the exchange of pest and pathogen information.* (Paragraph 24)

7. *We invite Defra to indicate which EU member states provide the most useful and comprehensive information to the UK to assist with combating plant disease.* (Paragraph 25)

Review of legislation

8. We support Defra's aim to negotiate a new and improved regime at EU level to enhance the UK's protection against pests and disease, and enable the UK to respond quickly to the arrival of new pests and diseases. (Paragraph 31)

9. *We recommend that Defra supports the extension of the plant passport system during the review of the EU regime so that it applies to all commercially traded plants.*

10. *We expect Defra to provide us with regular updates on its progress on negotiating the new EU plant health regime, including the specific EU proposals it is seeking to influence and any substantial conflicts between the EU proposals and the UK strategy.* (Paragraph 32)

11. We welcome the specific new protection measures relating to the import of plane, sweet chestnut and pine implemented in November 2013 by the Plant Health (England) (Amendment) (No.3) Order 2013. (Paragraph 33)

12. *In its response to this report, we expect Defra to identify the plant health regulations which it is proposing to revoke and to confirm that each of its proposals will be subject to full consultation to allow for proper scrutiny of the revocations and their effects.* (Paragraph 34)

13. The plant and forestry industry has a role to play in reducing biosecurity risks by reviewing their import/export processes and contributing to the cost of managing plant disease in the UK. (Paragraph 35)

14. Whilst recognising the importance of trade to the UK plant industry, the Government must act now to strengthen biosecurity and ensure that any potential pests and diseases are kept out of the UK. (Paragraph 36)

15. *In the period before the new EU plant health regime is implemented, we recommend that Defra consider strengthening the protection afforded to the UK by using existing legislative mechanisms, such as requesting protected zones for pests that are already present in Europe but not the UK or implementing new regulation where appropriate.* (Paragraph 37)

Capacity and capability

16. *We invite Defra to provide us with an estimated overall cost of ash dieback disease to both the Government and private owners in the UK, including management, removal, replacement and protection costs.* (Paragraph 39)

17. We welcome the increased funding available for plant health research but we are concerned that the overall budget for forestry research has reduced over the past five years despite a marked increase in the overall level of risk and consequent economic impact. We are concerned that resource constraints inevitably lead to a focus on short-term "fire-fighting" leaving long-term preparatory work, such as monitoring and research, under-resourced. (Paragraph 41)

18. *In line with Defra's key priority to safeguard plant health, it is essential that ring-fenced funding is provided for long-term research and development work that focuses on preparation for future plant health threats in order to ensure an effective response in the UK. This work should include monitoring; the development of control measures; developing a greater understanding of resistance; and researching other risk areas such as soil, untreated wood and insect pests.* (Paragraph 42)

Expertise

19. We support the Government's commitment to take action to address the decline of expertise and start to build up the UK's capability in this area. (Paragraph 47)

20. *We invite Defra to set out in its response to this report a full list of the immediate initiatives that are being taken to address the lack of relevant expertise in the field of plant health, including clear timeframes for implementation of these initiatives and details of the funding that has been allocated; and an explanation of how Defra is co-ordinating its response with the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills to ensure that the most effective and collaborative solution is realised.* (Paragraph 48)

21. *In order to secure new entrants and to maintain a suitable level of expertise in the field of plant health, we recommend that funding is provided to increase the number of university courses and research posts, with a corresponding increase in the number of related university places in the UK.* (Paragraph 49)

Resistance

22. *In the longer term, the development of resistant strains of ash trees will provide the surest protection against the prevalence of Chalara fraxinea, but the resources diverted to this end must not be at the expense of other, more immediate, control measures.* (Paragraph 53)

Environmental impacts

23. *The Government's approach to safeguarding plant health must encompass the protection and enhancement of public benefits, including biodiversity and ecosystem services. Mitigation measures and proposed actions in the risk register must include building resilience in woodlands and wider landscapes through conservation, restoration and expansion of our natural habitats.* (Paragraph 57)

24. This is an essential part of the response to plant diseases and pests in order to enable adaptation and robustness in our ecosystems. (Paragraph 58)

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 5 March 2014

Members present:

Miss Anne McIntosh, in the Chair

Richard Drax	Neil Parish
Mrs Mary Glindon	Mr Mark Spencer
Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck	Roger Williams
Sheryll Murray	

Draft Report (*Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity*) brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 58 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Tenth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned until Tuesday 11 March at 2.30 pm

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry page at www.parliament.uk/efracom.

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry web page at www.parliament.uk/efracom.

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/efracom.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2013–14

First Report	Draft Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Bill	HC 95 (HC 637)
Second Report	Vaccination against bovine TB	HC 258 (HC 705)
Third Report	Managing Flood Risk	HC 330 (HC 706)
Fourth Report	Wild Animals in Circuses	HC 553 (HC 746)
Fifth Report	Food Contamination	HC 141 (HC 707)
Sixth Report	Rural Communities	HC 602 (HC 764)
Seventh Report	CAP implementation 2014–2020	HC 745 (HC 1088)
Eighth Report	Appointment of Chairman of Natural England	HC 890
Ninth Report	Departmental Annual Report 2012–13	HC 741

Session 2012–13

First Report	Greening the Common Agricultural Policy	HC 170 (HC 654)
Second Report	The Water White Paper	HC 374 (HC 602)
Third Report	Pre-appointment hearing: Chair of the Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat)	HC 471-I & -II
Fourth Report	Natural Environment White Paper	HC 492 (HC 653)
Fifth Report	Desinewed Meat	HC 120 (Cm 8462)
Sixth Report	Draft Water Bill	HC 674 (Cm 8643)
Seventh Report	Dog Control and Welfare	HC 575 (HC 1092)
Eighth Report	Contamination of Beef Products	HC 946 (HC 1085)

Session 2010–12

First Report	Future Flood and Water Management Legislation	HC 522 (HC 922)
Second Report	The Marine Policy Statement	HC 635
Third Report	Farming in the Uplands	HC 556 (HC 953)
Fourth Report	The draft National Policy statement (NPS) on Waste Water	HC 736
Fifth Report	The Common Agricultural Policy after 2013	HC 671 (HC 1356)
Sixth Report	Implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy: Domestic Fisheries Management	HC 858 (HC 1485)
Seventh Report	Pre-appointment hearing: Chair of Gangmasters Licensing Authority	HC 1400-I & -II
Eighth Report	EU proposals for the dairy sector and the future of	HC 952 (HC 1548)

	the dairy industry	
Ninth Report	The Welfare of Laying Hens Directive—Implications for the egg industry	HC 830 (HC 1664)
Tenth Report	The outcome of the independent Farming Regulation Task Force	HC 1266 (HC 1669)
Eleventh Report	The draft National Policy Statement for Hazardous Waste	HC 1465 (HC (Session 2012–13) 540)
Twelfth Report	EU proposals for reform of the Common Fisheries Policy	HC 1563-I & -II (HC (Session 2012–13) 108)
First Special Report	The National Forest: Government response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2009–10	HC 400
Second Special Report	Dairy Farmers of Britain: Government response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2009–10	HC 401

Oral evidence

Taken before the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

on Tuesday 11 December 2012

Members present:

Miss Anne McIntosh (Chair)

Thomas Docherty	Mrs Mary Glindon
Barry Gardiner	Iain McKenzie

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Professor Ian Boyd**, Chief Scientific Adviser, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, **Martin Ward**, Head of Policy Programme and UK Chief Plant Health Officer, Food and Environment Research Agency, and **Roger Coppock**, Head of Analysts, Forestry Commission, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Good afternoon and welcome. May I thank each of you for agreeing to participate in our inquiry into tree health and biosecurity? I invite each of you to state who you are and the position that you hold for the record.

Martin Ward: Martin Ward, working for Defra as Chief Plant Health Officer for the UK.

Professor Boyd: Ian Boyd, Chief Scientific Adviser to Defra.

Roger Coppock: I am Roger Coppock, Head of Analysts at the Forestry Commission.

Q2 Chair: Excellent. Perhaps I should just declare at the outset that Fera is based in the constituency of Thirsk, Malton and Filey, which I am absolutely delighted about. If you agree, perhaps you do not all need to speak, but if you have additional things to say, please do. I shall ask first about this particular disease, ash tree dieback. It has existed in Poland since 1992, Denmark since 2003, and is understood to have been in this country since 2009. What do you think has changed, both in this country and across Europe, in the way that we both report, react to and try to prevent the spread of this and similar diseases?

Professor Boyd: I will probably take questions initially, and then direct them to my colleagues. First of all we need to understand the background to the uncertainty there was around the identity of this species of fungus, because that is one reason why the reaction right across Europe has been rather delayed. Nobody has really quite known until relatively recently what they have been looking at. So when you say, quite rightly, that it was identified in Poland in 1992, actually we did not really know what it was until well into the 2000s. Looking back in time, with the new knowledge that was available, allowed the identification of that disease syndrome right back to 1992.

Basically, the problem we have been facing is we have been working in an area of high scientific uncertainty, not just us in the UK but our European colleagues as well. We have been rapidly increasing our knowledge base to such an extent that in relatively recent years we have been able to identify the fungus causing this ash dieback syndrome as a species that was not present in the UK. We thought it was originally, but it was not present in the UK. One also has to bear in mind that ash dieback syndrome is caused by things other than *Chalara* as well, so it is quite a difficult thing for foresters to identify.

Ash dieback occurs quite regularly, but when it started to occur in the densities that it did in Europe, problems were suspected. It took basically 20 years for the science to catch up with those observations, so that is what has changed.

Q3 Chair: I am slightly concerned, just personally. What was the point of the consultation that the Government undertook? Mr Ward.

Martin Ward: Part of our risk-assessment process is to put the risk assessment based on the best information available to the official services into the public domain, pass it around stakeholders in order not only to gather views but to check that information against what is available to them. That is simply part of our routine process of risk assessment and risk management. Government does not necessarily know everything about the pathways or the risks. We frequently get useful additional information during the process of consultation, which then feeds into the decision taken on the appropriate risk-management measures. In this case there was also the factor that the main planting season is through the winter, so we were not losing anything in terms of effective control. So the consultation process is part of the routine for risk management and risk assessment.

Q4 Chair: Are we any closer to understanding both what causes the disease/fungus/pathogen, and what causes it to spread, and why it reacts one way in a sapling and another way in a matured tree?

Professor Boyd: I think we have a reasonably good understanding of what causes the disease, which is the spread of fungus within the tree. The disease is essentially the same in the sapling and the mature tree. It manifests itself in slightly different ways and it tends to kill saplings rather faster than mature trees. In terms of how it spreads, we also have a much better understanding of that now than we did have, although there are still gaps in our knowledge. It spreads during

the summer from fruiting bodies that form on the fallen leaves from the previous year, and it spreads by spores. One of the gaps in our knowledge is that we do not quite know how long those spores survive. It is suspected to be a few days, and that is enough time for them to spread over quite substantial distances, considering that they are wind dispersed. So we know how it spreads, but we do not know how far it will spread in any particular summer period, for example.

Q5 Chair: Is it your intention to review practices such as exporting ash tree seeds from this country to elsewhere in the European Union, and then re-importing them as potentially diseased trees?
Professor Boyd: If I could turn your attention to the interim report of the task force that I established, one of their recommendations is that that type of behaviour should be reviewed. It did not specifically earmark exactly that export and then re-import process, but it did suggest we should review the type of biosecurity that is placed at the border, which would potentially catch that sort of import/export process. It would not necessarily stop it happening, but it would allow it to be properly risk assessed against the risks that occur in the locations where the seed might actually be propagated.

Q6 Chair: Mr Coppock, is there anything you would like to add?
Roger Coppock: Yes, I would just like to say that it is a practice that has been going on. I do not think it has been widely understood for quite some time, but it is a completely legal practice under the EU plant health rules. However, one of the encouraging things recently is that the sector, both in terms of growers and some of the plant producers, has decided that they need to get together to strengthen those rules that they employ voluntarily for better understanding of the chain of custody to make sure that seed from native trees does not go abroad to be grown and then bring back unwelcome visitors with it. Whether we want to regulate or not, an approach by the industry recognising that biosecurity is extremely important in this area, and them taking steps to deal with it, may be the most effective way of addressing it.

Q7 Chair: Mr Ward, is there anything you would like to add?
Martin Ward: Certainly, the sector is keen to obtain more transparency, and they have been in some cases surprised at what was happening to the plants that they were buying as UK provenance, which were indeed UK provenance in the sense they were UK seed but were grown abroad.

Q8 Chair: I do not understand enough about the economics. Why is it economical to take a native tree seed and export it abroad to re-import as a sampling? I simply do not understand the economics of it. Mr Coppock?
Roger Coppock: There are a number of arguments for that. One argument the growers suggest is that, because they do not have a full understanding of requirements for plants in any given year, they hedge their risks by growing a certain amount, say 50% or 60%, themselves, and then buy on the open market for the other 40%. There is a little bit of dubiety about when the demand is coming because it does tend to fluctuate. Decisions on planting are often not made until the year in which the planting is due to take place, whereas it takes the nurseries two or three years to grow the plants. The second reason is that it is often more profitable to grow plants abroad. European nurseries can produce a plant in two years that might take three years in the UK.

Q9 Chair: Why? How?
Roger Coppock: So that plant might cost 10p a tree as opposed to 30p a tree in the UK.

Q10 Chair: Can you just share with the Committee how that is so? Why would they grow more quickly?
Roger Coppock: Warmer growing conditions essentially, and more mechanised larger scale nursery practices.

Q11 Chair: Are you suggesting that Denmark is warmer than Britain?
Roger Coppock: I do not think Denmark in the main, but Germany and Hungary, for example, and some other European countries can grow the plants more quickly than we can.

Q12 Chair: One thing that is welcome, and we congratulate all of you involved, is the extensive survey that was undertaken in the very short time that it was. Perhaps the surprising thing was that this was the first survey of its kind. Should we be surprised that that was the first such survey, Mr Coppock?
Roger Coppock: Ideally, we would like to be doing much more regular surveys. We do have the National Forest Inventory, which is a major survey of all of the woodlands in Great Britain. Part of that survey is to look for signs of poor tree health. In the case of ash trees, a number of those in the survey have been flagged as showing some signs of ill health, but we have been out and re-inspected all those survey plots, and only a tiny percentage of those have been confirmed as having *Chalara* present in them. There is definitely a need for more surveillance in the future. One of the challenges we face is that we do not know exactly what we are looking for. There are a number of pests and diseases that are not present here at the moment, so it is just trying to get correct boundaries around that surveillance work to make sure we are putting resources in the right place.

Q13 Barry Gardiner: *Chalara* was first confirmed as being present in the UK in March this year. Even then, it was known that in the rest of Europe it had been a quite devastating disease. At that point, when it was confirmed that it was here, why then was there not a ban on imports from high-risk countries?
Professor Boyd: I will take that in two parts, if that is all right, and maybe pass over to Martin Ward afterwards. First of all, it was confirmed in nursery stock initially, and I think there was a consideration

that that was an isolated case and it could be controlled by getting rid of that nursery stock.

Q14 Barry Gardiner: Professor Boyd, could you elaborate? Had the nursery stock been grown in that nursery? When you say "nursery stock", was it grown in the nursery or was it imported?
Professor Boyd: It was imported.

Q15 Barry Gardiner: So if it was imported, does that not suggest all the more that there should be a ban on imports?
Professor Boyd: Absolutely. Then a process was put in place that led to a ban on imports.

Q16 Barry Gardiner: That was a two-month delayed process.
Professor Boyd: A risk assessment had to be done. I will pass to Martin Ward, because he can provide you with information about the process that needs to be put in place in order to be able to come up with a ban under European regulations.
Martin Ward: I think we always have difficulty when we intercept a pest on a consignment in trade with imperfect knowledge, and the imperfect knowledge of the existing distribution of something. Clearly if something is already widespread in the UK, then a ban on imports is not going to help, quite regardless of EU legislation or WTO rules or whatever. If something is widespread, there is no point in trying to keep it out through an import ban.
In March, we knew we had that finding on that consignment, and knew we were entering into the period in which plants do not generally move around—through the summer. We did not know how widespread the disease was in the UK, and we did not at that stage have a risk assessment. We had a fairly weak evidence base in March for taking measures specifically against imports.

Q17 Barry Gardiner: Mr Ward, I have heard this argument before that says, "Well it was a time when there are very few movements of plants coming in, and that therefore justifies us not imposing a ban at that time." But surely the converse is true. Because there were few plants likely to come in anyway, imposing a ban at that time would have had no trade repercussions, and therefore all the fears that the Department has told us would have fallen down from the abyss of the Commission in Europe just would not have happened.
Martin Ward: I do not think I have ever referred to the Commission falling down on us in that way.
Barry Gardiner: I am sure you have not, Mr Ward.
Martin Ward: We need an evidence base in order to regulate, for our own stakeholders as well as for justification within the EU. In March we did not have that evidence base.

Q18 Barry Gardiner: What happened to the precautionary principle?
Martin Ward: We can apply the precautionary principle to some extent, but we still need some sort of assessment of risk.

Q19 Barry Gardiner: Let us look at that pest-risk analysis. You say you need an assessment of risk. In October 2008, a letter was sent to the European Commission stating that: "The UK believes C Fraxinea warrants listing in the Plant Health Directive," and pest-risk analysis was then in preparation. That was in 2008 in your own chronology. So then halfway through 2012, you say, "Oh well, we needed to conduct a proper analysis of the risk.". Four years later. What was going on?
Roger Coppock: The scientific evidence that the pathogen that we were trying to risk assess was not present in the UK was not there at that time. That was the crucial thing. It was this misdiagnosis of the causal agent that was the reason for all of the delay. The naturally occurring pathogen—
Barry Gardiner: This is *Hymenoscyphus albidus*.
Roger Coppock: *Hymenoscyphus albidus*, yes. That was what had been described as the causation of *Chalara fraxinea* in the literature. It was only in 2011 that the science was reviewed and a new paper came out that indicated that *Hymenoscyphus pseudoalbidus* was the causal agent. One could argue the scientists were not thorough enough in describing that, but there is a paper that is fairly soon to be published—it has not been published yet—looking at the origins of this pathogen. That describes the difference between the two as being almost infinitesimal. There are very, very minor morphological differences, so one can understand the reason why it was wrongly diagnosed at the time. Because it was wrongly diagnosed and *Hymenoscyphus albidus* was already present in the UK, and had been since the early 1900s, there was no case for taking action against it because it was already here.

Q20 Barry Gardiner: Well, that was one paper, Mr Coppock, but there was another paper published in March 2010 that correctly identified the fungus causing ash dieback as one not found in the UK. Molecular studies backing that up were also published in 2011. So why was no apparent action taken in 2011 to pursue the pest-risk analysis and ensure that work on a possible ban could be started before the disease was detected in the UK?
Roger Coppock: We did start on a pest-risk analysis in 2011 once that new evidence came out. The difficulty was that we were already dealing with a number of outbreaks of other pests and diseases at that time. The record will show that the number of pathologists available in Britain to deal with some of these pests and diseases is very small at the present time. Ideally, we would have liked to have got the pest-risk analysis done more rapidly than we did do, but we were dealing with fires at home at the time.

Q21 Barry Gardiner: Thank you. That, I think, begins to come to an explanation of why things did not happen. What you have pointed the finger at is a lack of personnel or resource at that time.
Roger Coppock: I would say that was one reason. The other reason was a lack of sound, hard scientific evidence.

Q22 Barry Gardiner: Well, we had the scientific evidence of that paper and the further biological studies in 2011, did we not?
Roger Coppock: That was identifying the causal agent. To do a pest-risk analysis, you need more than one paper. You need a body of scientific evidence to back up the assumptions within the pest-risk analysis.

Q23 Barry Gardiner: Indeed. Right, let me try to assess the impact of what you have just told me. In June 2011, the Forestry Commission said there was a high risk of the introduction of the disease into the UK. Is that right?
Roger Coppock: Yes.

Q24 Barry Gardiner: And it recommended that ash plants should be sourced from a pest-free area. Is that correct?
Roger Coppock: Yes.

Q25 Barry Gardiner: So, what we are saying is more than a year before a ban was actually put in place, the Forestry Commission—you, presumably at the Forestry Commission—had recommended that plants should only be sourced from a pest-free area and there was a risk of introduction into the UK. It had at that stage been correctly identified that there had been a misdiagnosis, and that the pathogen was not currently known in the UK and there was a risk of cross-infection. So when that recommendation was made, that they should only be sourced from a pest-free area, why at that point did we not go into the eight-week consultation period that caused delay after the correct identification of the disease as being present in March of 2012?
Roger Coppock: That was because we did not have the pest-risk analysis completed at that point.

Q26 Barry Gardiner: You are saying that the pest-risk analysis was an essential element of going into that consultation about imposing a ban?
Roger Coppock: Absolutely. If we are going to put legislation in place, which may well affect many, many businesses—

Q27 Barry Gardiner: No, sorry, we are not talking about legislation at this moment, are we? What we are talking about is imposing a precautionary ban until we have further information.
Roger Coppock: Well, I think we would need to put an order in place in order to put a ban in place.

Q28 Barry Gardiner: An order is not legislation, though, is it?
Chair: It is secondary legislation.
Barry Gardiner: Well, it is a regulation.
Roger Coppock: It is regulation.
Chair: One last answer and then we will move on.
Professor Boyd: Can you take up that point about legislation?
Martin Ward: Yes, we operate under the Plant Health Act, but a ban would need to be done by an order, a negative resolution SI under the Plant Health Act, as was done in October, in order to restrict imports and movements.
Professor Boyd: I think the general point is we have to proceed under the banner of evidence, and the pest-risk assessment was the accumulation of the evidence that would allow us to put in place appropriate legislation to ban imports.

Q29 Barry Gardiner: But that was not done in 2011 when it was recommended by the Forestry Commission.
Roger Coppock: We recommended to the industry that it adopted a voluntary position on import.

Q30 Barry Gardiner: What mechanisms do you have for ensuring that the pest-risk analysis process can be expedited in the event of detection of such highly damaging pests and pathogens in the UK?
Roger Coppock: A pest-risk analysis requires a degree of specialism to carry out, because it is a very exact sort of science. We are putting in place at the moment a greater number of people who can at least undertake the preliminary work of pest-risk analysis and get the main bulk of the work done, and then get it signed off by the more expert pathologists or entomologists in that case. That is what we are trying to do at the present time in order to expedite these more rapidly in the future.
Professor Boyd: Maybe I could also add, going back to my original point about the scientific uncertainty that exists, that at that time the Tree Health Expert Group had identified up to 28 different pathogens that were threatening our shores, essentially. The amount of evidence that is required in order to be able to develop a pest-risk analysis for all of those is enormous, so there was a huge task there. It is very easy, with the benefit of hindsight, to look back and say, "Actually, you should have done it this way." Yes, we maybe should have done, but it is very difficult to pick the winners from all those 28, or the losers, if you like.

Q31 Barry Gardiner: What is the cost of all those 28, Professor Boyd, and what is the cost of having sufficient resource to expedite pest-risk analysis on them?
Professor Boyd: I could not answer that question at the moment. That was the reason for setting up the task force.

Q32 Barry Gardiner: My point to you is that the downside risk from *Chalara fraxinea* and all those other pathogens and pests is enormous.
Chair: I think we need to move on now. I am sure you can write to us with a figure.
Professor Boyd: We are aware of that, and the task force has made that absolutely clear. We need to move to a different form of risk analysis.

Q33 Mrs Glindon: A key element of your control plan for *Chalara*, published last week, was the need to reduce the rate of its spread. What impact do you expect the actions in the plan to have? For example, what numbers of trees can be saved, and which geographical areas might be spared?
Professor Boyd: The number of trees that can be spared is something we cannot be specific about at

this stage. We do know the fungus is present in quite high concentrations in very specific areas, particularly the south west, Kent and East Anglia, and to a lesser extent up the east coast of England and into southeast Scotland. Within those areas we would expect significant proportions of the ash population to currently be affected but probably relatively few trees there to have died yet. It will take a number of years before those trees will succumb, and maybe not all will succumb because the vulnerability of the ash trees depends very much on circumstance.

The models that we have produced of the epidemiology, the spread of the disease, suggest that it may take several years for it to spread across England. They suggest that even by 2017 it would not really be present in very many areas in northwest England, for example, or southern Scotland. Even in areas where it is found, many of the ash trees will be affected but they will be able to survive. We do know that it is not *Chalara* that actually kills adult ash trees. It is usually honey fungus or some other stressor that kills it because the tree itself has been stressed by the *Chalara* infection. In general, we would expect a slow spread across England and not all areas to be affected to the same extent.

Q34 Mrs Glindon: How will you determine what your control plan refers to as a proportionate balance between the costs and benefits of action to stop the spread of the disease?

Roger Coppock: One of the difficulties with this is that often the people who bear the costs are not the ones who gain the benefits of taking such action. Part of the control plan acknowledges that eradication is unlikely to be possible. So what are the key areas that we need to try to protect for as long as we can to allow us to try to find some natural resistance within the existing ash population from which we can breed and then bring it back into the natural environment?

The modelling work that Professor Boyd referred to is looking at targeting specific areas with information such as special nature reserves, sites of special scientific interest—if you like, the crown jewels of the ash population—and also areas where there is a large concentration of ash. The aim then will be to concentrate our control efforts on trying to reduce the inoculum levels within those areas to give those important sites as long as possible to survive, and hopefully this natural resistance will manifest itself.

Q35 Mrs Glindon: What advice has Defra so far provided to the public nurseries and NGOs on minimising the spread of the disease?

Martin Ward: The advice comes in two parts. There is advice on basic biosecurity measures. In the case of *Chalara*, those are relatively straightforward compared with some tree diseases. As Professor Boyd said, the spores are considered to be relatively short-lived, and it is really the movement of leaves that is to be avoided during the winter. So that is simply a matter of not carrying leaves and leaf litter from one place to another.

The other part of the advice, which is more complicated and we have more work to do on, is around disposal of leaf litter, particularly composting and waste disposal streams from local authorities. We expect composting to be effective in substantially reducing the risks, but it may not eliminate them entirely, so the guidance will need to be adapted according to whether there is a risk of moving the disease into new areas or whether the leaf litter and the compost resulting from the leaf litter remains in the same areas where it originates. That clearly does not present a risk of spread to new areas.

Q36 Mrs Glindon: There was some advice given to the public to wash children, dogs and vehicles. Do you think that was effective?

Martin Ward: There are two different sets of advice. There is general biosecurity advice, which has to cover a range of different pests and pathogens. For example, *Phytophthora ramorum* is carried on spores in soil, so if you are going to eliminate the risk of moving it from one wood to another, then scrubbing soil off boots is a necessary part of that. In the case of *Chalara* alone, it is a simpler biosecurity process because it is leaves rather than soil that are the carrier.

Q37 Mrs Glindon: Would that advice still be given out by Defra regarding cleaning and washing vehicles, dogs, or children's hands?

Martin Ward: There is general biosecurity advice that has been developed by Defra, Fera and the Forestry Commission over the last few years. Initially it particularly focused on fighting off *ramorum*; more recently it has been under the public engagement strand of the Tree and Health and Plant Biosecurity Action Plan. It has to pitch the right balance between being rigorous and practical. It is about the reduction of risk, not elimination. It is the reduction of the amount of soil and leaf material being moved from one place to another.

Chair: Well, we certainly do not want people to stop visiting woods and forests.

Martin Ward: Absolutely not.

Q38 Chair: The Secretary of State has said that he wants to see a sea change in the way the Government and its advisers respond to plant health incidents. Professor Boyd, you mentioned 28 potential risks. Do you think there has been a change in the sense of urgency after *Chalara fraxinea*?

Professor Boyd: My view is, yes, there is a high sense of urgency. There is a realisation that plant biosecurity is something that should be treated with the same seriousness as animal biosecurity. Again, that was one of the reasons for calling a task force together—to look at how plant biosecurity could be improved to the same extent as animal biosecurity. In fact, it is a more challenging problem than animal biosecurity, because we have more pathogens to deal with and more routes of import for pathogens, or pathways as we call them. All those have to be risk assessed properly, and potentially controlled, using a variety of different methodologies. We need time to consider all those potential methodologies, but the Secretary of State has made it absolutely clear that this is a very high priority for the future.

Q39 Chair: In terms of plant disease and those owners, public or private, that have lost or will be losing trees, is the compensation between animal health outbreaks and plant health outbreaks equivalent?
Professor Boyd: There is no equivalence at the moment. I have to say it is not within our remit to be able to respond to questions about compensation. All I will say is that the Department has made it clear that at the moment compensation is not being considered for plant disease.

Q40 Chair: In terms of encouraging the growth of indigenous trees and plants that grow naturally in this country, what more can be done? Should there be voluntary or statutory means to encourage people to plant disease-free healthy trees and plants?
Professor Boyd: Again, I would point to the task force report. I would also say it is an interim report, so the task force is still working on this. There are quite a number of recommendations there about what can be done by Government, but there are also many recommendations about what can be done by the public and by the industry. I think it will be a combination of all those, including the voluntary sector, both in terms of surveillance for new diseases and in terms of trying to reinvigorate our woodlands and our forests with new types of planting regimes, using both our native species and some introduced species as well.
There are silvicultural methods available to help our forests recover from some of the challenges that they are currently experiencing, not just from *Chalara* but from some of the other pathogens that have been described. So I think this is going to be a joint effort. The Government is obviously willing to take a lead on this, but what they must do is make sure that what it is doing is evidence based.

Q41 Chair: Do you think that failure to provide any financial support might be a reason for people not to report a diseased tree?
Professor Boyd: I probably could not comment on individual motivations. Clearly, there will be motivations both ways, but at the moment I think the position is that financial support will not be given.

Q42 Barry Gardiner: In Europe we know there has been quite a devastating attack on forests. Are the trees that have suffered ash dieback there being turned into biomass chips and imported into the UK?
Roger Coppock: Our understanding at the present time is that there is not a large market for biomass chips coming into the UK. There is some firewood coming in from Belgium, which we believe to be dried firewood as opposed to green firewood, which carries a higher risk with it. We are currently conducting an assessment of that trade to understand its nature and where it is coming in.

Q43 Barry Gardiner: So once you have conducted the risk assessment, will you then conduct the consultation about stopping it?
Roger Coppock: No, we need to understand the nature of that trade; we do not know at the moment how extensive it is and where it is going to. If we then decide that it poses a risk, we could instigate, if we choose, an order based on the existing pest-risk assessment.

Q44 Barry Gardiner: Forgive me, but this has got to sound pretty odd to any member of the public listening. They will say, "You have all these trees. They are dead. Presumably somebody has wondered if they are still infectious in some way, so somebody has got to think about their disposal." What you are saying is here we have a disease that has been known about on the continent for many years. Although improperly understood before, as you have explained, for a number of years it has been properly understood. Yet you are saying that only now is a risk analysis being carried out about how safe it is to dispose of trees that have died from *Chalara fraxinea*.
Roger Coppock: No, that is not what I am saying.

Q45 Barry Gardiner: So has that risk analysis been carried out on the continent or elsewhere?
Roger Coppock: The pest-risk analysis has been carried out, which is why we have banned the import or the movement of plants at the present time. That risk analysis assessed the risk of onward infection from timber and firewood, and that risk was determined to be low because the fungal body does not, as far as we know, sporulate on timber or pieces of firewood. If we employ an order to ban the movement of firewood and potentially also the movement of timber, that does not just ban the movement of wood coming into the UK; it bans the movement of wood within the UK. That would have a major impact on the firewood industry in the UK and the way in which we can deal with the ongoing disposal process, if you like, of damaged trees. So we do need to take careful consideration of exactly what that trade is and the threat it represents before we put an order in place.

Q46 Barry Gardiner: I do not doubt that, but we are seeking clarity here. So first of all, what level of infection risk has been determined to remain from felled trees or wood that is or could be used as biofuel?
Roger Coppock: The risk is low, as long as twigs and leaves are not transmitted with that wood.

Q47 Barry Gardiner: Right, so it is a low risk, but there is a risk. Is the Government planning any additional restrictions on the use or movement of ash as a biofuel or as a wood product as a result of that risk assessment?
Roger Coppock: At the present time, no.

Q48 Barry Gardiner: Why?
Chair: For the reason he just said.
Roger Coppock: Because we are conducting this survey at the moment to look at—
Barry Gardiner: Sorry, you told me that a risk assessment has been done and the risk has been assessed as low.
Roger Coppock: Yes.

Q49 Barry Gardiner: So it is not that the risk assessment has not been done. It has. So now surely you need to have a consultation on what to do about that low risk.
Roger Coppock: We are trying to make sure that the firewood coming in from the continent is dry firewood, free of twigs and leaves, and is not green firewood. That is what represents the risk, not necessarily moving wood and timber from a site within the UK.

Q50 Barry Gardiner: So you are saying that you have assessed there is a low risk.
Roger Coppock: Yes.

Q51 Barry Gardiner: That low risk comes from impurities that might be imported with the timber itself.
Roger Coppock: No, the low risk comes from the fact that the fungus does not sporulate on the timber. If it comes with twigs or leaves, then it represents a high risk, or a higher risk.

Q52 Barry Gardiner: So it is the quality control. If it is simply the timber, it is a low risk.
Roger Coppock: Yes.

Q53 Barry Gardiner: But if that timber is contaminated with twigs or leaves, it represents a high risk. So my question still remains: what is the Government now contemplating doing about stopping the movements, or ensuring that they are quality controlled such that that high risk does not manifest itself?
Roger Coppock: We are ascertaining at the moment exactly what the nature of the trade is that is coming into the country to see whether it represents a high risk or whether it continues to represent a low risk.

Q54 Chair: Would you say it was a high or low level of trade?
Roger Coppock: Again, we are not exactly sure at the present time whether it is a high or low level of trade, which is why we are trying to do this very rapidly to determine the market.

Q55 Chair: Just to repeat the answer that you gave to Mr Gardiner earlier, if you imposed a ban on this import, you would effectively have to impose a ban on all internal movements of firewood and timber in the UK.
Roger Coppock: Yes.

Q56 Chair: On what basis?
Roger Coppock: On the basis of European regulations. What applies in one country has to apply equally.

Q57 Chair: No. The European rules, as I understand them, and it was previously Article 36, are that on grounds of public health, plant health included, you can reject imports from another EU country. Unless the law has changed radically, it would still allow internal movements of that product. Could you possibly do a note for us?
Roger Coppock: I will do a note. I will have to clarify that position for you.
Chair: Barry, are you happy with that?

Q58 Barry Gardiner: Yes. It does seem to me, Chair, that there are two elements here. One is the quality of the import, and the other is the quantity—the volume of the imports. What I thought our witness said was that nobody is quite sure what the volume of those imports is, but if they are contaminated by twigs or leaves, they represent a high risk. I absolutely want to get that confirmed so that it is clear. Those imports that are coming in may represent a high risk. At the moment the Government does not know how much is coming in but is still reluctant at this stage to ban them on a precautionary basis, despite the fact that you, Chair, have said to us that in fact cross-border movements through the EU could be banned on the grounds of public health.
Roger Coppock: I will have to clarify that point because that is obviously crucial to the discussion.
Chair: If you could, because it is rather important.
Professor Boyd: Can I just re-emphasise that we cannot act without evidence? We do have to move forward based on knowledge of what those imports are and whether there is actually a risk there.
Chair: The disease has been found for well over eight months in this country, and it is frankly quite staggering that you are not in a position to say, since presumably imports would have been one of the earliest things you would have looked at. I know Drax, the power station in Selby, imports huge amounts of woodchip from potentially third countries and EU countries. It is quite staggering that we do not have that information before the Committee today.

Q59 Barry Gardiner: Chair, could I ask for a further note of precisely what information the Government has, or research it has done, on the quality and quantity of imports of ash timber, whether for power station use as biomass or in any other form, so that we actually know what, four months on, has been done to look at this?
Chair: Okay. Sorry, if it is only four months. I misled the Committee.
Barry Gardiner: September, October, November, December—yes.
Professor Boyd: We will certainly provide you with that note. We did, however, consider at some length the risks associated with movement of ash wood. As Roger Coppock has said, those were considered to be low, and when I say low, I mean really very low. It would need a very special set of circumstances to present a risk of moving *Chalara* using that pathway, as we would call it, or that mode of transport. Relative to the many other risks we are looking at, that was considered to be extremely small.
Chair: Okay, but we would like a note, please.

Q60 Mrs Glindon: In some countries that have been affected by *Chalara*, trees have been shown to have partial resistance to the disease. What is your assessment of the potential for ash trees resistant to ash dieback being able to repopulate areas of

significant ash loss? And what is the likely timescale for any resurgence of ash in the UK?

Professor Boyd: There is clear evidence from the continent that there is a small proportion, probably 1% or less, of ash trees that have a certain degree of resistance to *Chalara*. That is almost certainly genetically based. That presents an opportunity for us to propagate or breed from that stock more resistant stock in the UK.

In terms of timescales, that depends very much on the kinds of characteristics we are looking at and the capacity we have to develop genetic markers. When I say genetic markers, I mean being to able to provide a diagnostic test that will allow us to go out into the countryside, pick an ash tree and decide whether or not it has the genetic resistance. It will also depend on how quickly we can find and propagate ash trees of British origin that have that resistance. However, trees do not grow quickly, and I suspect that it will be a decade or so before that discovery will have a significant impact on both the trade and the silvicultural practice that there is within the UK. So I would say probably about 10 years, even if we start now to propagate these trees, because by 10 years old an ash tree is still not all that large.

Q61 Mrs Glindon: But you are hopeful that that will possibly be a window for something positive to happen?

Professor Boyd: Absolutely. We are very hopeful, and in fact we are conducting a science workshop on Thursday of this week that brings specialist scientists together to consider how we are going to develop the research programme around genetic resistance in ash.

Q62 Mrs Glindon: What monitoring arrangements are there to ensure that nurseries do not sell on plants or trees infected with any disease or pest?

Martin Ward: There are some within the EU plant passports applied to those plants that pose specific risk. There is a whole range of pests and pathogens that are known to be present in the EU, and there are arrangements whereby nurseries who are authorised can apply plant passports to those plants to say that they meet requirements to ensure they are free. That might simply be inspection of the plants, but more often they come from an area free, or the place of production has been inspected and found free, or sometimes that the plants have been tested and found free where symptoms are not obvious. The proposed revision of the EU regime would bring all plants for commercial purposes within the scope of that plant passport system.

Q63 Mrs Glindon: Do you think the monitoring that exists currently is adequate?

Martin Ward: We are looking at the moment at whether there is a need to step up specific monitoring against some specific risks, even where they are covered by the plant passport regime. Clearly, like any regulatory regime, it is not perfectly applied. That is why we carry out monitoring, and we are reviewing our monitoring at present.

Q64 Barry Gardiner: You will recall that in July 2011, Lord Krebs put a question to the then Minister as to whether Natural England was responsible for surveillance to prevent the spread of disease in trees. On that occasion, Jim Paice responded that: "Nobody has the specific responsibility for surveillance." Do you think, in the light of events since then, that is still an adequate answer?

Professor Boyd: I cannot comment on the specifics of that answer. All I can say is that surveillance is in place, and the Forestry Commission has carried out surveillance recently and continues to do so, as does Fera in the nursery trade. We have identified, however, that that surveillance could be increased and done probably more intelligently than it has been in the past by looking towards where the greatest risks lie. In other words, identifying where the risk factors sit and focusing surveillance activities on particularly high-risk pathways for introduction of pathogens, locations and other activities. Basically, I think surveillance does happen, but it could be a lot better than it is at the moment.

Q65 Barry Gardiner: Professor, you have rerouted my question. I did not just ask about surveillance; I asked about responsibility for surveillance. My question was not how we can do surveillance better, which I think is a legitimate question. I am glad to know these matters are under review. My specific question was: should someone now, as a Minister, have responsibility for that surveillance so that there is a clear line of responsibility and people know that there is a Minister in charge responsible for ensuring that this happens?

Professor Boyd: I think it is probably not my place to respond to that. I am here to respond to questions about the evidence. I would say that is already in place in terms of ministerial responsibility for surveillance. I go back to my previous response, which says that there is surveillance in place, and we are working on actually improving that surveillance methodology.

Q66 Barry Gardiner: With respect, that is to contradict what Jim Paice said to the Committee before. He quite specifically said nobody has the specific responsibility for surveillance. So either he was wrong then, or, thank goodness, things have changed, in which case please advise us what has changed and which Minister is now responsible.

Professor Boyd: As I said, I cannot comment on the previous response.

Barry Gardiner: You just did. I thought you just said that there was somebody now who did have that responsibility.

Professor Boyd: I am a Chief Scientific Adviser, and I report to ministers. I see surveillance in place, and that surveillance is reported through to ministers.

Q67 Barry Gardiner: Let us go to the official bodies rather than the ministers. The task force noted that the function of the UK Plant Health Strategy Board, which aims to co-ordinate the plant health strategy between the official bodies—including the devolved administrations—required further consideration to strengthen and clarify its strategic aims and the

relationship with the proposed Chief Plant Health Officer. How is that going to be done?

Professor Boyd: At the moment I cannot answer that because the interim task force report has just been produced, and it is an interim report. The final report will be produced in March, and ministers will then respond to it in whatever way they choose thereafter. So there is no action following on from this interim report at this stage.

Q68 Barry Gardiner: Why is it not possible for an existing post to take on the role of Chief Plant Health Officer? Why has it not been part of the work of the Chief Plant Health Officer in Fera?

Professor Boyd: What the task force really identified was that aligning plant health and biosecurity with animal health and biosecurity arrangements was desirable. In order to do that, it was necessary to have a Chief Plant Health Officer who had an equivalence to the Chief Veterinary Officer and could essentially stand outside the line of management and challenge the process. We do not have that at this point, and the task force recommended that we ought to have that.

Q69 Barry Gardiner: So why has it taken so long to implement that? Surely that could just be done, could it not? If it is a recommendation and everybody agrees with it, why has somebody not said, "Hey, great idea; let's do it"?

Professor Boyd: The report was published last Thursday, and it is an interim report. I think there is a head of steam behind implementing many of the recommendations, but until the recommendations are firmed up by the task force in March, I would have said that it would be premature to respond to them, because the task force itself is still sitting, meeting and considering its response. It was asked to give some initial views, and those are its initial views.

Barry Gardiner: So what of the other 28 pathogens and vectors of disease still waiting?

Q70 Chair: We need to move on. What do you think the role of the horticultural and wood timber industry should be in this scenario of plant health?

Martin Ward: I think it is very important that we continue to work with all the industries that are involved. There is a wide range of different sectors, and I think we have tended to work with them on a sector-by-sector basis on specific pest and disease problems. I think increasingly we should be engaging them, and are, on plant health at a more strategic level. We have a recently established stakeholder advisory forum, for example, helping to develop the UK's negotiating lines for review of the EU regime at the strategic level. At the very practical level, we need to involve all the industries, NGOs and stakeholder groups in surveillance, for example. There are some organisms for which having many millions of people out there looking for the organism is much more effective than official surveillance. Also, of course, the outbreak management team needs to work with them closely, as we have been doing on *Chalara*, on the response to findings on eradication and containment measures when there is a finding of a quarantine organism.

Q71 Chair: The Independent Panel on Forestry report talks of grants and other support being given to public forest estate management for engaging with local communities. But do you think private growers are guided by the grants and support that is available as to what type of tree or plant they grow?

Roger Coppock: I think it would be fair to describe private owners, particularly in the forestry industry, as extremely individual. They have their own very clear aims and objectives. The role of the Forestry Commission in terms of providing grants, support and guidance is to help them achieve those aims and objectives. So whilst obviously grants are targeted at achieving a number of outcomes, for example an increase in forest area, healthy forest estates and that sort of thing, we try not to be too prescriptive and to allow owners to choose the route that best suits their desires and objectives in terms of how they manage the land.

Q72 Chair: Might they be tempted to go for more exotic plants and trees because there is a grant or support available, rather than indigenous trees, or, for example, import them because they grow more quickly in another country?

Roger Coppock: I think Britain has one of the longest experiences in the world of afforestation, given that our forest estate was less than 5% of the land area at the early part of the last century. It now comprises about 13% of the land area, and most of that has been non-native species. There have been more native species planted recently, and the grant schemes have very much been encouraging that, but I think the simple commercial facts are that the non-native species, with the exception of Scots pine, for example, are the ones that drive and support the wood and timber processing sector. They are the ones that make the returns to owners.

I do not think that owners are going to start going down hugely different routes at the present time, because at the moment, unless we start to lose species through pest and disease issues, they have a fairly good track record. They know how species are going to perform in a UK climate and the sorts of returns they will provide to them. However, the Forestry Commission is constantly updating its guidance and its research into what alternatives might be possible, and trying to think through the ramifications if people were to start to use them rather than just allowing people to go ahead.

Q73 Chair: Are you concerned about the lack of plant health experts in academia in the UK?

Professor Boyd: Yes, I am actually. We need to introduce more university courses that will produce larger numbers of people who are trained in plant pathology, and we need to do that through partnership schemes between the research institutions that we have in place at the moment and the universities. I am not saying that there has not been appropriate stewardship of this in the past, but I think the rising realisation of the challenge we have from plant pathogens means we need to meet that challenge with greater expertise in the marketplace.

Q74 Chair: I am staggered, just looking at the range and number. There are three departments that look at tree and plant health within the umbrella of Defra. There are the research institutions, charitable institutions like the Woodland Trust, and there is the industry. It is absolutely staggering, so there is obviously scope for either duplication or omission there. What do you think the role of the industry should be in examining plant health? Should there be an equivalent of an animal husbandry levy, or do you think that would be inappropriate?

Professor Boyd: Once again, I think that extends beyond the remit that we have, which is basically to talk mainly about the evidence. That is a response to the evidence. In terms of skills, we need higher levels of skills across the industry, as well as across Government, academia, and the non-Government sector. If we do achieve the objectives of having higher levels of skills, we will have an embedded capability there to identify plant disease at an earlier stage than we can at the moment. That will mean there is almost automatic surveillance. If all our foresters have the capability of identifying new pathogens, then there are many eyes and ears out there looking for these challenges, and we would be in a much better position than we are now.

Q75 Chair: Did you want to add anything, Mr Ward?

Martin Ward: On the non-forestry side, we certainly have got links with the levy bodies on potatoes and horticulture and arable crops, including discussions on where the boundaries fall between organisms under statutory control, which have tended to be researched with public funds, and those where statutory measures are not taken, where the funding has tended to come from the levy bodies. Sometimes those discussions take place during a consultation on what the policy should be on a new organism. We have had that recently on *Drosophila suzukii*, for example, a fruit fly coming in, where the horticultural levy body has taken responsibility for co-ordinating control on that pest rather than having it done on a statutory basis.

Q76 Chair: I am going to ask Professor Boyd to comment on this, because I think it will be difficult for Fera or the Forestry Commission to comment. From where I sit, I would have thought that Fera was in a strong position, being outside Defra and being slightly independent of the Government, but having a link to industry. Am I right, Professor Boyd, that you have made a recommendation that Fera be more closely linked to Defra? The Committee would be interested to know your thinking about how to improve the governance on plant health issues.

Professor Boyd: Well, the Forestry Commission is actually further afield from Defra than Fera, which is really a part of Defra; it is a research agency within Defra. I think there are arguments in both directions. I think there are very good arguments for saying that high-quality research and monitoring surveillance capability has to be close to Government and has to be an arm of Government. There are also arguments for saying there is strength in an independent research sector that is there not just to pursue its own interests within the context of plant biosecurity but is also there to challenge as well. We have both of those, to some extent, but we probably need to strengthen both of them. With respect to Fera itself, I do not believe I am on record as saying it should be closer or further away from Government. It does an excellent job, and both Fera and the Forestry Commission have done really fantastic jobs over the last month or so with the challenge that we have just had. It shows that when we are challenged, we can step up and make sure that the response is appropriate. In the fullness of time we can look at that again and assess the lessons we have learned from the relationships there are between the Forestry Commission, which is slightly more distant, and Fera, which is really very close to Government, and ask whether that balance is absolutely correct. My suspicion is it is probably not quite right, but at this stage I would not like to say which direction it should go in.

Chair: It is always good to talk, I am sure, but I am very pleased to hear what you said about the two organisations.

Q77 Barry Gardiner: Professor Boyd, I want to ask you about plant movement controls, but before I do I just want to make sure that it is worthwhile. The reason I say that is because there has been quite a dispute about how *Chalara fraxinea* came to the UK in the first place. Ministers seem to have adopted a very carefully worded phrase, which is that dispersal from the continent is "consistent with the science". I have no doubt it is consistent with the science, but I wanted to ask you what is most likely. Is it most likely, as in the original report that members received, that it came in through seedlings imported from the continent and may have spread from nursery to nursery, or from nursery out into planting from there? Or is it most likely that it was dispersed from the wind from Denmark, Poland or somewhere else on the continent?

Professor Boyd: That is an interesting question.

Barry Gardiner: I expect it was one that your ministers asked you.

Professor Boyd: It is. I will give you a scientist's response.

Barry Gardiner: Well, give me the answer you gave to them.

Professor Boyd: Yes, exactly. There is a weight of evidence. It is self-evident that *Chalara* was imported. The real question is whether that resulted in spread into the wider environment, or is the presence in the wider environment more consistent with a hypothesis of spread by wind from the continent? The weight of evidence, and I can come to the evidence in a minute, suggests that the spread in the wider environment is probably from wind dispersal from the continent.

There are a number of lines of evidence that support this. First of all, there is a negative one, which is that despite surveys around areas where *Chalara* has been actively introduced by people, we see no infection in the wider environment. The second, however, is the fairly obvious geographical distribution of *Chalara* within the UK, which is consistent with it coming from a nearby source on the continent. The third is that we know that *Chalara* spores are dispersed by wind and have the capability of surviving long enough

to be carried on the wind to the UK. The fourth is that we have run some very sophisticated models of particle dispersion using historical meteorological records, and those show during the summer season, when *Chalara* is sporing, that there are quite a variety of scenarios that would bring *Chalara* spores over the UK. The latest simulation has shown that they could come from as far as central Germany and Norway, so there is no doubt in my mind that *Chalara* has the capacity to spread from the continent on the wind to the UK.

The big question is: did it? Of course, that is a very difficult thing to answer. It may be possible with genetics, for example, eventually to show that, but it is a slightly academic point at this stage. We have *Chalara* in the country and we have to be able to control it. It would be useful to know that answer for future pathogens, to be able to understand how they may well spread. So essentially the weight of evidence suggests the spread in the wider environment in the UK has come from overseas.

Q78 Barry Gardiner: It is not just the weight of evidence. We know it has come from overseas. The question is: has it come in seedlings or was it wind borne?

Professor Boyd: The weight of evidence suggests it has come mainly on the wind. I am not denying that it has been brought in by people, but the question is whether it has actually led to a spread in the wider environment. The answer to that is: probably not, at this stage.

Q79 Barry Gardiner: So, in that case, does Defra consider that the international framework for plant movement controls is worth a fig?

Professor Boyd: I will turn again to the deliberations of the task force, which did question whether the movement controls are sufficient, especially within the EU at the moment.

Q80 Barry Gardiner: Why bother with movement controls if we know this is coming in on the wind anyway? You have said to the Committee that you believe that the preponderance of the evidence is that this is coming in on the wind. You know with absolute certainty that there have been imports of seedlings, but you have said to the Committee there is no clear evidence that those seedlings have given rise to what one might call a bloom of the disease around those areas where they have been imported or where they have subsequently been planted out. So if that is the case, what is the point of movement controls?

Professor Boyd: Are you talking specifically about ash here?

Barry Gardiner: Well, of course, yes.

Professor Boyd: Not general movement.

Barry Gardiner: No, I am not talking about other pathogens and other pests and vectors of disease, no. I am talking about *Chalara fraxinea*.

Professor Boyd: As the control plan says, we want to try as much as possible to limit the rate of spread of the disease. We know from epidemiological modelling that even though there is wind dispersal, the hand of man can actually add to the rate of movement of the disease.

*Professor Ian Boy*Mr Barry GardineAs the control plan says we want to try to, as much as possible, limit the. What we know from epidemiological.

Q81 Barry Gardiner: But the rate of movement was originally identified by the science.

Chair: We are really pressed for time here.

Barry Gardiner: Indeed, but, Chair, I think both Professor Boyd and I would think this was critical. The rate of spread via wind was about 30 to 40 kilometres, was it not?

Professor Boyd: It varies, depending on whom you speak to; 20 to 30 kilometres a year, perhaps.

Barry Gardiner: Twenty or 30 kilometres, whereas what you are telling us is actually we can have wind spore generation coming from the middle of Germany into the southeast of England, which is considerably more than 20 or 30 kilometres.

Professor Boyd: Exactly, but what we are dealing with is a probability distribution of spread, so you can get a mean of 20 to 30, but you can get very occasional spread over much longer distance.

Q82 Barry Gardiner: The map is not very occasional, though, is it? The map is really quite concentrated.

Professor Boyd: But remember that there may well have been internal spread after initial colonisation. If you run the epidemiological models forward, you can simulate the kind of distribution that we have within the UK.

Q83 Barry Gardiner: Professor Boyd, the Chair wants us to move on. So let me just ask you: what are the barriers to the use of stricter import controls, such as those that Australia and New Zealand have for the protection of their plant life?

Professor Boyd: Again, it is for the task force to report, and for the Government then to consider a response to that. At the moment it will depend on discussions with our European partners of the European Commission, where there is an ongoing process of reviewing plant health biosecurity, so we are pushing at an open door there. My personal view is that we could and should do more than we do at the moment, but we have go hand in hand with our international partners on this because this is about international trade and making sure that we are not unnecessarily standing in the way of free trade, but we may have a rules-based trading system as New Zealand and Australia have.

Q84 Mrs Glindon: How likely is it that Member States will support reform of the EU plant health regime so a precautionary approach may be taken by countries wishing to ban imports of plants and trees?

Martin Ward: We know that there is a general view that the current regime is not working as well as it should. *Chalara* is not the only problem spreading; there are other things spreading in other parts of the EU that are also getting a political profile in those areas and with the European Commission. So a more precautionary regime is in the offing. Proposals are expected in

February or March. There are still some points of contention, particularly around how precautionary the regime should be for new trades in plants that are high risk from other continents. There are also issues around the degree of regionalisation permitted under the regime, but I hope that we will get an improved regime, and there is a fair degree of consensus around some of the key points as to how it should be improved.

Q85 Mrs Glindon: What is Defra doing to influence the EU negotiations on revision of the plant health directive such that the UK has sufficient flexibility to act pre-emptively on pests and diseases that are present in other Member States but have yet to be detected in the UK?
Martin Ward: We have been working very closely with the Commission and other Member States over the last two years, during which the evaluation of the current regime and the fleshing out of the draft of the new regime has taken place. Regionalisation has been one of the key points that the UK has been pressing as part of better risk targeting, because it means targeting risks in the particular region where the action is taking place. For example, the risks in Finland are very different from the risks in Malta. I think that has been increasingly appreciated, understood and accepted. So whereas, for example, the protected zone arrangements were previously seen as something of a hangover from pre-single market days, those are clearly going to be retained, strengthened and secured in the new regime. We have also been working closely with stakeholders, as I mentioned earlier, and the Commission has been consulting stakeholders who are active at the European level, so the same messages have been going to the Commission from the UK and the UK stakeholder organisations.

Q86 Barry Gardiner: Professor Boyd, the Secretary of State in his letter to this Committee said: "We are basing our advice on the best available national and international evidence." I presume you had a hand in the drawing up of that letter. So, I was wondering whether you referred to the 2011 Forestry Commission Report that came out in May, which spoke of the research into *Chalara fraxinea*. If you did, you will recall that it said: "In Northern Europe many ash stands are affected, and death is widespread due to *Chalara*." But in the column that was marked "Research in Progress", it stated that there was none. So when we are basing our advice on the best available national and international evidence, can you tell me what research has been done in the UK between 2008 and 2012 on *Chalara fraxinea* by Defra or its agencies?
Professor Boyd: I cannot give you a statement right now on the details of the research that has been done. It would be much better if I wrote to you to provide that.

Q87 Barry Gardiner: The Forestry Commission said that it was none. The Secretary of State has said that he is basing his advice on the best available national and international advice. But it appears that no research has been done on this area, if one is to believe the Forestry Commission, over the past four years.
Professor Boyd: A considerable amount of research has gone on in the continent on *Chalara fraxinea*. The Forestry Commission and Fera have been in close contact with their colleagues in Europe, and in fact are part of an international research consortium into *Chalara*. So just because we may not be doing research directly in the UK does not mean to say we are not connected with the research that is going on and absorbing that information. It is that information that we use.

Q88 Chair: Mr Ward, did you wish to add anything?
Martin Ward: I would only say that increasingly we are looking at drawing evidence from areas where diseases and pests occur rather than trying to carry out research under quarantine containment conditions within the UK, which adds a great deal of cost and difficulty to doing research. It is much better if we can draw links with researchers in areas where disease is present and where containment conditions do not have to be used.

Q89 Chair: For the sake of completeness, could we just ask about plane trees? Are plane trees specifically monitored for disease?
Roger Coppock: No. The Forestry Commission does not monitor plane trees for disease. They are predominantly urban trees; they are not forest trees in that sense.

Q90 Chair: So, what if we imported a diseased tree?
Professor Boyd: Martin, do you want to take that?
Martin Ward: I mentioned earlier that we were looking at our monitoring, in an answer to a question from the Committee, of the highest risk trees for specific risks, and plane is certainly included on that list, where we are looking at how we can step up our monitoring.

Q91 Chair: Are we importing many plane trees from areas prone to the disease?
Martin Ward: That will be part of the monitoring we are looking at. Plane wilt, or canker stain as it is also known, is a regulated organism, so there are measures already in place to protect against the spread of that disease, *Ceratocystis platani*. As I mentioned earlier, of course measures are not necessarily perfectly applied, hence the need for monitoring, but it is not like the position with ash and *Chalara*. There are regulations already in place to restrict movement.
Chair: We are very grateful to you. We understand that we had you only till 3.30, so we hope that we have accommodated you to that timetable. Obviously, this is an early stage of our inquiry, and we are very grateful. We do congratulate you on the two documents, the task force interim report especially, which we shall continue to monitor, and we look forward to your final report. We have called for evidence until early January, and then we will go forward. Like you, we will be looking beyond the ash tree, but we are very grateful, Professor Boyd, Mr Ward and Mr Coppock, for you being with us and being so generous with your time at quite short notice this afternoon. Thank you very much indeed.

Wednesday 26 June 2013

Members present:

Miss Anne McIntosh (Chair)

Richard Drax	Iain McKenzie
George Eustice	Sheryll Murray
Barry Gardiner	Ms Margaret Ritchie
Mrs Mary Glindon	Dan Rogerson

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Jamie Dewhurst**, Horticultural Trades Association, and Managing Director, J&A Growers, **Caroline Harrison**, England Manager, Confor, and **Chris Inglis**, Chair, Confor Nursery Producers Group, gave evidence.

Q92 Chair: Good afternoon and welcome. Thank you all very much indeed for attending and contributing to our inquiry into tree health and biosecurity. Please introduce yourselves and give your positions in the organisations that you are with.
Jamie Dewhurst: I am Jamie Dewhurst. I am here on behalf of the Horticultural Trades Association (HTA). I am a member of the Tree and Hedging Group and a past Chairman of it.
Caroline Harrison: I am Caroline Harrison. I am England Manager for Confor, which is the Confederation of Forest Industries, the trade body for the forestry and timber processing industry in the UK.
Chris Inglis: I am Chris Inglis. I am Executive Director of Confor.

Q93 Chair: Excellent. You are all very welcome, thank you. A year on from the beginning of the ash dieback crisis—I shall start with Mr Dewhurst, and perhaps both organisations could answer—how far do you think the disease has taken a hold in the United Kingdom, Mr Dewhurst? How strong a hold has there been?
Jamie Dewhurst: I am aware from Forestry Commission statistics that we have 524 incidences spread between nurseries, the wider environment and infected plantings. Truly, I believe that once the infection period starts, we will see that figure explode. We are sitting on a ticking time bomb, you might say.
Caroline Harrison: I have nothing further to add to that.
Chris Inglis: I cannot really usefully add anything, either.

Q94 Chair: What do you think the main actions of the Government have been to prevent the spread of the disease, and do you believe that they have gone far enough? I ask Mr Dewhurst first.
Jamie Dewhurst: Have they gone far enough? We are dealing with a disease in the wider environment here. It is not foot and mouth in a field of sheep, where you can shut the gate. We are dealing with the wider environment. I believe that, given it is windborne, there is very little more that the Government could have done to slow the spread, if at all.
Chair: That is good to know.
Caroline Harrison: Again, within the timescale, the Government have done as much as they can with the resource they have. I believe there is a resource issue. Chalara is just one disease and I hope we are not going to just concentrate on Chalara today.

Q95 Chair: Looking to the role of industry, do you believe that industry should take some precautions? I have been concerned that we seem to have been exporting saplings to grow in countries that are infected with the disease and then reimporting them from the affected areas. It strikes me as not being a very safe thing to do. Would you agree with that?
Jamie Dewhurst: The European plant market is intrinsically a trading market. It always has been. One of the key issues is that we live in a marketplace that is forever changing. There have been instances in the past where seed is not only sent abroad but bought by other member state nurseries, grown on, and sold back to the UK. That happens. We all know that Holland is the biggest producer of horticulture product. They are not only buying UK seed; they are buying German, French and Danish seed for growing and selling back. Yes, doing that has created a biosecurity risk. Fundamentally, I believe that when we see the new EU legislation presently going through, we must ensure that that is tight enough to control these issues.
Chair: Thank you. We will come onto that. Is there anything you want to add, Mr Inglis?
Chris Inglis: There was a time that I can remember when trees were produced locally for the local market, but it is a long time since that occurred. The plant market is no different from any other market, really. It has developed over the decades, and has become rather more international.

Q96 Chair: If you think that this is one tree or plant disease and that there may well be others that we read about as well, are you reassured that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) have come up with a "lessons learned" and a fast response from this episode?
Chris Inglis: I think there is still a way to go, quite honestly, and one of the biggest difficulties is communication. I do not think there is effective communication, in a number of senses and contexts. There is communication up and down between agencies, but very often there is not sufficient communication across, and there is not sufficient communication with the private sector. There needs to be a single source of information that people can rely on that is completely up to date—a onestop shop for

information. I think there is a degree of confusion, and there continues to be a degree of confusion, about where the most uptodate information lies and how it can be accessed.

Caroline Harrison: If we are having problems accessing it, how are the public going to be aware of what are some very, very devastating and impactful diseases upon the private sector? There is Phytophthora, Dothistroma and Chalara. They are but three and there are several more.

Jamie Dewhurst: I have just one thing to add. I have an example where one of our members recently had a visit from his Defra inspector who was extremely frustrated that in Herefordshire there has been an incidence of chestnut blight, and he was unable to find out where, because it was a forestry issue and therefore being dealt with by the Forestry Commission. We have a big communication issue between the Forestry Commission and Defra. We are hoping, as Chris said, that vertical communication is improving, and certainly that awareness of it is. We are now talking widely to Defra and Martin Ward, and we welcome that, but we need to see some horizontal communication between the relevant agencies.

Q97 Iain McKenzie: If you purchased one of these saplings and brought it to this country, would you necessarily be made aware of, or be told, where the seeds originated from?

Jamie Dewhurst: If you sourced the material from Holland and you brought it into the UK, yes. That would be part of the contract. You would be buying a certain provenance material.

Q98 Iain McKenzie: So you would be aware that these had grown from seeds originating from, say, Germany?

Jamie Dewhurst: Or the UK.

Iain McKenzie: Or the UK.

Jamie Dewhurst: Yes.

Iain McKenzie: So you would have that trace?

Jamie Dewhurst: Within forestry and forest reproduction material, yes. When you are talking about amenity material—which is a closely related market, because there is a pencilline difference between what is forestry and what is amenity—then you would not. There is no requirement under the ornamentals directive to disclose that. Of course, we are now seeing the advent of the internet, where I can go on my telephone now and place an order for material with a Dutch nursery that could have been grown in Italy, or could have been grown outwith the EU. This, to me, is the biggest risk to the UK's biosecurity: e-commerce and globalisation of the plant trade.

Q99 Chair: May I ask about the expert taskforce? Do you believe that they have identified the right issues to be actioned?

Caroline Harrison: Confor is happy with and welcomes their recommendations. We are concerned about their timescales—and it is a plant health taskforce per se, not just trees, of course—particularly the risk register, because Confor believes that there has been very little horizonscanning of pests and diseases. You cannot contingencyplan if you do not know what is there. Again, that comes down to a resource issue. Yes, we are happy with them, but the timescales do concern me.

Jamie Dewhurst: Yes, I reiterate everything that Caroline has said. We are certainly happy. We think there are other issues on biosecurity, which we have outlined in our recent written evidence. Fundamentally, the nursery trade for a few years has been calling for a risk register, and we are pleased to see that that is the number one recommendation. It gives a single source of information. We have had information coming out of the Forestry Commission, out of Defra and from Forest Research. We need a single source.

Q100 Chair: Have they omitted anything that you think it is obvious that they should be doing?

Caroline Harrison: No.

Chris Inglis: I think the six principal recommendations cover the field fairly comprehensively.

Q101 Chair: Caroline Harrison, would you like to elaborate on the resource issues?

Caroline Harrison: We do have issues with research resources.

Chair: We will come on to that.

Caroline Harrison: If you will come on to that in a moment, we will cover it then.

Q102 Chair: I do not want to preempt. Can I just ask: I know the public are being asked to look for the signs, but I would not feel capable of looking. I am slightly worried that there might be spurious reports of ash dieback that perhaps is not ash dieback, or indeed other diseases.

Caroline Harrison: There is, and it does.

Q103 Chair: That actually could lead to a huge misappropriation of resources. Could the advice to the public be clearer?

Caroline Harrison: Crikey.

Chair: It is not a trick question. If there are limited resources, then we want to target the resources.

Chris Inglis: Even experts can find it difficult. Forest managers might identify the fact that trees were showing signs of dieback or lack of vigour, and be unclear as to what was causing it. It could be weatherrelated, the result of a cold winter and a severe frost, a nutrient deficiency on the site or some biotic agent. Asking the public to identify a particular pest—unless it is very large and obvious like a squirrel or a deer, or something like that—does carry certain risks.

Jamie Dewhurst: I am sure that there has been a huge amount of misreporting, but if you ask the public to do something, at least they are doing something. If you want them to do it, they will do it, and they have done it.

Q104 Chair: But it is not like a birdwatch?

Jamie Dewhurst: No.

Chair: It is slightly more complicated than that?

Caroline Harrison: It is much more complicated.

Q105 Barry Gardiner: Mr Dewhurst, can I just explore a confusion that I have? I understand that the HTA in 2009 wrote to Defra and notified them that you thought this was going to be a problem, but you said today that you do not think there was anything more that Defra could have done than they have. There seems to be a tension in those two statements. If they could not have done any more than they already have, then what were you notifying them about; what did you want them to do that they should have done, but did not; and, if they did not, why did you say today that there was nothing else that they could have done?
Jamie Dewhurst: My response of, "There was little more they could have done" was aimed at between spring last year and autumn. I think the question was around "over the past 12 months".
Barry Gardiner: Yes, indeed.
Jamie Dewhurst: I was actually on that trip in 2009 to Denmark. I was the chair when we went over, and Steve Ashworth took over from me on that trip, and I saw, for the first time, ash dieback in a nursery. Unaware of what it was, we spoke to the Danish nurserymen, and they said "It is a disease called Chalara fraxinea". Being aware of the volume of ash being planted in the UK, we decided to come back and write to the plant health authorities and request a ban. Everybody has read the response we received from Roddie Burgess. Subsequently, what we found frustrating was that when the science changed in 2010, we as an industry were not told that it had changed.

Q106 Barry Gardiner: Explain that, if you would.
Jamie Dewhurst: My Latin is not that great, but the Chalara in 2009 was believed to be caused by a fungus called—
Barry Gardiner: "A fungus." That will do.
Jamie Dewhurst: I was never good at school. In 2010, the scientific community identified it as being a closely related, but distinctly different fungus.

Q107 Barry Gardiner: Was that material to the question of whether a ban could or could not be imposed, because you could only impose the ban if we did not already have it endemic in the UK? I just want clarity here.
Jamie Dewhurst: We were told that the first fungus—let us call it Fungus A—was widely endemic in the UK. It was; it had been for decades. Fungus B was not endemic in the UK, and it was at that point that action could and should have been taken. We have mentioned communication before. We were never told. Had we been told that the science had changed, although I cannot answer for other commercial businesses, there would have been a raised awareness that we were dealing with a nasty here.

Q108 Barry Gardiner: Let me pursue that. I think we have got clarity here. You rightly told Defra in 2009. In 2009, the science said, unfortunately—
Chair: Could I just interrupt? I am so sorry. Did you tell an official, or did you tell a politician?
Jamie Dewhurst: We wrote to Roddie Burgess, who was Head of Plant Health in the Forestry Commission, and it was copied to Martin Ward. We received one response from Roddie Burgess, which we have. We never received a response from Martin Ward.

Q109 Barry Gardiner: Just for clarity, again, Martin Ward was the official at Defra?
Jamie Dewhurst: Correct.
Caroline Harrison: He was at the Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera).
Barry Gardiner: He was at Fera?
Caroline Harrison: Martin was Fera, wasn't he?
Chair: This is quite important, because I met officials.
Jamie Dewhurst: Yes, I know.
Chair: I met officials from your organisation, and it is just about being absolutely clear on the record whether the letter was sent formally to Defra.

Q110 Barry Gardiner: I am trying to get that clarity, Chair, with my line of questioning. Could you just explain again, for the record, the relationship between Fera and Defra? Cash out the acronyms, if you will.
Chris Inglis: Fera is, as I understand it, part of the Defra family.
Caroline Harrison: It is the plant health inspectorate.
Chris Inglis: It is the plant health inspectorate. It is the science side.

Q111 Barry Gardiner: So when Mr Dewhurst or the HTA wrote to the Forestry Commission and copied it to Fera, they were making sure that the two key organisations who had responsibility for tree health were aware of it?
Chris Inglis: Yes.

Q112 Barry Gardiner: In 2009, the science as we then understood it would not allow us to put a ban in place, but in 2010 that scientific understanding changed, and it was at that point, Mr Dewhurst, that you say a ban should have been imposed. Is that correct?
Jamie Dewhurst: Action should have been taken.

Q113 Barry Gardiner: What actions? Let's be specific.
Jamie Dewhurst: Yes. Action should have been taken way before this; the European Commission should have made it a quarantine pest. Had the European Commission made it a quarantine pest to get it onto the pest annex, then all plants would have been inspected at a source of production. That would not have stopped windblow. There would still have been plant material moved that was infected, because of the latency of the disease, but it would have slowed it down. That did not happen in the European Commission—why? I cannot answer why they did not do it, but they did not. In 2010, when the science changed, we could have taken emergency measures, as we did with oak processionary moth and as we did with Phytophthora ramorum. We could have taken emergency measures—first, requesting protected zone status—and we did not.

Q114 Chair: Can I just be absolutely clear—because Sheryll wants to come in as well—the Horticultural Trades Association did not write to Defra; they wrote to Fera and they wrote to the Forestry Commission?

Jamie Dewhurst: I would need to clarify that.

Q115 Chair: It is quite important, because I understood that they had written to Defra, and that seems not to be the case. In 2009, the science probably did not justify bringing it to the attention of Ministers; it is quite important to know when it came to the attention of Ministers.
Caroline Harrison: It depends who Martin Ward was with at that time.
Jamie Dewhurst: It depends who Martin Ward was working for at that time.

Q116 Barry Gardiner: Nonetheless, Fera were the tree plant health authority.
Caroline Harrison: Yes, they are the plant health inspectorate.

Q117 Barry Gardiner: They are part of Defra.
Caroline Harrison: Yes.

Q118 Barry Gardiner: As far as I can understand it, you wrote to the right people?
Caroline Harrison: Yes.

Q119 Sheryll Murray: Will you expand on that? First, would you have expected Fera to have brought it to the attention of Defra? Secondly, will you expand on 2010: was it very early on in 2010, or was it late in 2010? Is it possible for you to give us, if not in months, an approximate time of the year?
Jamie Dewhurst: I do not have the date with me, but I believe it was later in 2010.

Q120 Sheryll Murray: Would you have expected Fera to have flagged it up with Defra as a matter of course?
Jamie Dewhurst: That the science had changed?
Sheryll Murray: Yes.
Jamie Dewhurst: Yes, I would have.

Q121 Sheryll Murray: But you did not specifically request it?
Jamie Dewhurst: I do not have a copy of the letter in front of me; I would need to check that.

Q122 Barry Gardiner: Can I just take this a little further? Mr Dewhurst, you weren part of the delegation to Denmark that saw the devastation caused there, and you were obviously concerned about it enough in 2009 to notify both Fera and the Forestry Commission. What advice did you then issue to your own members? It is all very well to say, "We notified the authorities", but as the Horticultural Trades Association, you could have done quite a bit yourselves, could you not, in terms of notifying your members that you had seen this, that you believed that it was likely to be impacting on stock that they were purchasing, that they should be cautious when bringing it into the UK? What measures did you take at that stage, as an association?
Jamie Dewhurst: At that stage, we did not see it in devastation mode; in other words, in the wider environment. We only saw it on nursery. We did not visit forests; roadside trees looked healthy, they were not dying back, that we saw. We saw it on nursery—one incidence in one nursery.

Q123 Barry Gardiner: Substantial enough for you to be worried enough to write to both Fera and the Forestry Commission, and you have just told the Committee that at that stage, or at least by 2010, because of the advance of it on windblow, that you thought the European Commission should have been taking action. At that stage, when you believed the European Commission should have been taking action, what action did you take, as an association?
Jamie Dewhurst: At our trade group, the Tree and Hedging Group, it was minuted; it was discussed there, and we felt we would write to the authorities, who came back and said, "The fungus is already here", in layman's terms. Therefore our feeling was, "If the fungus is already here, there is something stopping it mutating into killing trees, because it has been here for a number of years".

Q124 Barry Gardiner: You could have thought that between 2009 and 2010, but in 2010 the science changed.
Jamie Dewhurst: We were not aware.

Q125 Barry Gardiner: When were you aware of that change in science?
Jamie Dewhurst: 2012.

Q126 Barry Gardiner: You did not know about this until it all went public in 2012.
Jamie Dewhurst: Yes. We were not aware from 2009 to 2012 that there had been a change in the science.

Q127 Barry Gardiner: Right. What you are saying is there is complete dysfunctionality between plant health, the science community and the plant trade. Is that right?
Jamie Dewhurst: There was then.

Q128 Barry Gardiner: A complete lack of communication?
Jamie Dewhurst: Yes.

Q129 Chair: I have a copy of your letter from the Chairman of the Tree Hedging Group of the HTA, which was sent to the Head of the Plant Health Service of the Forestry Commission, and was also copied, only, to Martin Ward, who was then Head of Plant Health at Fera. It looks like it was not brought to their attention. The other interesting thing is that you call for a ban on imports, yet that was not the advice you gave your own members.
Jamie Dewhurst: When we were told that—
Chair: This is 2009; you were calling for a ban, but that was not the advice that you gave to your members?
Jamie Dewhurst: We discussed it within the Tree and Hedging Group. We all agreed we should call for a ban at the AGM that we held in Denmark. We came back, we got the response that you will have a copy of, saying that the fungus is here, and, for some reason, it is not killing UK ash trees, but it does not like Danish trees.

Chair: I am half Danish, so I ought to declare that. It is not my fault.
Jamie Dewhurst: We were slightly stuck in—we have got the fungus; that was what we were told.
Barry Gardiner: There was a failure of the science.

Q130 Chair: The point I am trying to make, though, is you were asking the Government to impose a ban, but you were not prepared to impose a voluntary ban. I am trying to get behind your thinking about why you were waiting for the Government to act, and why you did not introduce a fairly obvious voluntary ban?
Jamie Dewhurst: HTA members only cover 40% or 50% of the plant trade. They would have suffered severely commercially, and we were told that the fungus was here, so was it an issue?
Chair: I am trying to understand why you wanted a ban if the fungus was here?
Barry Gardiner: They did not know that at that point.
Jamie Dewhurst: We did not know that until we received the letter back from the Forestry Commission.

Q131 Sheryll Murray: Will you expand on that, before I come in and ask another question, because it seems as though you felt it important enough to ask the Government to impose a ban at that time, but you did not feel it important enough to ask your own members to have a voluntary ban?
Jamie Dewhurst: We did not directly. We spoke about it at the AGM, and it was minuted that the group would request a ban: that is not the whole of the HTA; the Tree and Hedging Group would request a ban. We got the response back saying, "The fungus is here", so we could not pursue it any longer.

Q132 Sheryll Murray: At that time, was any suggestion made that perhaps you could have imposed a voluntary moratorium yourself?
Jamie Dewhurst: I do not think there was ever—
Caroline Harrison: Would that have controlled the disease, though? Would that have controlled it coming over here?

Q133 Sheryll Murray: I just find it confusing. I shall continue with disease resistance. What is your assessment of the potential for ash trees resistant to ash dieback being able to repopulate areas of significant ash loss?
Jamie Dewhurst: I am not a scientist. We have all heard what the scientific community are doing, and they are working extremely hard to do that. At the moment, they have identified trees that are showing signs of resistance to Chalara in Denmark, and for Fraxinus excelsior, which is the ash in the UK. They are just showing signs of resistance. Unfortunately, under tree-breeding programmes, it is a long haul to—

Q134 Sheryll Murray: Do you have any idea of the timescale?
Jamie Dewhurst: Not in my career.
Caroline Harrison: 50 to 100 years.
Jamie Dewhurst: Probably 50 or 100 years.

Q135 Sheryll Murray: Do you have anything to add to that?
Caroline Harrison: I am a forester; I am not a nursery person, but from what I have heard, from biosecurity and science, I am confident that it is long, long-term.

Q136 George Eustice: What proportion of the total annual sales of ash species, in nursery stock, are native species, raised from seedlings and grown on their own roots, compared to perhaps more ornamental ones that might be budded or grafted onto—
Jamie Dewhurst: Percentage by number or by value?
George Eustice: By number, just roughly.
Jamie Dewhurst: By number, 98% are Fraxinus excelsior.

Q137 George Eustice: Grown on their own root?
Jamie Dewhurst: Yes.

Q138 George Eustice: In terms of resistance, in some of these things resistance has been dealt with by finding a particular root stock that carries a resistance, which then can be used right across the whole range of species. Is that something that is being looked at?
Jamie Dewhurst: I do not know. I am not a scientist. There are varieties of ash that are resistant to Chalara grown in the Far East, where it now turns out that this disease originated from, but they are not suitable for our climate. I am not a scientist; I am not a researcher. We are tree farmers, for want of a better word: that is what we do; we farm trees. I would be asking that question to the scientific community.
The fundamental problem is to build up the basis. If you are starting with one tree, to multiply it up to the point of putting it into the commercial world, to repopulate the UK, is a long, long goal, assuming that the UK ash succumbs to Chalara, which it looks like it is going to. We can only hope there is a degree of resistance in the UK population.

Q139 Chair: That fine, upstanding Tree 35 in Denmark—are you surprised that it has proved resistant, and to what do you attribute that?
Jamie Dewhurst: I do not know. I am not a scientist.

Q140 Chair: Are we going to learn from the Danes? Are the Danes going to share with us the—
Jamie Dewhurst: They have a 10-year start on us, so hopefully we will learn from it. Hopefully, there will be a lot of panEuropean, global work done on tree diseases. We cannot sit in our own little cocoon here; we have got to look—
Caroline Harrison: It is one of the taskforce recommendations that we look at the EU and beyond; certainly, for Chalara, we looked at Poland, France, Denmark, and various scientists. The Tree Council did some work on contacting various people in those countries and looking at what the scientific community had done over there, so it was very useful—a bit too late, but very useful.

Q141 Richard Drax: Looking slightly further afield to the international rules on trade, New Zealand and Australia have strong control on imports that predate

their entry into the World Trade Organization agreements. It can be argued that the UK has an absence of mechanisms, which means that immediate action is quite hard to take. What problems have been identified with the international framework governing plant movements, and what improvements could be made? Mr Dewhurst, may I start with you?

Jamie Dewhurst: Are you talking within the EU?

Richard Drax: We are looking internationally. Australia and New Zealand come out very strongly; they have the advantage, for the reasons I have just expressed. What problems have been identified internationally? Your answer may well be that the EU is part of the problem; I do not know.

Jamie Dewhurst: The present EU plant health regime is inwardlooking; it is not horizonscanning, which is something that we must start doing. With the risk register you are going down that route. We have to improve our border controls—I am talking EU-wise. We work in a single market. Unfortunately, unlike Australia and New Zealand, we live 21 miles across the water; they are living thousands of miles from anywhere. We will always have the risk of windblown disease or pests coming in, which is a fundamental difference between the UK and Australia and New Zealand that we cannot get away from. When the new plant health regime eventually comes in in 2018 and beyond, we must ensure that it is modernised and fit for purpose. That is something we are already closely co-operating with both the Forestry Commission and Defra on.

Q142 Richard Drax: Bearing in mind the wind problem, you are saying the rules within the EU are not tough enough? Is that what you are saying?

Jamie Dewhurst: They are out of date with present international trade in plant supply.

Richard Drax: Ms Harrison, what is your view?

Caroline Harrison: I cannot comment. It is not my area.

Richard Drax: Mr Inglis?

Chris Inglis: There is a very real distinction between the EU and the rest of the world.

Chair: We are coming on to the EU in just one moment.

Chris Inglis: As far as trade is concerned, we can prevent the import of something if it represents a risk. We can make a case for not importing some plant material from, let us say, North America, because it poses a risk, and we can do that relatively easily, without contravening any trade rules. However, to stop something coming in from the European Union is more complicated, because it is a single market.

Q143 Richard Drax: What are the barriers to stricter import controls, such as Australia and New Zealand have? What are those barriers?

Jamie Dewhurst: I do not know enough about their regimes.

Chris Inglis: The Australians and New Zealanders can put up a barrier, because they are not part of a wider trading group, so they are not impacting upon trade within that group. As I understand it, as a nation we could put up similar barriers to plant material from the rest of the world coming in, but not from the EU, because we are part of a single trading bloc, and it is a single market. We need to be able to show we are a pestfree zone; that the pest exists in the rest of the EU, but does not exist here, and then, through current EU legislation, we can easily stop the import of the material that might introduce that pest into this country.

Q144 Iain McKenzie: I think we have probably touched upon this question, and it is to do with the proposed changes to EU rules on the movement of plants. To the whole panel, do you think these changes in rules will permit earlier action to prevent diseased plants being imported by the UK?

Chris Inglis: The key here is something that we touched upon earlier, getting a better understanding of the pests that pose a threat to us, in the European context and in a wider international context, concentrating on the science of those organisms, so that we have a complete understanding of the potential risk becoming a real hazard, and looking at ways in which we can strengthen our pest-free status. We have to be able to prove that the UK is pest-free before we can claim pest-free status. There is a period that one is allowed to do that, but, for example, if we had better monitoring going on, as a matter of routine, we could identify spores of different fungal pests or organisms and identify very quickly when a fungus or an insect was found to be present. That requires a significant investment, and whether we could ever do that—

Q145 Iain McKenzie: Do you think that the forest and horticultural society has been sufficiently engaged in developing these proposals?

Chris Inglis: We are at the point now, through the work that has been done by the taskforce and the ongoing work stemming out of that, of beginning to think about these things. There is an opportunity for the private sector to be fully engaged in this.

Caroline Harrison: We have tried to be engaged, but there have been resource issues within the plant inspectorate. Finding an insect at the ports around these countries is like finding a needle in a haystack, and they simply do not have the resource to do it efficiently. We have offered private-sector help with other diseases, for instance Phytophthora, in surveillance monitoring, and a framework tender went out from the Forestry Commission. We are here, we are engaged, and we are ready to help, if we can help.

Chris Inglis: I could also make the point at this juncture that the import of plants is not the only pathway to the introduction of pests. I was somewhat surprised last year to discover that we land 7.2 million shipping containers each year. That works out at an average of about 20,000 shipping containers a day throughout the year.

Chair: Of trees?

Chris Inglis: No, this is shipping containers. The majority of shipping containers have wooden packaging, pallets and so on, a proportion of which—I will not say "all of which", because pallets should be treated so that they are not carrying pests and diseases, but a significant number of these containers have the potential to introduce pests through this wooden packaging material. This is probably when

the shipping container is unloaded of its contents and just dumped.
To inspect 20,000 shipping containers every day is just an impossible task, so Customs and the plant inspectorate work on a riskbased approach, as I understand it. If they think a container is coming from an area of the world where there is maybe less rigid regulations applied, then it will be inspected, and good communication takes place between different European Customs departments to flag up where they think there might be problems. I urge you not to focus solely on the import and trade in plants, because it is just one route.

Q146 Iain McKenzie: As a supplementary to what Ms Harrison said, you were ready and willing to have input into the design of these EU proposals, but you have not, you said, to date?
Caroline Harrison: That is not quite what I said.
Jamie Dewhurst: Certainly, the HTA and the Confor Nursery Group are actively involved with both Defra and the EFC on reviewing it. We have to remember we are at the early stages; we are only in draft form. There is a huge amount to go through, and we have to ensure that it is fit for purpose. As it stands at the moment, the plant health regime will allow member states to take emergency legislation quicker, but we are at draft stage now. We are already aware that the French and the Germans are not very keen on the Forest Reproductive Material (FRM) part of the package and are looking to get forestry pulled out of it, but it will still be Lisbonised and tied to the Plant Health thing. We are actively involved in setting the UK thing, certainly the HTA and the Confor Nursery Group are.
Caroline Harrison: I was referring more to at the wood-face—the surveillance and monitoring that is going on now for the likes of Phytophthora, Dothistroma, Chalara, etc.

Q147 Iain McKenzie: As a further question to Mr Dewhurst, along the lines of the EU proposals, to do with the practice of exporting seeds to be cultivated abroad, do you see these proposals as decreasing the risk of importing diseased saplings into the UK?
Jamie Dewhurst: Are you asking whether it will reduce the amount of seed being shipped abroad? No, there is nothing that will stop that. Do I see it decreasing? Not while we have such a volatile marketplace.

Q148 Iain McKenzie: As a supplement to that, what are you doing to promote the growth of native species in the UK?
Jamie Dewhurst: The market is looking to demand it, but at present there are no official figures collected. I would estimate—and I am not just talking forestry; I am talking amenity, hedging, and everything—that we still import over 50% of the plants that are planted in the UK. We do not have a production base in the UK for horticulture produce. It is the likes of Holland, Belgium—they are 95% export countries. Why? It is a very good question; it is not a commercial reason.
The company that I run started 11 years ago in direct competition for imports. We are two and a half times our business plan, in terms of the size of the company and number of trees we produce. Some people say, "Why not grow more? The demand is there." The market is so volatile that one year we could be selling 800,000 alder; the next year it could be 500,000. We cannot afford to burn the material, to destroy plants, so we grow 500,000, and once that is sold, people go to the continent. We need stability, not only in the forestry market, but in the whole amenity market, and that is driven by support mechanisms.
Caroline Harrison: It is driven by grants.
Jamie Dewhurst: Grants, support, and investment.

Q149 Chair: Could I pick up on two things? Mr Inglis, what evidence can you demonstrate that pests have transferred from pallet packaging to trees? It is quite a big statement to make.
Chris Inglis: Asian longhorn beetle came in on package material.
Chair: How far did that—
Chris Inglis: Fortunately it was discovered, identified and hopefully has been eradicated.
Chair: That is helpful.
Chris Inglis: It is a large beetle, and it makes large holes, so it was quickly spotted. If it had been a tiny beetle that made tiny holes, it might not have been spotted.
Chair: I have heard of spiders coming in with bananas.
Chris Inglis: The reality of the situation is that larger beasties are easier to spot.

Q150 Chair: I always understood that what was originally Article 36, and I do not remember what number it is now, of the Rome Treaty, and possibly the Lisbon Treaty, enables imports to be stopped on the basis of human or animal, and presumably plant, health. Have you ever tried to use that to limit imports from those countries in Europe that we know have had the disease since 1992?
Chris Inglis: This is a particular disease?
Chair: I am thinking of ash dieback.
Chris Inglis: I think the answer is no. I do not think one should concentrate solely and too strongly on Chalara, because there are other pests and diseases that are causing real commercial damage out there, some of which have been present in the UK for 50 years. Pests and diseases have a habit of sitting there in limbo for a bit and then suddenly, for no apparent reason, there is a sudden upsurge in activity and damage.

Q151 Chair: You are slightly contradicting yourselves when you say that, because, if you ask for a ban, but you realise that it may already be here and dormant, what is the point of a ban?
Chris Inglis: Chalara is one disease that we need to learn policy lessons from, but there are other diseases that equally we need to learn from, and because something may be benign at the moment, and is perhaps benign elsewhere in the world, if it is brought in it may not be as benign under UK conditions. Phytophthora is another example. That came in on imported rhododendron and has caused sudden oak

death, but it has transferred to larch and it is causing serious commercial damage to larch crops.
Sometimes it is quite difficult to predict how an organism is going to behave, and how quickly it is going to show that behaviour. The more we know, the more we can exchange information with other countries, and the better we can identify those diseases that pose a real threat to our industry and our landscape, the more we can do. Developing a policy based on the introduction and incidence of one pest would be dangerous.

Q152 Chair: To clarify, Mr Dewhurst, you said we import over 50% of all trees; is that of all trees, not just ash?
Jamie Dewhurst: All trees, hedging—that is my feeling; there are no official figures. I know, roughly, the production base in the UK, and we hope to know roughly the market size in the UK, but there are no official figures kept.

Q153 Chair: On what you said about the commercial decision that you grow your 500,000 and then you stop, is that purely a commercial decision?
Jamie Dewhurst: The market fluctuates so wildly—and it is a very price-sensitive market that we work in—that we cannot afford to destroy any plants, and the moment we do, we turn a crop from being profitable into a loss-making material. We grow what we are confident we can sell; my goodness, we get that wrong sometimes too.

Q154 Dan Rogerson: We started off by asking what more the Government could have done, and your view was that you did not think it could have done much more, given that it was an airborne pest.
Caroline Harrison: Is this Chalara again?
Dan Rogerson: Yes. Looking at what you are arguing there, that you think the Government could have a slightly different approach to dealing with pest and threats generally, what would that look like? As some of these threats may be airborne, and some may be in packing cases or whatever, is it possible for you to tell the Government, "This is what we think you ought to have in place to catch all these things"? What are you asking the Government to do?
Chris Inglis: There are things that have been done, like banning the import of coniferous timber with bark on, because insect pests can be harboured in the bark and be brought in. That is an example of an action taken quite a long time ago that has prevented the importation of some fairly nasty pests that would decimate trees in this country. We need to look at practical solutions and work to reinforce regulation that exists; as it is, pallets have to be heat-treated to—I forget the temperature—56 degrees, which should kill all pests. We are beginning to import biomass for energy, which is being driven by some other policy, but a lot of that will have bark in it. That might be a low risk, because it is fragmented, but it is still a risk, and the wood chips—
Chair: I think we are coming on to this, so we shall move on now. We are coming on to that specific point.

Q155 George Eustice: You have mentioned a couple of times about Phytophthora and the approach there, and you talked about how the private sector was involved in surveillance. Please expand on that, so that we know exactly what is being done by the industry itself to help improve that.
Caroline Harrison: It started off in the south-west—I happen to live in the south-west, so I have been very well aware of Phytophthora. It came in on a rhododendron apparently, anecdotally. It has spread from rhododendron to larch. The forestry sector, working with the Forestry Commission and the agencies, formed a working group, four or five years ago, and a marketing group. We worked very closely with the Forestry Commission, using statutory Plant Health Notices and clearing the larch. The Forestry Commission staff were wholly under-resourced. We worked with the Forestry Commission, put in a bid for grant support, so managers and advisers could help private-sector owners, and a framework tender went out from the Forestry Commission for companies such as Tilhill to do the surveillance for them, because while Forestry Commission staff and Forest Research staff are out in the field, other grant and regulation work is not being done. Management grants those support mechanisms that are bringing woodland into management, then those applications are not being processed while you have agency staff out in the field doing surveillance that the private sector could quite easily do.

Q156 George Eustice: Did the private sector still want to be paid by the Government for doing that work? They did not feel they had a responsibility themselves to try to prevent the spread.
Caroline Harrison: We did not ask for disease; it is a quarantined disease—
George Eustice: The Government did not ask for it.
Chair: We have established that the disease is already here.
Caroline Harrison: Yes.

Q157 George Eustice: Are there any lessons, then, that could be learned applying that now to—
Caroline Harrison: Absolutely.

Q158 George Eustice: What would those be?
Caroline Harrison: Phytophthora is a good example of how agencies, the private sector and the public sector, work together for the greater good of the landscape and the environment. None of us wanted it. The public sector has got the disease as well as the private sector; we are all having to work together to do the best we can to get the trees down, and try and control the marketing of that timber. It is very different to Chalara, of course, because it is a quarantined disease, and it is enforced, essentially.

Q159 George Eustice: You say it is a quarantined disease; should Chalara be a quarantined disease? It is not at the moment, is it?
Caroline Harrison: Chalara is not my expertise.
Jamie Dewhurst: Should it be a quarantined disease?
George Eustice: Should it be, or should it have been? It is too late now.

Caroline Harrison: It is a very different scale, but perhaps we would not be where we are today if it had been.

Jamie Dewhurst: It should have been made a quarantined pest. It was not. Had it been, I believe we would have still got it, because it is windblown. It is in the natural environment, but it would not have got here quite so quickly.

Q160 George Eustice: It is good to know there are lessons from Phytophthora, but are those involved in the nursery stock trade, and the industry collectively, doing enough to make sure that plants sourced are free from the disease, and that, indeed, movements between nurseries are restricted in some way if there is an incidence of the disease?

Jamie Dewhurst: There has been a much greater awareness from industry. I cannot speak for everybody, but people within the Tree and Hedging Group are much more aware—the forestry sector has probably been very aware for a while, and they have generally inspected the stock prior to purchase. Given the latent infection of tree diseases, and the inability to spot it sometimes, what we are ensuring is that the new regime that we will face is going to strengthen the EU's and the UK's position on plant health. That is what we must do.

Unfortunately, we are five years away from earliest implementation, I am told. The HTA, along with Conform, hosted a recent biosecurity conference, which we were fortunate to have Lord De Mauley open. Joan Webber, the Principal Pathologist at the Forestry Commission, gave a very good presentation, and to finish, she introduced the four biggest threats to the world in plant health: the emerald ash borer, the bronze birch borer, pitch canker and Phytophthora pinifolia. At the end, a question was asked to her, "How many of these are quarantined pests, if we know they are out there?" Only one.

Q161 George Eustice: You said it would take five years. Is this because it is an EU-wide thing and it takes forever to do?

Jamie Dewhurst: I am reliably informed that once it is signed off there is a three-year transition period until full implementation.

Q162 George Eustice: That is at the regulatory level, but in your industry the retail garden-centre end is a very fragmented industry, but on the production side, you could probably count on one hand the number of significant producers in the UK.

Jamie Dewhurst: Not many more.

Q163 George Eustice: Precisely, and it is the same in Holland. The production end is dominated by a very small number of very large producers. Is there something that could be done much sooner, on a voluntary basis, by those large nurseries that are doing the production getting together and agreeing certain practices among themselves?

Jamie Dewhurst: Certainly we do within the UK. We do get together. On an international basis, there are nurseries in the UK who deal solely with one producer in Holland. Unfortunately, in Holland a lot of the producers who are supplying what I would call the sheds in the UK—the people who have got a shed and a forklift, plants coming in one door and going out the other door—are buying from the trading houses in Holland, who are doing exactly the same. They have got loads of producers firing it in, and it is all coming out. That is how the plant market works in Holland.

I have some stock contract grown in Northern Germany—some beech, purely because my soil will not grow beech, because of soil-borne micronutrient reasons. It is grown by a nursery that purely grows trees and never trades anything. He is an exceptionally good grower, and that is why I use him; I have used him for a long time. If we suddenly noticed a disease of beech coming in, we would be much more aware of the potential impact. I am afraid it is a wakeup call to everybody.

Q164 George Eustice: There is nothing more that the industry could voluntarily do by setting up its own protocols, and—never mind the five-year wait for a new regime—just doing it now? Do you not think there is anything further that could be done that you are not already doing?

Jamie Dewhurst: It would be good if the industry would sign up to it. I do not believe you would get universal sign-up to it.

Jamie Dewhurst: There is the Confor Nursery Group.

Caroline Harrison: Our nursery members set up their own—

Jamie Dewhurst: We have rules. I am a member of both groups, the HTA and Confor Nursery Group, and we set up our own protocols for membership.

Q165 George Eustice: Is there any way that you could pool some moneys and funds to finance eradication strategies, or strategies to mitigate the spread of the disease? Do you operate at that level, or are you simply a trade association that lobbies the Government? Could the HTA co-ordinate a collective response?

Chris Inglis: Pest eradication is easy to say, but unless you can catch the pests very early, like Asian longhorn beetle that I referred to earlier, once the cat is out of the bag it is very difficult. When you start spraying pests, you have all sorts of social problems, land use problems, water problems, and wider environmental problems, which mean that one is constrained in what one can do. It is possible to control the oak processionary moth, for example, by spraying, but it is now fairly well entrenched within London, and the thought of spraying pesticides over London is not something that too many people would envision as practical.

Q166 George Eustice: Finally, on this point about collaboration, you mentioned research and development; budgets are stretched, as always. There is still a horticultural levy, is there not, from the Horticultural Development Council? Are they putting sufficient priority on this? Are their efforts being diluted on less important issues?

Jamie Dewhurst: I am a panel member of the HDC, as well, for my sins; I seem to be sitting on everything. Our hardy nursery stock research budget

for this year—bear in mind hardy nursery stocks are much greater than trees and hedging—is £380,000 for research and communications; trees and hedging accounts for 13% of that budget, which roughly works out as £50,000 a year for research. That is one project, and presently the one project that is being funded by the HDC is on growth regulators in an attempt to ensure that we can manage the height of our crop, because if our crop gets too big nobody wants it. There is miniscule research funding available to the sector, and it is self-financed. That is all found from levy; no longer is it part-funded by Government.

Caroline Harrison: Forest Research is forest research, and not just pest and disease. We have just undergone a science innovation strategy review last year, looking at all areas of research, which Government will have access to. You will be able to see just how stretched research is; it is ridiculous.

Q167 Richard Drax: Confor has criticised the administrative process led by the Forestry Commission and National Resources Wales. What reduction in imports of plants could be achieved by improving the administrative processes?

Chris Inglis: If I might respond to that, the process of getting approvals through for applications for a planting scheme is a very tortuous process, and is unpredictable. Jamie has already said that the nurseries are constrained by the unpredictability of demand. That is not helped by the forest management sector having this uncertainty as to how long an application is going to take to go through the process of consultation, amendment and approval. It takes three years for a nursery to produce plants that are suitable for planting out on a commercial planting scheme or a woodland creation scheme.

They need to know in 2013 what the demand might be in 2016, and with the uncertainty of how long it is going to take for schemes to be processed and come out the other end as an approved scheme, so that the forest manager can order his plants, it is very difficult. The schemes are linked to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Rural Development Policy (RDP), which works in seven-year cycles. The demand for plants this year, because we are coming towards the end of a seven-year cycle, is enormous, because forest managers are saying, "Let's get trees planted while we can, with a scheme that we understand and a scheme that exists, because we do not know what is going to follow on in the next seven-year cycle, and what the support scheme might look like".

Jamie, and other nurseries in the UK, have sold out of a lot of species and are unable to satisfy the demand for trees, which results in imports being sucked in to satisfy that demand. It is the uncertainty on an annual basis as to the approval processes for applications for grant, and the wider RDP scenario of being in seven-year cycles.

Caroline Harrison: Due to the burden on Forestry Commission staffing, we are looking now at some 18 months from application through to approval, and that is pretty much down to staffing being taken away on to plant health issues. It is a vicious circle.

Q168 Richard Drax: You suggested targeting financial support to prevent degradation of forests, since there is no requirement for owners to replant—

Caroline Harrison: On a statutory Plant Health Notice, there is no condition to restock, no. We have deforestation targets in the UK and we have afforestation targets in the UK. Along with the likes of wind farms development and PAWS restoration—plantation of ancient woodland sites restoration—we are potentially losing commercial resource, as such.

Q169 Mrs Glindon: Mr Dewhurst, how would lengthening the duration of forestry grants enable better planning from managing plant pests?

Jamie Dewhurst: It would allow the nursery trade to step up. Due to the volatility in the marketplace, our production level is fairly low. If we had stability in the marketplace through setting grant schemes, we know what is going to be the case for the next five years—that is the amount of money you are going to get per hectare for planting. The market would know. The commercial foresters would know; they would be able to plan ahead. We would have more confidence in the marketplace; we would then increase our production—I am speaking for myself and a number of colleagues; we have spoken about it—thereby reducing the reliance on imports.

Chris Inglis touched on the CAP and the seven-year cycle we are sitting at the moment, but as of 1 January we have no grant scheme. I am buying seed at the moment for a market that may not exist, because tier two funding has not been finalised.

Caroline Harrison: We do not know if there is transition funding or not.

Jamie Dewhurst: We have no transition funding. The foresters are firing in the grant applications now, and so you are getting this massive demand for plants that do not exist in the marketplace. Why are they firing? Because they do not know what might be available on 1 January; there may be nothing. In Brussels they are saying that it is going to be 2016, so we may be facing two years. If that is the case, you will not have a nursery industry in the UK. You will be importing all your plants. We are in serious trouble.

Q170 Mrs Glindon: So this is quite hypothetical, talking about longer—

Jamie Dewhurst: If we get stability in longterm planning, we as an industry will increase our production. I have heard arguments before that, "Oh, the Dutch are cheaper"—that is rubbish; it is absolutely rubbish. I compete against Dutchmen every day. I compete against Belgians every day. If I can do it, the horticulture industry can do it. They are no bigger, no better; they are just 25 miles the other side of the water from us.

I have a classic example here of how support, when it was withdrawn, collapsed the market. This is one of our members: in the 2009/10 season he sold 1.47 million of a species. Under the Scottish Rural Development Plan support for rural hedging was withdrawn in 2010. It is a twoyear cycle for that nursery to produce hawthorn. It had dropped to 566,000, to a third of its level. It was withdrawn overnight—no prior warning, no impact assessment

done; they just shut the door. All the farmers in the North East of Scotland stopped planting hedges.

Q171 Mrs Glindon: You are talking about the uncertainty of what is going to happen in January. If there was certainty and you could have this longterm planning, it would help the industry—please God you do have the grant scheme in place—if you have this longer timeframe, would it not limit the flexibility to respond to the sudden emergence of new threats?
Jamie Dewhurst: I do not have a problem with that, as long as it is done for the right reason. Sometimes these incidences happen without thought of the consequences. If it is a plant health threat, fine. That is the real world. We have just faced the worst winter. We harvest through the winter months. We can handle that; that is part of the industry. However, when decisions are taken and we cannot see an apparent reason, and they happen overnight, or without any forewarning, that is what we cannot handle.
Caroline Harrison: Communication.
Jamie Dewhurst: It is communication again.

Q172 Iain McKenzie: I gather you are saying that in your supply chain you are being required to absorb all the risk. You absorb 100% of the risk. Is that not something you have to look at in how you are supplied, to pass on at least some of the risk to your supplier, in respect that you are placing orders on a regular basis? Would it not be the case that they would need to absorb some of that risk? You could say, "We are regularly placing an order with you. It may not be X we are asking for, but we will definitely be asking for Y. Therefore, if we need to go to X you have to absorb a bit of that risk."
Jamie Dewhurst: Are you talking about demand?
Iain McKenzie: Yes.
Jamie Dewhurst: So, look to my customers to take part of the risk? I would not have customers. The Dutch would walk all over it. I work very closely with my customers and we have been very fortunate that we have never been caught out. It is a supply chain management. The moment they see problems with a species they will let me know.

Q173 Iain McKenzie: When do you place your order, if you are looking towards January as the date when you have to give the supply?
Jamie Dewhurst: When the grants will be—
Iain McKenzie: Right.
Jamie Dewhurst: That will affect the next planting season, not this planting season now. The door will shut as of 1 January. That is as it stands today, we believe.
Caroline Harrison: Yes, 2014.
Jamie Dewhurst: As of 1 January, the door will shut, but there will be a lot of schemes within the pipeline that have already been approved at that point.
Caroline Harrison: They will continue.
Jamie Dewhurst: Those will continue. You will see it suddenly go like that—1 January being there, and then the schemes will drop off. We do not have any schemes in place, because the 50% funding out of the EU is not agreed yet. The 50% funding coming from the UK is there; 50% funding out of the EU is not there yet. We have a situation where there is no match funding available. I know in Scotland there has been a promise of transition arrangements; I am not exactly sure on the figures—
Chris Inglis: I am not sure of the details.
Jamie Dewhurst: I do not think they are sure of the details, but there will be transition arrangements. In England and Wales, we have no transition arrangements.
Caroline Harrison: Unless you know something different.
Jamie Dewhurst: Yes, and if you do, can we know?

Q174 Chair: Can I just ask a couple of questions; are you saying to the Committee that the industry is not viable commercially without these grants?
Jamie Dewhurst: No.
Caroline Harrison: We are not saying that at all about the forestry industry, but the nursery industry?
Jamie Dewhurst: We are reliant on the forestry industry and commercial hedging, which is funded through support mechanisms. Would the forestry industry plant trees without grants? Ultimately, yes, they would, but it would take a long time. In New Zealand they do it.
Caroline Harrison: They do.
Jamie Dewhurst: They have gone through that transition; they decoupled a while ago, and it was a painful period.

Q175 Chair: They have decoupled?
Caroline Harrison: They have no subsidy in New Zealand.
Jamie Dewhurst: They have no support mechanism.
Caroline Harrison: No agricultural support.
Chris Inglis: The grants are not there to subsidise an ailing industry; they are to pay for Government policy.
Caroline Harrison: The public benefit.
Chris Inglis: Public benefit. It is to plant species that the woodland owner might not otherwise plant for commercial reasons, but have wildlife, social, and recreational benefits. It is to leave open space within the forests, which is not productive for timber, but is productive for wildlife and environmental aspects of land management. Grants are not there to subsidise the industry. It is to pay for public benefit that is delivered on top of the timber.

Q176 Chair: Could I just ask: in your written evidence, in the point about this RDP grant, you seem certain, but you seem less certain verbally. Perhaps you could write to us.
Caroline Harrison: From Confor or the HTA—whose evidence?

Q177 Chair: I think it was Mr Dewhurst. If you could possibly—
Jamie Dewhurst: Expand on it? I will write to you.
Chair: That would be helpful.

Q178 Dan Rogerson: Looking at a wider issue with RDP, in terms of animal health work that has gone on, there is this potential gap in projects that are coming on now that are doing a great deal of good, and what could happen there. Just to clarify, in terms of the

hedgerow work you were talking about earlier, which might have an effect for some of your members, that might not necessarily be seen in the minds of people within the Department as a forestry scheme, because effectively it is an environmental scheme ancillary to other sorts of farming. It is about biodiversity and all those kinds of issues, so on this communication you are talking about, would you say it is a lack of communication between the industry and Defra as to what the effects might be of altering environmental stewardship programmes and what knock-on effects that might have for your members?
Jamie Dewhurst: Yes.
Dan Rogerson: It is certainly something I have considered, and it is interesting that you brought that up for us today.

Q179 Chair: Does anyone want to comment on that?
Jamie Dewhurst: I would agree. It is a misunderstanding.

Q180 Dan Rogerson: When they think forestry they think of core forestry activity as opposed to some of the stuff on other livestock farms, or whatever.
Jamie Dewhurst: Yes.
Chair: That is helpful.

Q181 Dan Rogerson: Another thing that both organisations have argued for is a chief plant health officer. Why would such a role be able to coordinate things more effectively and how would that work alongside people who are in existing posts?
Caroline Harrison: That is what the taskforce have recommended, so I assume they have done the research and the background, and surmised that there is a post for a chief plant health officer. It is a tangled web of levels of policymaking, committees, groups and policies. We have a tree health and plant biosecurity action plan that is already in existence, and we have an expert taskforce, and we have different disease outbreak management teams, and different committee, and we have the programme board.
Defra or Fera produced a governance organogram; it is a complicated thing, so the Committee might want to have a look at that to better understand how a very under-resourced private sector is running around all over the place, attending different meetings, and is not quite sure who is governing whom—who is doing what, to whom and when, is the best way to put it. If a chief plant health officer could get a grasp on all that, and consolidate the different outbreak management teams—because we are working towards the same goal—essentially that would be a better thing.
Jamie Dewhurst: There is one very simple situation that occurs, at the conference that we held, where we had Martin Ward, the chief plant health officer, and we had John Morgan, who is Head of Plant Health in the FC. Someone from the floor asked, "Who do I blame?" They both looked at each other: "Well, if it is in forestry blame him, and if it is—" ; there needs to be someone to take overall governance.

Q182 Dan Rogerson: I hope you can be slightly more positive than talking about blame, by making sure we do not get these problems occurring.
Jamie Dewhurst: There needs to be someone that you can go to.
Chris Inglis: To clarify channels of communication, if I have got an issue with a plant health matter, should I be going to Fera or should I be going to the Forestry Commission? Which takes precedence? If I go to both and they give me different answers, which one is right? That was an extension of what Jamie was saying.

Q183 Dan Rogerson: To complete that point of clarification, would you anticipate—this is addressed to both organisations—that involving a rejigging of other posts within separate organisations, in order to make sure that that post was accepted, and have the chain able both to get information together, but also to disseminate it and ensure that actions flow from it? What would you see the knock-on being?
Chris Inglis: The information has to cascade effectively and quickly.

Q184 Dan Rogerson: Is it just information or is it a line of command in terms of response?
Chris Inglis: Both.
Caroline Harrison: Indeed, there has to be some sort of review. If the taskforce has not done it already, there needs to be a skills and needs analysis of who is doing what, and whether it could be more effective. It could; it is not up to the private sector to advise you on what agency staff are good at, what they are not good at, and whether they are communicating or not. It is not happening.
Chris Inglis: There is perhaps an interesting point to make in that context: the Forestry Commission has a responsibility for trees in woodland. It does not, according to its constitution, have responsibility for trees outside woodland, but, by default, because nobody else has responsibility, it does. We are talking about a community of plants within a smaller island or group of islands, and pests and disease do not respect fence lines, but who is responsible? Are Fera and Defra responsible for the trees on that side of the fence, and the Forestry Commission responsible for the trees on that side of the fence? It is a grey area, which, in a plant health context, it could be helpful to clarify.
Caroline Harrison: We also have a problem with devolved administrations as well. It is so complicated. Natural Resources Wales, regulators—let us take Phytophthora, for instance: do they abide by the GB control strategy or not? There is a lot of confusion as to that cascade of governance for plant health into different administrations.

Q185 Chair: Is the Forestry Commission headquarters in Scotland?
Caroline Harrison: Yes.

Q186 Chair: So they relate to Defra for England and the Scottish Government for Scotland?
Chris Inglis: Yes.

Q187 Chair: To ask a straight question, who do you think is in charge of tree disease, and who do you think is in charge of plant disease?
Caroline Harrison: I would say Plant Health GB, Forestry Commission, aided by Forest Research. For wider plant, I would say Fera, but that is only because of my involvement in the past. I would not have a clue otherwise.
Jamie Dewhurst: It depends where you are standing; if you are standing in the Olympic Park, it is Fera, and if you are standing in a woodland it is the FC.

Q188 Chair: Who defines a woodland?
Jamie Dewhurst: There is no definition.
Caroline Harrison: Exactly. There is no definition.
Chair: There is no definition of woodland?
Jamie Dewhurst: I do not believe so. What is forestry?
Caroline Harrison: What is forestry? What is woodland?

Q189 Chair: Does it matter whether it is private or public?
Caroline Harrison: Yes—no?
Jamie Dewhurst: No. We do not know.
Chris Inglis: It should not matter.

Q190 Dan Rogerson: Along the same line, the taskforce raised concerns about the UK Plant Health Strategy Board and whether that was able to do what was asked of it as well. What are your views on that concern?
Chris Inglis: I have to admit to sitting on that Board, but I have not been able to attend. I joined a year ago, and they have had two meetings, neither of which I was able to attend, so I have not been able to make a productive input to that discussion and debate.

Q191 Dan Rogerson: You are not conflicted then; you can speak without having yet been part of its activities?
Chris Inglis: I am certainly not conflicted, no. It is an example of one of the numerous bodies that have been set up in recent times in response to the raising of awareness of pests and diseases, and if you had seen this organogram that has been produced by Fera, you would immediately see how complicated this all is. It need not be as complicated, but the distinctions between different groups of plants, industries, administrations and departments do not make it any easier. If it can be simplified in some way, with a sensible structure and representation of the public and private sectors on key discussion groups and policy advice—

Q192 Dan Rogerson: Is that not the point of that Board: that it is bringing together all these groups?
Chris Inglis: It is, but there are all these other groups discussing individual aspects of this that is very difficult for smaller organisations like ours to participate in fully.
Caroline Harrison: Prince Charles called a meeting at Clarence House about two months ago, and it was a this-sized table of industry representation, purely because he and we did not know who was doing what and where we should be. He is expecting action as well.
Chair: We should all talk to the trees; that is the message.

Q193 George Eustice: You started earlier to talk about felled trees and transporting them around. I stopped you, because we were going to come to that now. Is there a risk of infection from felled trees?
Caroline Harrison: Which disease in particular: Phytophthora, or Chalara?

Q194 George Eustice: Chalara. The Forestry Commission said that if it is treated properly, there is not really a risk. Do you think that there is? Is there enough advice out there about the dangers of transporting wood?
Chris Inglis: What the Forestry Commission can do, does do, and has done, is to impose restrictions on the movement of timber within the UK for plant health reasons. If part of the country is diseasefree, and part is not, they can put a prohibition on moving timber from one part of the country to another. That can halt the spread. It is possible to debark trees—peel the bark off—if the pest is within the bark. I understand that something like Chalara does not live in or on the bark of trees; it lives in the shoots, so the timber is relatively safe to move.
There is always a risk that if you are moving material from A to B, you may be loading logs or roundwood on to a wagon, but also some leaf or branch material might get tangled up in it, so there is always a risk that one is transporting a disease from A to B.
Caroline Harrison: It must be done on a risk assessment. Phytophthora is different.

Q195 George Eustice: Different in what sense?
Caroline Harrison: In the fact that it is in the needles and in the bark, but there is no research to suggest what level of risk that is. We have been segregating bark—infected and non-infected larch—we have movement licences, we have processing licences, and still it spreads. The strategy, as it stands, for Phytophthora is not fit for purpose, and we need to review the biosecurity protocol for that disease.

Q196 George Eustice: What else would you introduce, if you have got quite a lot of restrictions already—passports and all sorts—that would stop it?
Chris Inglis: It has to be looked at on a casebycase basis and a diseasebydisease basis—how widely distributed the disease is, where the timber is being harvested, where it is being transported to, and what the risks are associated with that. The Forestry Commission does that, and imposes restrictions on timber movement, which might be seasonal if there is a risk of spreading an insect pest through its eggs or larvae at certain times of the year, or it could be a blanket ban on moving timber from this area into this area if it is known that one area is disease free, and one is not.

Q197 George Eustice: In the case of ash dieback, when the Forestry Commission say wood products

would not spread it, if treated properly, they mean, basically, if it is cut right back of all green shoots.
Chris Inglis: Yes.
Caroline Harrison: Yes, if the timber is clean, as far as we are aware.

Q198 Ms Ritchie: I want to move onto the area of investment in science and research. A particular problem with the Chalara outbreak appears to have been lack of scientific understanding about the fungus responsible for the disease, which led to Defra concluding in 2009 that it was not permitted under EU rules to ban ash imports, given the presumed prevalence, already within the UK, of the disease. I would like to ask all of you your estimate as to the level of investment in science and research that is necessary to provide sufficient UK capability on tree and plant health issues. Mr Dewhurst?
Jamie Dewhurst: I do not know. I am sorry; that is not a question I can answer.
Caroline Harrison: We suspected this question, and we cannot answer it, I am afraid.
Chris Inglis: I would need prior warning, and need to do a significant amount of research myself, to be able to answer that sensibly, because I do not, sitting here today, have a complete understanding of how much investment is being put in and where. Research funding comes from all sorts of different sources, and is used by different entities, whether that be universities or Forest Research, or other research establishments. I am not a researcher by inclination or training, so I do not feel that I can give you an informed answer to that question.

Q199 Ms Ritchie: As a consequence of the possible research you might do, perhaps you could provide us with a written response, within the next number of weeks, which may be of help?
Chris Inglis: Yes.

Q200 Ms Ritchie: If I could just go on, are you aware of how much the forest and horticultural industries themselves are investing in research on plant pests and pathogens?
Caroline Harrison: I can get that.
Jamie Dewhurst: Certainly, I can fairly easily get the Horticultural Development Company (HDC) levy take in trees and hedging. How much is allocated to pests and pathogens is variable, depending on the strategy and the research call at any one time.
Chris Inglis: In response to the question about the private sector, the answer is very little. The private sector is not an entity. It is a whole lot of small businesses, and it is very difficult to get 150,000 woodland owners and small businesses that rely on trees for their income to come together, like-minded, and all put their hands in their pockets and contribute a similar amount to research. I know it is going to be very difficult to get the private sector voluntarily to put a lot of money up front for research, unless by levy—levies are one way of doing it, but they have somewhat gone out of fashion, by and large. That is one way; a levy on a product is an easy way to gather money together.

Q201 Chair: Could I just come back? Caroline Harrison, you have said that this is a resource issue a couple of times. Are you aware that there appears to be no research on Chalara in the Forestry Commission or Fera work on key pests and diseases in recent years? Are you aware of that? Caroline, you mentioned it, so I do not know if you—
Jamie Dewhurst: We have become aware of it. We were not aware of it before, but subsequently, since Chalara, we have become aware of it.

Q202 Chair: Even though it has become quite a hot issue—the spread and everything. You mentioned Holland, and possibly Denmark, as one of the main areas from which we import. Are you aware of any state aids that they are in receipt of, or any research that has been taken in those countries?
Jamie Dewhurst: No, I do not know enough about the Dutch systems. It will be coming from somewhere in Holland, I am sure.

Q203 Chair: Would you say you are surprised that there has been no research done in this country?
Jamie Dewhurst: On Chalara?

Q204 Chair: Yes, and indeed, larch; has there been research done on—
Caroline Harrison: Yes, there has been a lot.
Jamie Dewhurst: Our resources have been targeted. The limited resources have been targeted at the issues that are—it has not been horizon-scanning, it has been fire-fighting. The resources are being targeted at Phytophthora ramorum. Unfortunately we have all heard what the Chancellor has said today; we need the input to get ahead of ourselves, so that we can see.
Caroline Harrison: Again, the taskforce has recommended that sort of preparedness.

Q205 Barry Gardiner: Just picking up on what you said about not fire-fighting, but horizonscanning, and just to be absolutely clear, you have not written any other letters lately Mr Dewhurst, have you, that we ought to know about?
Jamie Dewhurst: Not that I am aware of.

Q206 Barry Gardiner: In your normal commercial dealings, you cannot see, at the moment, any other vectors of disease that you think really need wider investigation at this point?
Jamie Dewhurst: In the UK or horizon-scanning?
Barry Gardiner: I am talking about wherever they are coming from?
Jamie Dewhurst: Yes, I do. I think there is a massive threat sitting in Russia at the moment. It is the bronze birch borer, both within the UK and the EU. It is in Russia; it has been identified in Russia.[1]

Q207 Barry Gardiner: Have you written to Fera, Defra, Forestry Commission, or Forest Research about the bronze birch borer?
Jamie Dewhurst: I have spoken to John Morgan, Head of Plant Health in the Forestry Commission, and

[1] Note by witness: I stated the Bronze birch borer was in Russia, this is incorrect, it is in the USA, it is the Emerald Ash Borer that is in Russia

it is presently going through Brussels to get it as a quarantined pest.

Q208 Barry Gardiner: Could I ask you perhaps to send a letter to this Committee, at least setting out what your concerns are, either jointly or severally?
Caroline Harrison: Maybe we should do that for all of the pests and diseases that research tells us could be a threat, because we do rely on our research community to tell us, as a sector.

Q209 Barry Gardiner: What monitoring arrangements are there to ensure that nurseries or your members do not sell plants or trees that are infected with a disease or pest?
Jamie Dewhurst: There is the plant passport system. For protective zone material we are inspected for specific pests and tested for some of those pests. It is not only visually inspected; it is taking samples, sending them away, in an attempt to overcome the latency of some diseases. There is the plant passport system, which was brought in to put the onus on the nurseryman to inspect his own crop, and ensure it was free of harmful pests and diseases.

Q210 Barry Gardiner: Forgive me, Mr Dewhurst, but this Committee has been sitting recently taking evidence on horsemeat and horse passports, and you will appreciate that a passport system has proven less than effective elsewhere in the supply chain.
Jamie Dewhurst: I would agree.

Q211 Barry Gardiner: You know better than anyone. You know how your members operate; you operate that way yourself. How would you go about controlling this in the way that you would like to see?
Jamie Dewhurst: I personally called for inspection of all material on all production sites during the growing season prior to marketing.

Q212 Barry Gardiner: Tell me what that would involve.
Jamie Dewhurst: That would involve an official inspection of your material. We have that inspection on certain species anyway; all plant material is inspected at the point of production prior to marketing—an official inspection.

Q213 Chair: Who would pay for that?
Jamie Dewhurst: With the new plant health regime, that will be—
Chair: It would have to be the industry.
Jamie Dewhurst: The industry will pay for it. Yes, it will be an additional cost. I will probably get shot by some of my competitors, but it will not be a massive additional cost, and we will be able to pass it on. We can market ourselves as having been officially inspected, rather than self-inspected. We do that with certain species. I do that; I have inspections. It allows me to export material to Ireland.

Q214 Barry Gardiner: Will a prioritised plant health risk register, such as the one recommended by the taskforce, ensure that swift action can be taken to identify new threats?
Caroline Harrison: I am hoping that the risk register workshops that are coming up will be able to tell us that.

Q215 Barry Gardiner: How soon are they?
Caroline Harrison: Next week.
Chris Inglis: Next week.
Barry Gardiner: After that could you possibly write to us? Thank you very much.
Jamie Dewhurst: There is no point having something if it is no use.

Q216 George Eustice: I was very interested in what you said just now, about having a mandatory, officially-inspected clearance. Is that used elsewhere in the industry on other sectors of horticulture? Is there a model where that is already used?
Jamie Dewhurst: Pass, if you are talking about horticulture. I am not sure whether the veg sector is officially inspected. Cattle are inspected for TB. Our inspector is on our nursery; he does not have to drive again, because he is there. I know my inspector extremely well, and generally he will walk through, and he will come back and say, "That is looking good. You have got some mildew on your roses." I would say, "Well, we have just sprayed them". He is there, anyway. Even though he is there to inspect certain crops, he will be walking through others, and he should almost come back and give you—not a licence to market, but—
George Eustice: A certification.
Jamie Dewhurst: Yes, that the crops are clean of harmful pests and pathogens.

Q217 Chair: Could I just ask: you are asking the Government or the taskforce to suggest that we step up from a riskbased assessment to a fullon complete inspection. Food safety—and we have looked into contaminated meat—is currently only a riskbased assessment. Why would you argue that it is more appropriate to have a full-on inspection than a risk-based assessment?
Jamie Dewhurst: We are inspected anyway.

Q218 Chair: On the basis of risk, and no one has argued to us in the contamination of food, unless there is—
Jamie Dewhurst: We are inspected automatically every year. I see my inspector twice a year. In fact, I see him more than that—three or four times a year.

Q219 Chair: Presumably they are unannounced?
Jamie Dewhurst: No, he phones me.

Q220 Chair: Why are you asking it to be stepped up from a risk-based assessment to a full-on inspection?
Jamie Dewhurst: I think he should be inspecting all our crops, not just the crops that we require protected-zone status for.
Chair: On behalf of all the Committee, can I thank you, all three, for being so generous with your time and the evidence you have given, and for contributing to our inquiry? We are very grateful indeed.

Wednesday 16 October 2013

Members present:

Ms Anne McIntosh (Chair)

Richard Drax	Sheryll Murray
Mrs Mary Glindon	Neil Parish
Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck	Ms Margaret Ritchie

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Harry Cotterell**, President, Country Land and Business Association, **Don Pendergrast**, Plant Health Adviser, National Farmers' Union, and **Dr Simon Pryor**, Natural Environment Director, National Trust, gave evidence.

Q221 Chair: Good afternoon, and may I, in particular, welcome our guest experts here this afternoon. Thank you very much indeed for being with us and participating in our inquiry. For the record, if I could ask each of you to state your names and positions.

Dr Pryor: Simon Pryor, National Trust, Natural Environment Director.

Don Pendergrast: Don Pendergrast, Plant Health Adviser, NFU.

Harry Cotterell: Harry Cotterell, President of the CLA.

Q222 Chair: We are looking at the whole aspect of tree health, so I would just like to ask one or two general questions, if I may, at the beginning. Where you agree, do not feel that you have to each speak. Where you disagree, please speak as loudly as you would each wish. Are you concerned at the possible lack of tree and plant health experts in the country at this time?

Don Pendergrast: It is certainly a concern for the NFU, which we have raised a number of times, that there is limited resource in this area. There has been a continual reduction of resources, continual consolidation, and a limited amount of people coming through and encouragement of new people coming into this industry and this sector to build up the level of expertise necessary. We saw that during the *Chalara* outbreak when it first happened; there was a scratching around to find information and pull everything together. We have also seen it with regard to other potential plant health risks as they have come into the country, where it is difficult sometimes to identify people with expertise.

Dr Pryor: We would certainly agree, particularly on the tree health side of things; there is a severe lack of experts both at the research level and also managing epidemics on the ground. It feels like they are pulled between managing *Phytophthora* and now *Chalara* and we still want them to be preparing for the next one, so it is a serious problem.

Harry Cotterell: I have nothing to add.

Q223 Chair: I will ask you the next question first, Mr Cotterell. Are you convinced that there are sufficient resources to tackle tree health in other aspects rather than just the research aspects, but its containment and other aspects of tree health as well?

Harry Cotterell: It is always the easiest thing in the world to cry out for more resources, but we do understand the incredible difficulty of the public finance situation at the moment. Broadly speaking, the *Chalara* issue has been dealt with by Government with a relatively low regulatory input, which has obviously been not too expensive. For *Phytophthora,* certainly over £20 million has been spent so far and there is absolutely no indication that that particular disease is under control at all, so I suspect there is resource around and resource can be found. More importantly than resource, at the moment, we are very pleased to see the fact that plant and tree diseases have become a Defra priority in the Secretary of State's mind. That has been very welcome from our point of view.

Dr Pryor: We would be arguing for proportionality. Just to put it into perspective, the National Trust is just one owner, but we are estimating the cost of *Chalara* alone to us to be around £15 million, which is £15 million we cannot spend on other conservation priorities. That is for one owner. It does not feel like the resources that are being put in are proportionate to that in terms of trying to avoid those costs for people. It is also the way in which the plant health budget is deployed. We are slightly concerned about the very heavy investment in Phytophthora and the very light investment in *Chalara*.

Q224 Chair: If we take just ash trees on their own, I understand there are 80 million ash trees at risk. When you give the figure of £15 million cost, is that the cost of ultimately removing diseased trees?

Dr Pryor: It covers the cost right through—the direct cost to the Trust as a whole. The biggest slice of that is managing the tree surgery in terms of keeping those trees relatively safe where they are on road sides or path sides or in parks and gardens. We do not want to shut our properties, so we need to keep them in a safe condition without simply just felling them all. However, there is the loss of timber income, the replacement cost and the protection cost. It is a very worrying bill to be looking at.

Q225 Chair: With my limited knowledge of the subject, I understand that ash trees, say, are used for both hedgerow trees and woodland trees. Where they are growing on the road side, will they be the responsibility of the Highways Agency, the county council or whose responsibility are they?

Dr Pryor: The landowners' responsibility.
Chair: Even if it is on a road verge.
Dr Pryor: Yes.

Q226 Chair: All that is costed in. Do we have a cost nationally, in England alone, of what the cost of removing those trees would be?
Harry Cotterell: It is impossible to extrapolate. It depends what value you put on the timber, because one of the problems is that the sawn ash market is incredibly small. In fact, one of the great successes in the last few years has been the opening up of more diverse markets for ash timber. I personally was exporting ash trees to Ireland for hurley sticks. They had been originally planted to become tennis racquets, so there has been a widening of the ash market as a whole, but it is not big enough to take the quantities we are talking about. Having said that, the private sector has really got motoring, and they are exploring export routes to South-East Asia and China for ash that is going to become a casualty of this disease, but it is almost impossible to extrapolate over the country what this disease will cost.

Q227 Chair: We saw some import of diseased wood into this country. Do you think China would willingly take diseased wood?
Harry Cotterell: They will already, if it is sprayed, and Vietnam will take it without it being sprayed.

Q228 Chair: You will not be surprised by this question, possibly. Should we be looking at, and is it feasible to look at, an antidote?
Harry Cotterell: Everyone in the whole of this country would be absolutely delighted if there was an economically viable, easily applied, workable and environmentally safe antidote. It is as simple as that. The difficulty is there does not seem to be one available at the moment. It does seem that there would be a commercial imperative to get one off the ground, at the moment, but there does not seem to be one, so we have to play the hand we are dealt in that case.
Don Pendergrast: Work should still continue towards developing and looking for control measures, but I agree, at the moment there is no evidence there is anything clearly available.

Q229 Chair: Could it only be sprayed?
Dr Pryor: When one talks about an antidote, that would be the ideal: to be able to apply something to a tree and it would get better, as simple as that. However, we ought to be looking more widely at that and ways of reducing the spread; simpler measures might simply reduce the amount of spores—even mechanical treatments for the leaf litter, in order to reduce the spore level. That might well slow the whole disease down sufficiently to avoid the worst impacts.

Q230 Chair: We have had the final report of the Expert Taskforce. What do you think of the actions taken to date? Do they go far enough?
Don Pendergrast: The actions have been very good so far. There has been good co-operation with the industry. There are concerns, certainly from our members' perspectives, that maybe we do not have a real handle on what is going on in the landscape, in terms of the hedgerows, etc, and that is a big issue that needs to be addressed. There may be people who are unaware they have ash within their hedgerows, and hedgerows also represent a significant risk in terms of transfer. They are the highways of the landscape, so there is a real concern there from our end that maybe that has not been addressed as fully. However, more broadly, the work has been very good in terms of co-operation and management of the outbreak.
Dr Pryor: The recommendations felt sound, and we would support them. We just argue for vigour and energy in terms of pursuing them. We are slightly worried that the risk register feels like absolutely the right mechanism, but it feels slow and perhaps a bit onerous, and we need to move quickly to some of these solutions. Similarly, in terms of the review of the plant health regulations, there is a need to be ambitious and say, "Let us not do the minimum. Let us do what is right for this country."
Don Pendergrast: We have a concern, as well, that it is important we focus on the broader aspects. It is not just tree health that is at stake here; there is plant health. In the last year, we have seen spotted wing drosophila coming into the country, which is a significant concern for a lot of fruit producers. We have also had a number of other outbreaks: concern about the stink bug coming into Kent. There is a wide range of other issues that are of concern. The risk register is very welcome, but it almost feels a little bit late. It is good that we have it, but it does need to be regularly reviewed and it does need to take account of economic impacts on the longevity of the horticultural and fruit and veg sector, not just tree health. There needs to be a broader focus there.

Q231 Chair: Are there any new problems or difficulties that you have identified in the last six months that you feel need to be dealt with?
Harry Cotterell: Relating to *Chalara* or wider?
Chair: Any tree disease.
Harry Cotterell: We have been saying for a long time that there are a huge number of diseases knocking at the door, the majority of which are fungal, and, if they get in, they are going to have a Dutch elm disease type impact. Dutch elm disease is still out there. You can grow an elm tree to about 15 or 20 years old as easy as anything, but you will not see them older than that because the disease gets to them. The situation is very, very concerning, and there is no indication that it is getting any better, particularly with *Phytophthora*, which is a real disaster in the south-west to some extent, but south-west Wales particularly.
Dr Pryor: I would support that. I am pleased with the rapid response that was taken about chestnut blight, and it felt right to move quickly. The thing I am concerned about is that there are developments with the existing diseases, *Chalara* in particular. We were looking at a site infected on our National Trust land near Exmoor last week, which is very different from previous infections. They are older trees. The disease has been there for 10 years; it does not appear to have spread, and not that many of the trees have died.

Therefore, we are finding some very interesting and challenging new information coming up, and we gather we are not alone in having a site like that. I am particularly worried about whether the agencies involved are sufficiently adaptive and flexible in their approach, to say, "No, there is new information. We do not fully understand this disease yet." It totally does not fit with our existing modelling, so we will be arguing strongly for closer observation and more trialling. We do not know how this disease is going to behave here and we need to adapt our approach to respond to it.

Q232 Ms Ritchie: The first recommendation of the Expert Taskforce was that a prioritised UK plant health risk register be developed. In that regard, how effective will the risk register be in identifying and combating disease issues?

Harry Cotterell: Our view is that the risk register is extremely welcome, and, as long as it can be effectively used by people on the ground, i.e. it is easily searched by both disease and by species, we are sure it will be a great benefit to farmers, landowners and land managers on the ground. It also has a role for policymakers, and the wider establishment as a whole, to horizon-scan for the diseases that are out there. Obviously, that is not going to be a great deal of use on the ground.

Our concerns are the mitigation measures that are in there must be utilised, and they must be utilised firmly and effectively. We are not an organisation that looks for significant regulation. Instinctively, we are de-regulators, but we feel that in this instance, if you do not apply the mitigation measures to the full extent that they can be applied, it will probably be disastrous.

Don Pendergrast: The risk register is very welcome. We have been involved already, to some degree, in the development, and are looking forward to being involved further. Going to the risk-mitigation measures, that is probably one of our concern areas. One thing we have seen with spotted wing drosophila is that we have an increasingly limited pool of chemical and even biochemical controls available to us. There is a real risk that while we might be able to produce a risk register, we may have limited or no mitigation measures available to us to manage the potential outbreaks. I know HDC did a lot of work, with CRD and Fera's help, to try to get some of the pesticides that were available registered for use for control of the pests there. That is a real concern that we need to be aware of as we go forward: that we have a diminishing range of available tools to manage the potential increasing risks we are seeing with global trade.

Dr Pryor: I have one minor thing. I would certainly concur with that, but one of our general concerns is the join-up between the different agencies involved, and I was slightly alarmed to hear the other day that they had been working through the risk register and the Forestry Commission and Forest Research have not been involved so far. I do not know quite what is behind that, but the general point is that we really want close collaboration and real join-up between the different agencies.

Harry Cotterell: On that, it is now with Forest Research being peer-reviewed, and we think it is going to be released in the next couple of days.

Q233 Mrs Lewell-Buck: The Government intends to review the regulation on plant health and forestry. I am just curious as to what you think the priorities should be for the Government in that area.

Harry Cotterell: The first priority must be to keep them out, because our experience is that once they are in there is very little that can be done. In my experience—Simon may know better—there has only been one disease that has been effectively controlled by the Forestry Commission since its arrival, on a wide scale, and that was the Dendroctonus beetle in Norway spruce. They found a predator that was effectively used, funnily enough, on some woods that I managed back in the 1980s. However, beyond that, there are virtually no examples, so the control has to start with keeping it out.

The second point is that plant disease does not respect national boundaries, even if they are coastlines, and unfortunately this is probably going to be better dealt with on a European scale. The review of the plant health directive, which is currently being undertaken, will probably be more relevant than necessarily what we can do here ourselves.

Don Pendergrast: A number of the findings or the potential recommendations that have come out the report do mirror some of the things that are being proposed at a European level in terms of the plant health regulations. I would agree with Harry, to some degree. It is about keeping them out. That needs to be the priority, so things like getting rid of the baggage exemption, particularly for the public bringing in plant material. Foot and mouth is a good example of this, is it not? After the foot and mouth outbreak we did see raised awareness. However, we do have a concern that, even though things have improved on that front, people probably are not aware of the plant health issues, but also the deterrent needs to be there. There needs to be a deterrent for people who bring in material, so that they are aware that they are breaking the law. What are the punishments for people who are willingly breaking the law and bringing material into the UK?[1]

Dr Pryor: I would agree that the first priority is to keep them out.

Q234 Sheryll Murray: Could I turn to the about-to-be-recruited Chief Plant Health Officer? I know he is going to report directly to the Ministers, but can you tell me what you think should be at the top of his in-tray?

Dr Pryor: I would return to my issue of join up between the different agencies and parts of Defra. They are expert in their own field. It feels to me like they are increasingly working in a complementary way. There are a few gaps between them. Things can easily fall between stools. We felt things like street

[1] Note by witness: The statement about Foot and Mouth is somewhat muddled. I was trying to say that since Foot and Mouth, awareness has improved of risk from imports. However deterrents are not strong enough. The risk is much greater in plant health where there are no deterrents for the general public, little awareness and no restrictions.

trees have been rather overlooked, because they are not really Forestry Commission, Fera, or even Defra, so we are very worried about that. It does not feel as though they are really collaborative. It does not feel you get that cross-disciplinary approach that you do with, say, academics working together. Therefore, it is ensuring there is real efficiency, join-up and integrated delivery.

Harry Cotterell: I have nothing to add to that.

Don Pendergrast: I do not either; I would agree.

Q235 Neil Parish: We talked quite a bit to start with about ash dieback, and I would like to very much agree with Mr Cotterell's comments that in many parts of Somerset you have hedgerows where there were a lot of elms; they have got Dutch elm. Now we have the problem with ash trees, and it is a real problem. The Government, naturally, has said, basically, 'Cut down the small trees, keep the bigger ones and see what happens to them'. Do you think that is a right policy or should there be something else that should be done?

Dr Pryor: I would certainly concur with that. That is the line we have taken on the National Trust's own estate and it is probably more vigorous and more, if you like, rigorous than some owners, who are prepared to wait and watch. There is a difficult decision to be made. At the moment, we are facing this site of 12-year-old trees; do we take them all out, even though 90% of them are in good health? At the moment, we are just going to take out the diseased ones straight away and then watch and monitor, but this is where I am very concerned that we are coming up with prescriptions without observing and monitoring closely enough to see how the situation unfolds, because it is not doing what we have been told it would do.

Q236 Neil Parish: Are we doing enough to investigate those trees that are resistant, which we are hoping for, are we not?

Dr Pryor: Again, I am pleased to see an experimental trial of different provenances and origins to see what resistance is there. I am much more interested in us looking at what is surviving of our native ash and working on that rather than an expensive designed trial. I feel we have a lot to learn from what has survived within our area. It is very interesting to see how few of the mature trees are being affected, and maybe it is about mycorrhizae; maybe it is about the genetic diversity. However, it would be nice to see a bit more interest from the agencies in terms of looking, observing and learning from that.

Neil Parish: So you do not think we are looking enough at the moment.

Dr Pryor: Absolutely.

Don Pendergrast: When you look across the continent, in Denmark they are talking about 10% and now it is down to 2% resistance, so there has to be a concern that we are looking a little bit for a needle in a haystack here. I agree with what Simon said in the sense that we do need to be doing better monitoring and looking for resistance, not just in the forest areas but across the broader landscape. However, we will also need the trial work there as well, because in terms of being someone with a background in research of this kind of thing, it is going to come from looking at both of those, if we are going to identify. That is not going to solve the fact that we are going to have a long-term landscape issue. With the older trees there has to be a concern that we are going to see a deterioration over the next 10 to 15 years.

Harry Cotterell: We are very pleased that the Government and agencies have not been particularly prescriptive about this, because it would have all sorts of impacts on management, costs and markets. We have members who are doing all sorts of different things, from sanitation felling of mature trees while they are still relatively healthy down to leaving them and seeing what happens and I think that is probably the best way to find out what works, and we will see going forward. I am sure in a few years' time it will become clear.

Q237 Neil Parish: That is right, because on the continent they have found out that some trees will survive quite a long time. Therefore, it is a case of whether we go out and cut them all down, or whether we wait and see. I suppose the only trouble is while they are alive and have lots of disease they are spreading that disease.

Dr Pryor: This is what was, in a sense, a surprise: that we have trees that have had the disease for 10 years and it has spread half a kilometre, so the rate of spread from a 10-year-old plantation has not been as rapid as we thought. Anything we can do to slow the spread of that impact—ecologically, economically, or culturally—has to be a good thing.

Q238 Neil Parish: Is the Government's balance of priorities correct or should other diseases be receiving more attention? When we were up in York recently, it was almost frightening to see the number of diseases out there and the potential for it, so has the Government got it right, or should it be looking somewhere else or what?

Don Pendergrast: If it is okay for the NFU to speak, we are concerned about this. It is important that we deal with the risk from *Chalara*. The risk register is very important to the whole process of identifying the number of risks, but we do want to see that there is a balance. We may be looking at a broad landscape issue here, but if we had an issue in the potato sector or some of the other plant sectors, you could have devastating consequences from outbreaks—I have referred to the spotted wing drosophila a number of times. We could have massive outbreak problems there, not be able to manage them and that would be devastating for orchards that have been long-term established, and for businesses; we have seen the impact on the horticultural sector when ash movement has been closed down. There is nothing going to bring that back for those businesses now; they have been severely impacted. Therefore, there needs to be a balance of priorities. The risk register is important to that, but it does need to balance economic, environmental and social aspects.

Q239 Neil Parish: The French are suffering and have a real problem with the plane trees. I do not know

whether we can stop anybody coming from France here, but seriously, what do we do about this? Do we just sit here, rather like we did with ash dieback, and say, "Oh, now we have got it", and there is a hell of a fuss about it but we have probably had it for quite a long time? What do we do?

Harry Cotterell: Public awareness has been raised significantly by *Chalara,* and we have definitely been trying to widen the brief into the worst things. *Phytophthora* is a worse commercial disease. It will not have anything like the landscape impact, but it is a worse commercial disease for UK forestry than *Chalara* is. We also have the Asian longhorn beetle. The impact of that, because it is multi-species, could be devastating. We have red band needle blight in the east—particularly, Corsican pine is very vulnerable. There are diseases all over and we were delighted to hear the Government's Secretary of State raising the priority that he gives these problems.

Q240 Neil Parish: Are Defra or Fera giving farmers and landowners enough information about the potential of these diseases, do you think?

Don Pendergrast: One of the things that is suggested in the tree and plant health report does suggest there needs to be some sort of central resource that is easy to access and can provide more information. There is a lot of reliance on the levy boards and the agricultural sector to get that information out there, but there is more work needed—and it probably goes back to this Chief Plant Health Officer's role—to make sure that communication is improved. Some issues are recognised, but there are areas where maybe there is not a level of recognition, where maybe a specialist scientist has picked something up. There need to be better ways of bringing that together and that goes back again to that role and how it works.

Dr Pryor: I would say that communication to the public is very important. Communication within the sector could be better. It would very nice to be up to speed always about what is emerging and what has been found, and it feels a little bit like some of that is kept back; we would like it really open. We are all keen to help, and the more we are informed the better. I will just say a word about the balance between the different diseases. Looking within tree health and the four big ones for us, we just feel that there is not quite the right balance and the right rational approach. We have *Phytophthora* and oak processionary moth, and it is felt that the Department has taken quite a heavy-handed approach to those, with enforcement notices, plant health orders and a lot of money thrown at them. Whereas, I have to say, with *Chalara* and acute oak decline it has felt much more hands-off, and I am not sure that really reflects the value to the nation and the concerns. I am absolutely with Harry in terms of the commercial impact of *Phytophthora,* but we have spent £23 million or £24 million; have we carefully enough evaluated how effective that has been? Have we thought long and hard about it and are we learning those lessons, in terms of the other diseases? A bit more of an open discussion with us about the resources that go in and the priorities would be really welcome.

Harry Cotterell: On *Phytophthora,* the real concern is that it can jump the species. It has been found in Douglas fir and Sitka spruce, and that is basically commercial forestry in the UK, as well as our broad leaves and rhododendrons and all the rest of it. Therefore, the prescription for *Phytophthora* is going to have to be different from *Chalara,* which is isolated to the single species.

Just one other point on what we should be utilising. Protected zone status, which is what has been implemented in relation to the sweet chestnut by the Secretary of State recently, is the only real defence that we have. Plant material that is going to be planted in this country should only come from areas that are disease-free, and we have to be brutal in implementing that; we really have.

Neil Parish: We do the same with animals. We would not take diseased animals and then take them somewhere else, so it seems absolutely logical to do the same with trees.

Q241 Chair: Does it not seem extraordinary, though, having known that *Chalara fraxinea* existed in Poland and Denmark, that we were exporting seeds to be grown as saplings in those countries and then re-imported, knowing that they had that disease? It just beggars common sense that they would do that.

Harry Cotterell: The plant passport system has been fundamentally flawed. It is not really within our area of expertise, but it does need to be totally overhauled and revamped.

Q242 Richard Drax: You have already touched on the protected zones, Mr Cotterell, but as far as trade is concerned, the Government, as you have said, has already tightened some controls. Has it gone far enough, and is there more it could do, bearing in mind that we know the pests come in through cars and furniture? It is a very difficult thing to stop, is it not, so what more can be done than the Government is doing?

Dr Pryor: If we look at the tree diseases, most of those have come in on the back of the plant trade, so while there are a million different sources and routes into the country, plugging some of the biggest ones first. Speaking as the National Trust, one of the biggest gardeners and purchasers of plants, there are real concerns about the horticultural trade in garden plants, because they come in soil and in pots, etc, so, yes, a much more robust approach to the plant passport. We were interested the other day to find US Department of Agriculture inspectors over in this country checking out nurseries here before they would accept any imports to the US. Maybe we ought to be going out to the source, if we cannot rely on their own controls. If it is a new trade route, we should be out there checking that out before we allow it in.

Don Pendergrast: Within the proposed plant health regulations coming from Europe, we are seeing that concept of new trades being identified and being closed down until we have a level of understanding of the risks that are being identified. There are new trades being developed all the time, and the ornamental horticultural sector in particular is a key one, where soil is coming into the country. Soil is a

big risk area, in terms of what it can bring in. Even at this stage, before those regulations are rolled out across Europe, more work needs to be done by the Government to look at how we deal with those new trades—an investigation of those new trades—even if the powers are not there at the moment to control them.

Q243 Richard Drax: Should bans be brought in, for example?
Don Pendergrast: It would be difficult to do that at the moment. It goes back to a level of investigation, working across Europe and, possibly, across the world, if necessary, with the other plant health services to understand what the real risks are and what information is available. Going back to Ash dieback, it is hard to understand why we did not gain more information and look to find more resource and information from the Member States that were already experiencing problems with it ahead of seeing the outbreak in the UK.
Harry Cotterell: I have nothing to add.

Q244 Richard Drax: You know that the Secretary of State has said that a new regulation is going to be made so far as the import of plane and sweet chestnut from areas where there is a risk of disease is concerned. What is your view of these proposals and, again, what further action, if any, is required?
Harry Cotterell: We very much welcome the proposal to apply protected-zone status to sweet chestnut. Since the UK is the only place, as far as I know, that is a protected zone, it basically is an import ban, to all intents and purposes. I think it is very difficult to go any further than that, because of the trade rules in Europe as they happen to be. I do not think plane trees are quite that far down the road yet, and, I have to say, plane trees, being a predominantly urban tree, do not excite our members particularly much. However, they are still a significant issue, and I suspect a plane tree disease would have more newsworthiness nationally than probably *Chalara* has, because of the danger of them falling on people. There is a requirement to look out there, find out what is around and then to start bringing in protected zone regulations as early as possible.
Don Pendergrast: I would concur completely. There is an opportunity there, certainly in terms of protected zone status, where we can use it, but we have to have good justification to do that, which goes back to my comment about gaining information and understanding the risks.
Dr Pryor: It is a good example of the Government taking the lead quickly and doing exactly the right thing.

Q245 Chair: Just before we release you, you have mentioned a little bit about solutions in the European Union. The Secretary of State indicated at the party conference in Manchester—and it is on the Defra website, so it must be true—that the EU is looking to impose restrictions on the movement of larch trees. Are you concerned by the length of time it takes, as was the case with ash trees, before these movement orders across the European Union come into effect?
Harry Cotterell: Someone may correct me if I am wrong, but I think this is going to be applied against us. It is more likely that we will lose protected zone status for larch. If one is realistic about the way that you stop *Phytophthora ramorum* spreading into France, it is probably to fell an extraordinarily large area of larch out of southern England to stop it spreading. If one is realistic about dealing with this, we are probably going to have to face some pretty unpalatable requirements over the years ahead.
Dr Pryor: The timing is obviously a concern. The one that really frightened us is the fact that the *Chalara* thing was all held up for several years simply because people could not agree on what this organism was called and what it was named and we can only have orders on things that relate to a widely agreed named organism. Everyone knew the syndrome and knew the problem, and it is those sorts of bureaucratic holdups that are deeply frustrating.

Q246 Chair: Do you think we have learned from that experience at EU level to speed things up?
Dr Pryor: I am not confident we have learned yet.
Don Pendergrast: I am concerned as well. Just looking at *Amoria Bungi,* there was a recognition there that a lot of the information and supporting information was in Mandarin, and in the risk assessment process we were asked if we should look at this and translate the Chinese information. I would have thought that decision should have already been taken to begin to gather the information, so I am concerned that we are not learning the lessons on that front.

Q247 Richard Drax: We have some members of some conservation and environmental groups following you, who I assume you work with: the RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts, the Woodland Trust and others. Do you concur, broadly, with the organisations in directions for the way forward, or are there big differences in what should be done? Are you all in the same bed, if I dare use that expression, and agree with the way forward?
Dr Pryor: With *Chalara,* the development of the management plan—working with the agencies and with Defra—felt to me one of the best examples of the whole sector and all interests working well together and working well with Defra. It felt as though Defra was really listening and wanting to learn from the pragmatism of what could work out on the ground. Therefore, certainly, I think you will find on most of these there is very strong agreement. We might have some tensions around the priorities and the funding streams, but there is very good collaboration.
Chair: Thank you very much indeed for being with us and being so generous with your time.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Dr Hilary Allison,** Policy Director, Woodland Trust, **Paul Wilkinson,** Head of Living Landscape, The Wildlife Trusts, and **Mike Wood,** UK Forestry Policy Officer, RSPB, gave evidence.

Q248 Chair: Good afternoon and welcome. Can I thank you very much indeed for joining us and participating in our inquiry—Mr Wilkinson, two days running. If I could ask each of you to introduce yourselves for the record, starting with Dr Allison. Just say who you are and where you are from, if you would.

Dr Allison: Certainly. My name is Hilary Allison. I am the Policy Director for the Woodland Trust.

Paul Wilkinson: Good afternoon and thank you for the invitation. Paul Wilkinson, Head of Living Landscape at The Wildlife Trusts.

Mike Wood: Hello. I am Mike Wood from the RSPB. I am UK Forestry Policy Officer.

Q249 Chair: Again, if you agree, no need to speak, but if you disagree, please say it as loudly as you possibly wish to. Can I just ask one or two general questions looking at the agencies involved? Are you impressed by the level of co-operation and co-ordination amongst the agencies, such as Natural England, the Forestry Commission and Fera, as regards to tree and plant health?

Dr Allison: One of the interesting things about the way that tree diseases are being dealt with is that probably action has happened despite the multitude of agencies, rather than necessarily because of them. There are a lot of different players taking part: the FC is involved in forest trees and timber responsibilities, Fera has plant health and garden plant responsibilities, and Natural England has biodiversity and conservation responsibilities. There are also responsibilities of other Government Departments as well, such as the Department for Communities and Local Government, which also looks after non-woodland trees, plus we have a matrix of country groups and devolved responsibilities as well. Therefore, the map of participants in the struggle against tree disease is quite a complicated one, and it sometimes confuses us, so I suspect it confuses them sometimes too.

Paul Wilkinson: I agree. The priority for us is about not necessarily just seeing the wood but seeing the trees and the woodlands as whole systems, and that means that there are complicated relationships. From our perspective, we are quite keen for the solutions to the problems of pest and tree disease to not be worse than the cause. What we want to see is a greater role, potentially, for the nature conservation bodies—Natural England—and we are not necessarily seeing them having a terribly strong voice in the debate at the moment.

Mike Wood: I would agree with that. I have been quite disappointed that with Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and CCW—now Natural Resources Wales—the nature conservation aspects of this issue were not fully considered, particularly as you have to remember it is over 20 years since forestry policy in Britain has been for sustainable benefits and a range of things, including biodiversity. I think the Government's own biodiversity voice was not properly heard. There is another point that I want to make about the linkup between agencies and parts of Government. For example, with the Expert Taskforce, one of the things I found disappointing was they did not seem to draw enough on a lot of the expertise that rests within the Forestry Commission. There was great fanfare that they were bringing lots of outside experts in—great—but they did not seem to draw enough on some of the practical experience and some of the research that rests within Government agencies, mainly Forest Research, which I found baffling.

Q250 Chair: Following on that, could I ask one question in three parts? Do you believe that there are enough tree and plant experts, including academics and experts in the field as well as in industry? Do you believe that there are enough resources going into identifying new threats to tree and plant health? Equally, do you think there are enough resources going into how to tackle the fungal diseases so identified?

Mike Wood: One of our concerns has been about how priorities have been set. First of all, it is which diseases are chosen for study, for research, for examination and potential control measures. Even within particular diseases you can take a different angle. For instance, on *Phytophthora ramorum,* we do not think there has been enough effort looking at the effects on heather and bilberry and those native habitats, rather than just looking at the impact on larch. I am not knocking the commercial larch issue. I am just saying there are other aspects. If you look at the Forestry Commission's website, there is a whole list of plant diseases they are concerned about and then they pick from those which ones they want to examine and relate to control measures. It is the relative priorities of which ones you pick and then how you address them we have been concerned about. Going into the particular expertise, yes, we are very concerned about expertise, not just in terms of the numbers of people, but their technical background and their work on how that relates to biodiversity and other aspects. I am not saying plant health is just a biodiversity problem, but it has a particular biodiversity issue that we do not think is being examined properly. One of the interesting things about *Chalara* and red band needle blight is that we have been exposed more to the technical experts. I enjoy talking with them and exchanging information at stakeholder groups, but part of the time you do feel that you are dragging them away from their main job. They are very thinly stretched, and some of them are retired. Some of your written evidence was very interesting from some of the retired plant pathologists making points about lack of expertise now, and capacity, particularly in forest pathology, not just general plant pathology. It is not the same as working with potatoes.

Dr Allison: There are probably only literally half a dozen practising forest pathologists in the UK at the moment, and only really Bangor and Aberdeen with fully functioning forestry research departments, added

to which is the pressures that Forest Research come under in terms of expenditure cuts and the increasing number of diseases that are appearing. They are incredibly stretched and we know that first-hand in terms of our work with them on citizen science projects, where they are really being stretched to be genuine partners in some very exciting work.

If I could just quickly switch to the third part of your question, if I may, which was about the resources to tackle disease, I just wanted to make one particular point. The timing of the end of the current Rural Development Programme is very interesting and probably could not have come at a worse time in terms of our ability to be able to deploy resources towards the tackling of tree diseases. Obviously, things come to an end on 31 December 2013, and the new Rural Development Programme priorities are only going to be consulted on, I believe, imminently, in the next few days. We are in a situation where we need resources being channelled through EU and matched Treasury funding, through the Woodland Grant system and Woodland Improvement Grants and other capital sources of funding, and yet we do not have, in 2014, a fully functioning RDP programme of grants to be able to tackle that. In many ways, that gap—that transition year—could not have come at a worse time. We have no new woodland creation grants in 2014. We have no new woodland management agreements able to be entered into in 2014. We have £500,000 for capital expenditure to be able to tackle tree diseases, which has been put forward by the Forestry Commission, which does not seem to me to be sufficient to address the scale of the task. That is a particular point about the whole resourcing issue in terms of dealing with disease, let alone the resources needed to identify new threats.

Paul Wilkinson: I will not add anything further.

Q251 Neil Parish: Mr Wood, you talked about the Expert Taskforce and the report. I want to ask the panel two parts to my question. Firstly, what are your views on the actions taken to date in response to the report? Secondly, what did you think of the report? Did you like it, or were there other things that you would have liked to have seen in it?

Mike Wood: I will start with the second part first. The report was useful and good as far as it went. I felt it missed some useful things. I have already mentioned that it was maybe lacking a little bit in addressing some of the biodiversity interests. Also, one of the things that was rather disappointing was that it did not start getting into some of the practical issues related to how forestry is regulated and run in the UK. For example, one of the things that could be done with the grant schemes in the four countries is you could help define what biosecurity is, to help woodland owners. There is something called the Forest Reproductive Material regulations, which are not sufficiently robust to give people an idea on traceability. The current situation is that you could buy some trees, and they could go away on holiday and come back, and you would not know they had been away on holiday, which is what happened with *Chalara.* It is possible to tweak those regulations so there is better traceability. These are not magic bullets, but they would help to deal with some of the issues. It was very good at looking at some of the international issues and some of the technical disease issues, but it did not touch on that.

The other thing is, apart from missing out some of the key biodiversity aspects, it also was a bit too Chalara-focused, which is not surprising, considering where it came from.

Q252 Neil Parish: What about the actions that we have or have not taken in the report?

Mike Wood: It is really wait to see, in terms of the risk register. On the surface, it sounds quite positive. We are waiting to see some proposals. We are not in the stakeholder group, so we have not seen any of the detail. The devil will be in the detail of how it works, and it does raise issues about whether they are going to horizon-scan properly outside these shores. There is also the point I made previously about priorities: will they pick on diseases, pests and pathogens that have a range of impacts on a range of species related to wildlife, as well as focusing very much on commercial timber production?

Paul Wilkinson: Generally speaking, the report exists, it recognises the significant public interest in the *Chalara* issue, and it is great that the Secretary of State has raised that as a key priority now; that is obviously important within the Department. It is a balanced report; it contains some really good stuff. The risk register is obviously a key focus. What we would like to see within that, in terms of the mitigation measures, though, is to have a sense around the potential impacts of applying some of those mitigation measures. We want to have an ecological dimension to that—an ecosystem dimension—to make sure, as I mentioned earlier, that the cure that we use is not worse than the cause. We need to focus quite a lot on that mitigation. The fact that there are additional resources now, in terms of a Chief Plant Health Officer, is obviously key, and what we would be looking for him or her to do is to drive that process and also the broader strategic thinking around plant and tree health across the board within the UK, and horizon-scanning beyond.

Dr Allison: We were positive about the publication of the taskforce report. It is very authoritative and very thorough and detailed. As my colleague said, it probably focuses quite a lot on processes and policy rather than necessarily on conservation strategy, which is perhaps hardly surprising.

There are a couple of things. The first two recommendations around the risk register and the Chief Plant Health Officer are relatively discrete, and Defra is making good progress on both of those. It is, in a sense, recommendations 3 to 8 that are the most interesting, the most long-term and the most difficult, perhaps, to tackle, and where a sense of long-term momentum and commitment to delivering them is going to be very necessary. We will be watching out for those.

If I can just say a couple of things about the risk register, which my colleagues have not particularly mentioned so far, just to add to their comments, we are hoping to see a consultation draft of the register. We do not know what is in it yet, but we would be

very keen to make sure there is horizon-scanning for pests and diseases that are not yet present in the UK, so horizon-scanning for what is yet to come out there, and, secondly, to understand the idea of composite risk. We are not looking at risk from the point of view of an individual species and an individual risk, but looking at what happens when combinations of risks occur at the same time. That is critical.

Chair: We stand adjourned and will come back as quickly as we can, if you can bear with us.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Chair: Just to let colleagues know who did not hear, we have just had the election of the Deputy Speaker, and I am delighted to announce that Mrs Eleanor Laing has won a very hotly contested contest. You will be pleased to know in the public gallery that there were no spoiled ballot papers. It would have been very embarrassing if there had been any spoiled ballot papers. I am sure we would all want to wish our new Deputy Speaker well in her position. If we could now continue, and I thank you for your patience and allowing us to go and do our democratic duty.

Q253 Ms Ritchie: I want to ask a question about the risk register. Dr Allison has already referred to it, but the question is how effective you think the risk register will be in identifying and combating disease issues.

Mike Wood: It is difficult to say, because we have not seen the details, unfortunately. As far as we are concerned, it relates to whether they consider the right range of pests and diseases, including ones that will affect biodiversity, and that they look quite wide geographically. We need to see the detail, so, unfortunately, it is difficult to answer that.

Paul Wilkinson: I will let Hilary supplement the points that she was making just before the bell, potentially. However, looking slightly further ahead, having welcomed the creation of the risk register, it is about sustaining the effort and ensuring that there is continued support for it. As Mike said, we need to make sure that the detail is right, but we also need it not to just sit on the shelf. It needs to be a useful document that evolves and develops over time. We need to see some forward-looking commitment to how Government views the risk register in the future and how it might be used, but it is about involving the right stakeholders now in ensuring that it is as robust and useful as possible, and then keeping the pressure on in making sure that it is then used.

Dr Allison: Just to elaborate, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. Hopefully, there will be things on the risk register like the bronze birch borer, which we know is coming our way, which is very partial to European birch. It is not here yet, but hopefully, if that is on the risk register, it will be at least a sign that the register is looking beyond our borders and there are other things there that are, in a sense, almost known unknowns and unknown unknowns.

The other key point, in terms of the usefulness of the register, is the point that was made about the extent to which mitigating actions will be identified and the extent to which the risk register will be able to be used in a way that does not just look at linear risks—so you have pest-risk-impact-action, and then you go onto the next line and you look at the same thing, and you look at each of these in isolation. The point is that probably some of the worst situations that we could envisage in terms of risk developing are where we have multiple infestations of pests and diseases at the same time. We already have *Phytophthora* marching up the western seaboard of the UK. We have ash dieback on the eastern side, and we have other pockets of diseases. We have acute oak decline in the middle of the country. Imagine if we had three, four, five, or half a dozen more diseases all happening simultaneously, and the interactions between those different diseases in terms of how woodlands and their ecology and their biodiversity would be affected. The risk register has to prove itself that it is able to at least use some of that information to come up with genuinely useful mitigating actions.

Q254 Ms Ritchie: The next question is about the review of legislation. The Government intends to review the regulation on plant health and forestry. What do you think should be the priorities in that area?

Dr Allison: That is a very interesting question. We have all had to become very rapid experts in the quite obscure field, for us at least, of plant health regulations. One of the pleas that I have made on several occasions is for the few people who understand the EU plant health regulations to provide organisations such as ourselves, the Wildlife Trusts and the RSPB, who have good European connections, with some clear briefings about the key things that need to be improved in terms of EU plant health regulations, and therefore to allow us to help support efforts of the Government to influence for the better the outcome of that consultation at the moment. In a sense, give us the bullets and we will fire them on behalf of Government, who perhaps do not feel able to do that themselves.

There are a couple of things that I would say. Probably you need also to think about whether we want to concentrate our efforts on the source of plant material coming in, whether we want to concentrate on the points of entry, or whether we want to concentrate on the points of arrival. There is a really interesting debate to be had about that and I am not quite sure where I would put my own money at the moment, but there is certainly something about the points of origin of material, particularly non-EU material coming into the EU itself. Other than that, I am afraid I cannot give you chapter and verse because it is quite an obscure area, and I am not an expert in it.

Paul Wilkinson: I do not think I can add a great deal to that, if I am perfectly honest.

Mike Wood: I have a few comments to make. First of all, as the RSPB, we are very interested in the draft EU instrument on plant health and invasive non-native species: how many different species there are going to be included in which one, and how that is going to be selected; that is all to be worked out and developed. However, you will not be surprised to hear me say, we are concerned that the species selected are properly

considered species that could cause biodiversity impacts in the UK and Europe.
The other point I would make, which I have made before, is that you certainly need a connection from the EU plant health through to some of the practical regulation that goes on in UK forestry. I mentioned the Forest Reproductive Material regulations; there is scope to tweak those to enhance traceability, so people know what they are getting. You need to certainly come up with a companion system for the horticulture landscape trade, which is not in place. Also, some of the guidance that goes to landowners and something called the UK Forestry Standard, which is a Government minimum standard that goes with conditional grants—connecting biosecurity into that. There are some tweaks that need to be done. Certainly, you need to sort out the plant trade aspect and also traceability into the UK and specifications, so that people can specify biosecure stock, where they can, and know where the stock has been and comes from.

Q255 Mrs Lewell-Buck: This might have already been touched on by you, Mike, in your last answer, and was a question asked of the previous panel. I am just curious what this panel thinks should be the new Chief Plant Health Officer's number one priority.
Dr Allison: I do not have a great deal to add to the answers that were provided by the previous panel, except to say that the co-ordination of efforts across organisations and administrations, so that there is a clear line of sight and a UK responsibility for certain elements of plant health policy, is pretty critical. That is a big issue.
Paul Wilkinson: I would add that their first job should be to look around them to see which expertise they need to potentially draw on, and also what resources they are being provided with individually to do the huge job they have been asked to do. We would want to make sure that that officer is not a stand-alone person, and that they are provided with the support and resources they need to do the job.
Mike Wood: I would say the priority is related to getting on top of the scientific background to plant trade, both into the EU and also within the UK, and really understanding what the scientific basis to all of this is, understanding the supply chains, what the risks are and what could be done technically to address this. The other thing is I would really want that person, who is currently in post, to properly consider and understand biodiversity, and understand UK forestry, landscape management, landscape design, and those kinds of aspects. Defra is a Department very much based on agriculture and animal health, not forestry and amenity; it has some biodiversity responsibility. For that person to be effective, they do need to take on board new information, new regulatory mechanisms and practices, as well as some new science.
Mrs Lewell-Buck: A busy time for them then.
Mike Wood: Yes.

Q256 Richard Drax: What is your opinion of the action taken so far to combat ash dieback disease?
Dr Allison: From about October 2012, there has been a tremendous degree of energy and activity, which we are very supportive of. One could debate whether that was the case before October 2012. I would echo a point made by Harry Cotterell earlier in saying that the development of the *Chalara* management plan has been a very constructive process. It has drawn on the expertise of a wide range of people within the sector, and there is a great deal of expertise out there. Certainly the most recent version of the plan, if it is going to be revised for March 2014, does bear the hallmark of a lot of debate and a lot of constructive input from the sector, in terms of a pragmatic view on use of the maps that were created through the modelling process; identifying the right courses of action; leaving mature trees as they are; and focusing on the removal of young infected trees, which seem to be the most clear vector of infections. That has all been good.
Probably the key thing to say is that we cannot go through a similar hugely intensive process of collaboration and in-depth detail for every single disease and creating management plans and response plans for every single disease going forward. There has to be a better way of dealing with that going forward, and we are quite pleased that Defra has agreed to broaden the consultation and stakeholder engagement to look at tree diseases in the round, rather than focusing purely on ash dieback, important though it is. However, there are, as you say, a lot of other diseases out there that are going to have equally important, if not even larger impacts than ash, heaven forfend.

Q257 Richard Drax: You have jumped onto the next question about whether the balance of priorities is correct, and whether other diseases should be receiving more attention. I think you are hinting at that, are you not?
Dr Allison: Yes, indeed.
Richard Drax: However, I think you are saying that you cannot have these massive management-style programmes for all of them; is that right?
Dr Allison: Absolutely not. I was personally involved, as indeed colleagues around the table were, in various elements of the consultation around what we should do about *Chalara,* and that was enormously time-consuming. It occupied large amounts of my time between October and March, and if you multiply that by six, there just is not sufficient capacity within the sector—from the private sector, the NGO sector, the horticultural trade sector—to be able to support those kinds of processes. That bit needs to be revised.

Q258 Richard Drax: Mr Wilkinson, bearing in mind what Dr Allison has said, what do you think the Government can do? Does it have to prioritise particular diseases? How is it going to cope with all of these problems?
Paul Wilkinson: One of the reasons we welcomed the *Chalara* plan was that we felt they had taken a precautionary, ecology-led and science-based approach. They have to retain that science and evidence-based approach to this work, and that is looking across the range of diseases. Despite the reservations and the real concerns that we have around capacity, maintaining that stakeholder engagement

and approach will broaden the scope of what they are focusing on, because that was one of the real strengths of the way in which *Chalara* was tackled. Obviously, it was all over the newspapers; it was a huge high-profile incident and something that had to be seen to be being dealt with in the most stringent ways. Therefore, we all downed tools or picked up tools, or however you want to describe it, in order to engage. However, we need to make that stakeholder engagement more sophisticated now and develop it. That would be the key for us: maintaining the focus on the science, on the precautionary approach, not doing things now that will have damaging effects—having a "no regrets" policy, basically.

Mike Wood: In terms of the *Chalara* action plan, I agree with Dr Allison about the amount of time and capacity it has taken from people who were involved with it. If you go back a year, they were having to come to a ministerial summit and, basically, help to educate a Government Department about not cutting big trees down or whatever. There was a need for Government to skill up and understand some of the issues that are in quite a small bunch of technical practitioners and scientists and people involved in the issue. Things have moved on and improved dramatically, but Government needs to make best use of the expertise and goodwill inside and outside its agencies, landowners and people like us.

In terms of prioritising how to address the range of things out there or that could be coming to our shores, this is where the risk register comes in and I do have concerns that it is not necessarily going to pick up on either some of the issues that affect biodiversity or on some of the right species. That is where considering the species in a group is quite helpful. For example, with *Dothistroma needle blight*—red band needle blight—we are very concerned about the effects on native pine wood in Scotland. That could also be hammered underneath by *Phytophthora ramorum* attacking bilberry, which is a food for capercaillie. That is a good example of where we are not even convinced that these two diseases will be looked at in that way for those issues, but also the interaction between the two.

One of the points I do have a concern about, going back to your question about *Chalara,* is that the first Defra plan was uncertain about what Defra's role was at a UK level. The subsequent plan was a bit more realistic, and there is an all-Ireland *Chalara* plan, and there is one for Wales and one for Scotland, which picked up on country priorities related to different issues for the different woodland resource and policy priorities. It is a complex issue where the devolved Administrations have a role in issuing plant health notices, grants and what-have-you, but also Defra has a very important role in funding Forestry Commission research for Great Britain, which is a support to Northern Ireland in terms of the technical expertise on *Chalara* and other tree health diseases, so it is a complex role. Defra does not just have an English role; it has an important UK technical lead role. As well as that, it needs co-ordinated action from a biological perspective at that scale.

Q259 Mrs Glindon: In a recent memorandum to the Committee, the RSPB suggests that some disease control measures could have a negative impact. Could I ask you to elaborate on what impacts there might be on birds or wider biodiversity?

Mike Wood: That was very much a plea that when Government is considering measures to control these diseases it does not just consider what impacts the disease would have on economic, social and environmental things, but that the control measures themselves could have an impact. I can give an English example, but recently in Scotland there was a trial done for aerial spraying of fungicides against red band needle blight. We were very concerned, working with the Scottish Government, to make sure that they considered what the biodiversity impacts of that spraying would be, as well as trying to work out, if that disease spread in the Scottish pine, what the effects on wildlife would be. Similarly, in south-west England, we have been involved with case work for large control of *Phytophthora ramorum* and have been concerned about the timing of some of the tree removal and the sanitation felling that could cause disturbance to nesting birds. We have worked with the Forestry Commission and others, giving them advice on that. It is a tricky area, but it needs to be considered in policy and regulation of plant health.

Q260 Chair: In terms of antidote, is that what you are talking about—that it was a control, an antidote?

Mike Wood: No. Currently, with *Phytophthora ramorum* tree-felling is going on—

Q261 Chair: Did you look at aerial spraying?

Mike Wood: No, that was one particular case where Forestry Commission Scotland were talking about aerial spraying for one disease and others, like Butterfly Conservation, are concerned about the impacts on butterflies and plants.

Chair: What did they conclude on the aerial spraying?

Mike Wood: They have just done the trial.

Chair: It would be very helpful if we could see the results of that.

Mike Wood: Yes. I can send you some contact information on that. That was on red band needle blight.

Chair: That would be helpful.

Q262 Neil Parish: Mr Wood, I think you have more or less said that a lot of this is a conundrum, because you have to try to take action in order to clear the disease from the trees, and if that affects birds nesting or whatever that is an issue. Also, if we could find an effective spray, especially if it is a fungicide, it probably should not have too much effect on the biodiversity otherwise. Do you have experts within the RSPB to look at this or what?

Mike Wood: We have some expertise, and we have been asking external experts for opinions on that, and it does vary between diseases in different circumstances, in different woodland types and whatever. I cannot generalise across the whole of plant health and all woodland types in the UK. You have to look at the ecology for each situation.

Q263 Chair: Can I just ask: there is no knee-jerk reaction from the RSPB, in principle, to an aerial spray, say, an antidote for *Chalara fraxinea?*

Mike Wood: I refer to the answer from the CLA earlier, saying that we would have heard about these things before. We want to hear the science and understand what the impacts are, positive and negative, on the environment. Therefore, there is no knee-jerk reaction, but we need to understand what these things are, how they work, and what the benefits and disbenefits are.

Chair: Are there any other responses to Mary's question?

Paul Wilkinson: You may already be going on to talk about this, but it is about the connection between forest policy, more broadly about the Government's ambitions with the England forest strategy to increase the area of woodland and a landscape-scale approach to restoring our woodlands, and how that connects to this area of plant and tree health. At the moment, these two things appear to be totally siloed and disconnected. You were talking about the impacts of certain treatments, and our take is that this is being done in isolation. We need to look at improving the resilience of our natural environment and our woods and forests more generally, and how we make those environments more resilient to these different shocks. At the moment, it feels as if these things are being done in various silos within Government between Departments.

Dr Allison: If I could add one further point, particularly about the *Phytophthora ramorum* situation, there are probably nearly 14,000 hectares of infected larch in Great Britain, and most of those are either about to be or are subject to statutory plant health notices, which, in a sense, trump the forestry legislation, and do not necessarily require landowners to put trees back in place once the felling has happened. From that point of view, we are quite concerned about the process of sensitive restoration of ancient woods that have been damaged by the planting of conifers over many years—and that includes larch, even though it is quite a benign conifer, if you like. The opportunity for that restoration of valuable ancient woodland habitats is going to be lost, because there is going to be no requirement to restock, either very slowly, which is the best way of restoring ancient woodland, or even doing it in a much more fast-track kind of approach, so we have particular concerns. At one of our sites in south Wales, at Wentwood forest, we announced a couple of weeks ago that we are felling 80 hectares of larch. There is no requirement on us to restock. There is no grant for us to restock available from the Welsh Assembly, but we will do that, because we are a conservation body and we want to see that habitat restored to its former glory. However, that will not necessarily be the case for many other woodland owners, who will take the opportunity, perhaps, for a complete change of land use.

Q264 Richard Drax: You were here for the trade questions and the same goes to you. Just to remind you, the first one was about the Government tightening controls for some tree imports: has it gone far enough and is the action effective?

Mike Wood: We certainly welcome them. In terms of the effectiveness, I do not think they will be the total solution, because plants and diseases will get in other ways. It is welcome as far as it goes, but we have concerns about this new EU plant regulation and needing to have better control and traceability of plant material. That is an important part of it, but it is not the whole picture.

Q265 Richard Drax: Protected zones: do you agree with those?

Mike Wood: They could work. I am sorry I am being so vague, but it depends on the species, on the woodland type, the disease and how the disease is working.

Q266 Richard Drax: Mr Wilkinson, can you take it any further? Has the Government been effective, has it gone far enough, and, if not, what would you suggest it should or could be doing?

Paul Wilkinson: There is a difference between the short-term fixes and the long-term strategy. There have been some short-term fixes around particular bans; we have seen recent announcement around bans on other species. However, our focus is on what the long-term strategy is, and that is where we want to engage. It is about looking at the range of threats and, as Hilary mentioned earlier, looking at the source, and as an island nation, thinking about how we stop things arriving in the first place, not necessarily just trying to put up the barriers once they have arrived. That would be my view on that.

Dr Allison: Just briefly, we welcome the imposition of bans on imports of certain species, because although imports of contaminated plants are one vector by which diseases arrive in this country, and there are many others, it is important to do what you can about the things that you are able to affect. Clearly, reducing the amount of infected material that comes in through legitimate trade is critical and important. However, I would endorse what Paul has said, in the sense that these are short-term fixes, and there is a much bigger question here about the resilience of the woods that we have in the UK, which are historically very fragmented, they are very small, and they are not joined up. They are very species poor in terms of the tree species; there are five species that make up 80% of the conifer woodlands in the UK, and there are about five species that make up 65% of the broadleaf woodlands in the UK, so we are very vulnerable to the fact that we have a very impoverished tree assemblage. We need to work very much harder at developing resilience, which is a much longer term game than just simply banning imports, welcome and important though that is.

Q267 Richard Drax: Longer term, we know that pests can remain in furniture and on vehicles and so forth, and that is a huge problem. Do you have any magic-wand solutions in the longer term to deal with that particular issue? How do you stop that?

Paul Wilkinson: It does come back to the fact that we need our trees and woodlands to be more resilient.

There will probably never be an ability to stop everything that we would want to stop coming into this country. What we need to do is increase that resilience and ensure that we are protecting the genetic diversity of our trees and woodlands, so that is some of the work that is happening now around *Chalara* to potentially identify more resistant strains, but also looking at the genetic diversity of the breadth of our tree and plant species. It is about looking at the way in which those trees and woodlands are managed, to make sure that they are in good, sensitive management, and are robust and resilient to change, as well as the species composition of those woodlands, and trying to enhance and develop that. Things will blow in and be drawn in on car carriage, the legs of birds or whatever it might be, and what we have to do is to make sure that, as a country, our ecosystems and our national environment is much more resilient.

Q268 Richard Drax: Finally, can I touch on the further controls on plane, pine and sweet chestnut imports? As you know, the Secretary of State has made these announcements. What do you think of these proposals? Again, is further action required on this particular issue?
Dr Allison: We very much welcome that action; it sends a very clear signal. However, it does link back again with the risk register, so we need to be much more aware of potential pests and pathogens that may be coming in and to act as soon as we possibly can, by using the tools that we have, and strengthening and improving those through the forthcoming review of EU regulations.
Paul Wilkinson: I do not have any more to add to what has already been said.
Mike Wood: I would agree with Hilary. The only other thing I would add, going back to the previous question about packing cases and transport and what-have-you, is there are still things that we need to do in terms of traceability and biosecurity within forestry, but also with horticultural trade and what-have-you. Those things need to be done as well as trying to tackle some of the very difficult issues with packing cases and other material. That is where some of the reports for the expert group and some of the work for the *Chalara* group were quite useful in terms of gathering experience and understanding from elsewhere in the world. Not that there have been perfect solutions in New Zealand or elsewhere, but it gives a better understanding of how other people have tried to tackle this issue.

Q269 Chair: On the EU plants regulation, do you think it is sufficiently swift in its decision-making mechanism, and what improvements would you like to see to it?
Mike Wood: I am not convinced it is particularly swift enough. I do not have a magic wand for how they can work much quicker. We are concerned that it will take a while to make decisions, in terms of the new regulation or whatever form it is taking. Also, it will have a limited number of non-native species—probably 50 they are going to look at—but there is probably bound to be room for improvement in that.

Q270 Neil Parish: Dr Allison, going back to the types of trees and the rate of diversity, the Japanese larch was brought in as a fast-growing tree and to give some diversity, so what are you saying regarding more diversity—within the UK or bringing in trees from outside? How do we create that? It is a great thing to say, but how do we do it?
Dr Allison: It depends what perspective you are coming from. If you are looking from a commercial forestry sector perspective, I am not going to be so qualified to respond to that. However, from a broadleaf native woodland perspective, which is where the Woodland Trust is coming from, we are convinced that there is much more use that one can make of minor species. We can increase the number of trees that we use in creating new woodlands using the existing material that we have and planting things that are less commonly used, but which could nonetheless add a great deal more variety and diversity to our woods.

Q271 Chair: Mr Wood, you said about doing more to develop resistance, and building on the work of other EU countries to do that. Could you point us in the direction of what you would like to see done? Do you think we have learned enough from countries like Holland and Denmark?
Mike Wood: *Chalara* has been a bit of a wakeup call for the UK, and I am hoping there will now be better joint working with other scientists. I think there already was, but better networking and joint working to understand some of these issues, and understand not just, "That is what is happening in Denmark", but how it works in context and how it may or may not work in the UK. Not that I am optimistic, but I think things have improved in terms of the need to look outside these borders and understand what others have been doing.

Q272 Chair: Do you think it was unwise to export seeds to grow into saplings in areas known to have the disease and then re-import those trees as saplings?
Mike Wood: Yes.
Chair: Can I thank each of you for being so generous with your time and for participating? Thank you.

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