

ANIMALS MATTER



Animals matter; to our climate, to our health, to our economy, and to British voters. They matter as sentient individuals.

Improving animal welfare is both popular with the electorate and essential to creating a safe, sustainable and fair future.



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ANIMALS MATTER

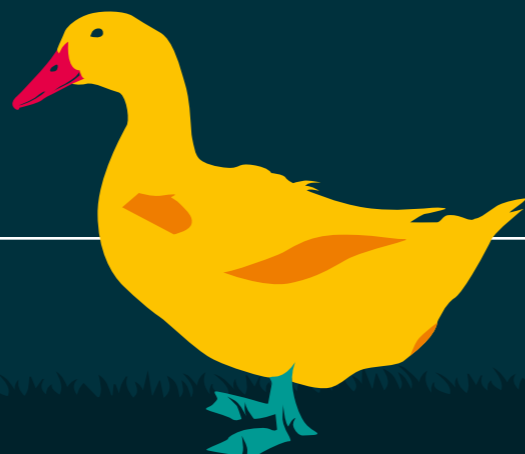
Animals matter; to our climate, to our health, to our economy, and to British voters. They matter as sentient individuals. Improving animal welfare is both popular with the electorate and essential to creating a safe, sustainable and fair future.

From across our proudly self-proclaimed 'nation of animal lovers', all Members of Parliament receive a large amount of correspondence from citizens wanting more and stronger animal protection laws and policies. Constituency-level (MRP) polling carried out in September 2023 showed that more than two-thirds of the British public feel that a political party announcing plans to 'pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty' would have the right priorities. Polling also revealed that one in ten British people rank animal welfare amongst the top five issues facing the country, and 71% believe that passing good animal welfare laws show compassion and concern for those who don't have the power to protect themselves.¹

The welfare and suffering of animals can be an emotive issue, but policy makers should not mistake improvements in animal protection as a sentimental or altruistic ambition. Promoting good welfare and health for animals is an intrinsic and essential part of solving many of society's major challenges, including climate change, sustainable food production, public health, and reversing biodiversity and habitat loss.

*This briefing sets out some key policies that the next **UK Government** must introduce in order to improve animal protection laws, as polling shows voters expect.*

All of the proposals command strong public support, most have near-zero direct cost, and all would set the UK on track to becoming a world leader in the compassionate treatment of animals, for the benefit of animals at home and abroad.



BANNING LIVE EXPORTS FOR SLAUGHTER OR FATTENING

The **Government's** manifesto states "We will end excessively long journeys for slaughter and fattening" and commits to "Abolishing the cruel live shipment of animals."² We welcome this policy, and a similar policy, to end live exports for slaughter or fattening that was in the **Labour Party's 2019 Animal Welfare manifesto**³. This policy was introduced to Parliament in the (now abandoned) Kept Animals Bill, and is expected to appear in a new Bill in the final pre-election session. The New Zealand Government's ban on all livestock export by sea came into effect on 1st May 2023, Brazil implemented a ban in 2023 and Australia is consulting on banning live sheep exports. The UK should be keeping pace with world leading standards of animal welfare and an end to the live export trade is long overdue.

WHY IT MATTERS

As sentient beings

In 2019, 3,549 calves were exported from GB for fattening. 3,446 of those animals went from Scotland to Spain, via Ramsgate, on journeys lasting over 60 hours⁴. Research indicates a higher mortality rate in post-transport for calves under four weeks old⁵. Allowing calves to be subjected to live export presents an unnecessary risk to welfare. In the same year, 30,890 sheep were exported for slaughter or fattening. After 5-6 hours of transport, sheep are likely to be hungry and may already be showing signs of dehydration. Some sheep export journeys were destined for Bulgaria and Hungary. These countries have a large onward trade to the Middle East, where slaughter conditions are often inhumane⁶. Once animals leave British territory, the **UK Government** is unable to ensure that they will be transported and slaughtered in accordance with domestic legislation on animal welfare.

For a strong economy

Whilst no live exports have occurred in the past three years, due to the trade having been

temporarily halted because new post-Brexit checkpoint requirements can't, at the moment, be met through certain ports, the trade could resume at any time. In any case, economically viable alternatives to live exports exist. Sheep can be exported as carcasses, to the benefit of the British meat-processing industry. Calves exported from Britain are mainly male dairy calves and the export trade in these was already rapidly becoming redundant due to growing use of sexed semen, dairy-beef crosses and commitments by retailers to source British beef. The UK is only 75% self-sufficient in beef, so it makes no sense to export calves. They should be reared in the UK to high welfare standards, thereby increasing food security in the UK.

To voters

As well as having cross-party political support, a ban on live exports is strongly supported by the public with only 10% in a recent poll disagreeing with a live export ban⁷. A recent Parliamentary petition called on the **UK Government** to 'Find the time to take the Kept Animals Bill through Parliament and make it law' and was signed by over 107,000 UK residents⁸.

NEXT STEPS

The ability to end this trade, as a result of the UK having fully left the EU, has been identified by senior **UK Government** ministers⁹. The Government introduced legislation banning live exports for slaughter or fattening in the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill in June 2021, but this Bill was withdrawn in May 2023. Ministers have indicated that it will be brought forward in a new, single issue Bill in the final pre-election session. We urge the Government to introduce such legislation in Government time, without delay, and for all parties, MPs and Peers to ensure its smooth passage into law. ■



SUPPORT FARMERS TO END THE USE OF CAGES AND CRATES

Every year, over 10 million farm animals in the UK are confined to cages for all or part of their life. The **UK Government** claims to want to be a global leader in animal welfare. But several European countries have already banned caged systems – should post-Brexit Britain fall behind best practice?

We are calling for the prohibition of a) barren, enriched and 'combi' cages, b) farrowing crates for sows, and c) individual calf pens in British farming. Other farmed animals that are sometimes confined to cages include rabbits, pullets, broiler breeders, layer breeders, quail, pheasants, partridges and guinea fowl. The use of cages for these species should also be prohibited by law.

Cage-free farming systems, which allow each animal to express their individual needs, are already widely used and have been proven to be economically viable. Consumer demand for food produced in cage-free systems is rising rapidly¹⁰, and it is increasingly what the public expect of British farming.

WHY IT MATTERS

As sentient beings

Cages confine and restrict, they thwart many of an animal's natural instincts, and they are a desolate reflection on our society. Despite the obvious ethical failings of this outdated technology, animals in the United Kingdom continue to be confined in cages every year. There is a wealth of robust evidence demonstrating that enriched cages for laying hens and farrowing crates for sows are highly detrimental to welfare.

To voters

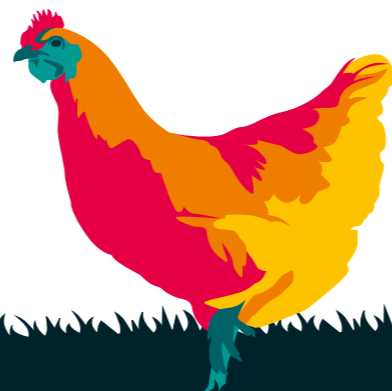
A petition on the Parliament website, calling for an end to caged farming, secured over 109,000 signatures in 2021¹¹. This followed a similar petition in 2019, which secured over 106,000 signatures¹². In 2019, a European Citizens' Initiative secured over 1.4 million signatures. In response the EU

Commission committed to bring forward a legislative proposal, in 2023, that could end the use of all cages, across the EU27, by 2027¹³. As one of the driving forces behind, and one of the first to implement, a ban on sow stalls across the EU, the UK should not now be falling behind EU Member States in the area of pig welfare. A number of other European countries have taken steps to ban caged systems; the UK must now do the same if it is not to fall behind voter expectations.

NEXT STEPS

The abolition of cage systems is not a partisan issue. During the debate on the above-mentioned petition, the then Farming Minister said, "the **Government** are committed to phasing out confinement systems and supporting the industry to do so, not least to underpin UK food security."¹⁴ The **Labour** Animal Welfare Manifesto committed to introduce a 'phased ban on sow farrowing crates' and to 'end the use of cages on British farms by 2025'¹⁵. And the **Scottish Government's** 2021-22 Programme for Government committed to "Start consultation this year on proposals to... phase out cages for gamebirds and laying hens, and farrowing crates for pigs."¹⁶

The **UK Government** must show it is serious in its ambitions and embrace a cage-free future – starting by publishing the long awaited consultations. It must also ensure that farm subsidies, such as the Sustainable Farming Incentive, are specifically ringfenced to support farmers with large infrastructure grants to transition to cage-free systems. Ending the cage age would both protect millions of farm animals every year across the UK and ensure that the UK does not fall behind other nations. ■



INTRODUCE MANDATORY ANIMAL WELFARE LABELLING ON FOOD

The **UK Government** has the power to bring in clearer labelling for consumers on how their food was produced and slaughtered. In September 2022, Defra published the results of their call for evidence. This showed overwhelming support for introducing mandatory labelling and a consultation on proposals had been promised for 2023. However in July 2023 the Government paused the consultation to introduce mandatory labelling. We call on the Government to introduce clearer information for consumers showing how their food was produced - whether it is in supermarkets, on products or in the food service sector.

WHY IT MATTERS

To voters

Consumers have said they wish to see clearer information on food so that they can make informed purchasing decisions. Polling from 2021 shows that 68% of the British public want to see food labelled to show the conditions that animals have been reared in and 84,000 people signed a petition supporting Honest Labelling¹⁷. Introducing Method of Production (MoP) labelling will empower consumers to make informed choices about the food they purchase.

For a strong economy

As it can *and should* be applied to imported products, labelling will ensure that information on any food sold in the UK, whether it is produced here or abroad, is readily available to the consumer. This will enable market forces to drive further investment in higher welfare systems by British farmers. In tandem with a trade policy that adheres to core animal welfare standards, labelling will also ensure that consumers can easily distinguish between higher welfare products and lower welfare imports that do not meet the standards that

UK citizens expect their food to be produced to. Labelling will also ensure that any product entering the UK from a free trade deal that is produced at standards below the UK's will be clearly identified giving the consumer the information required to make a clear purchase choice and helping to ensure British farmers are not undermined by cheaper imports.

NEXT STEPS

We call for rapid progress on this issue. The Government has recently announced that it will not proceed with the long-anticipated and promised consultation on labelling, after resistance from some major stakeholders. This consultation must be published as soon as possible as a first step to fulfilling public demand for making more information available to consumers. The scheme that is eventually introduced should be mandatory, apply to both domestically produced and imported goods of meat and dairy, and be applicable to fresh and processed foods in a range of settings (e.g. fresh cuts of meat in supermarkets, ready meals, public canteens). The Government should allow a reasonable phase-in period for any labelling reform but this transition period should be relatively short. ■



ACCELERATE A SHIFT AWAY FROM INTENSIVE ANIMAL AGRICULTURE AND TOWARDS CLIMATE AND NATURE-FRIENDLY FARMING

The Dimpleby Report on the National Food Strategy encouraged a reduction in meat consumption by at least 30% over the next decade¹⁹. The Sustainable Farming Incentive Scheme and Animal Health and Welfare Pathway must promote “less and better” meat and dairy production. This requires reducing intensive farming that is unsustainably dependent on forest clearances abroad to provide feed for animals in factory farms, and instead supporting British higher-welfare farmers across agricultural and trade policy.

WHY IT MATTERS

To reach Net Zero

Intensive farming systems in the UK, especially those in which caged animals are unable to feed from natural resources, are heavily dependent on unsustainable imports of animal feed, typically from monoculture systems in South America. The processes of deforestation and land clearance to meet demand for animal feed are highly damaging to local biodiversity and wildlife, and rates are expected to accelerate in-line with demand and population growth. In light of these factors, and the well-established link between climate change and global meat production and consumption, we must transition away from an unsustainable animal-centric food system.

NEXT STEPS

Following its role as COP26 President, the **UK Government** must continue to lead the way in supporting a just protein transition by revising dietary guidelines, supporting alternative protein innovation and offering financial incentives and skill-building, as outlined above, to help farmers and food growers shift away from intensive animal agriculture to sustainable protein production.

The Government must also revise the Government Food Buying Standards by committing to increase the proportion of higher welfare meat such as RSPCA Assured and plant-based meals and increase fruit, vegetable and fibre offerings in public sector procurement. The Government consulted on this in September 2022 but has yet to set out next steps. The policy actions should set our country on track to achieve public health and sustainability goals, improve food security and ensure the UK is able to compete in the booming global plant-based foods market. ■



INTRODUCE CORE ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS IN TRADE DEALS

The **UK Government** has made repeated commitments not to compromise “on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food safety standards” in trade negotiations. However, as we saw with the UK-Australia trade agreement and with the Trans-Pacific trade agreement (CPTPP), the UK is prepared to allow in animal products from other countries that would be illegal to produce in the UK, including battery eggs and pork produced in sow stalls. As these practices are often cheaper, the imported food will inevitably undercut British-produced food, resulting in our farmers being undercut and undermining the use of public funds to support higher welfare farming in the UK.

WHY IT MATTERS

As sentient beings

Importing products that are illegal to produce in the UK is simply offshoring poor animal welfare. Trade deals signed or underway will liberalise trade and encourage imports from a wide range of inhumane farming systems banned in the UK, including wool from mulesed sheep in Australia; beef from cattle transported for twice as long as permitted in the UK or produced in barren feedlots in Australia; eggs from barren battery cages in Mexico; and pork produced in sow stalls from Canada.

All of the agreed trade deals involve tariff reductions over a period of at least 10 years, so the actual impact on our animal standards may not be seen for some time.

For food security

A trade policy without adequate safeguards will negatively impact the UK’s current animal welfare standards for decades to come – undermining our hard-won regulations and seriously undercutting higher welfare British farmers by forcing them to compete with products from lower welfare systems, which risks putting more farmers out of business, jeopardising our food security and outsourcing animal cruelty.

For a strong economy

Trade deals typically include reductions and elimination of tariffs on imports. If the tariff on imports of food produced to low standards is eliminated, British farmers will be entirely unprotected from unfair competition. It’s not just our farmers who will be exposed. Our food industry employs over 4 million people in the farm to fork food chain. Enshrining core animal welfare standards in trade deals would limit the risk of producers in the UK being undercut by such conditionality.

NEXT STEPS

As proposed by both the animal welfare sector and the National Farmers Union, Britain should set core minimum standards for animal welfare and the environment as a condition for any tariff- or quota-free access that is granted through trade deals. The **UK Government** should promote trade in higher-quality, sustainable goods, rather than engaging in a “race to the bottom” in which good practices in Britain are undercut by imports of agri-food products produced in conditions that would be illegal in Britain. The UK should continue to raise these issues at the WTO underlining the public moral case for raising animal welfare standards. Meeting those core standards would ensure they are competing with British producers on a fair basis. ■



BAN THE IMPORT OF HUNTING TROPHIES INTO THE UK

Trophy hunting has been shown to negatively impact populations of threatened and endangered species, including disrupting social structures, reproduction rates and infanticide, whilst failing to provide adequate or sustained conservation funding¹⁹. The fact that in 2022 people from the UK are still travelling the world to kill some of the world's rarest animals in order to import their body parts home is a stain on our country's reputation. However, Britain can lead the way by passing the world's most comprehensive ban on the import of hunting trophies and by ending our involvement in this outdated and damaging practice.

WHY IT MATTERS

As sentient beings

Trophy hunting serves no purpose, it is not about killing an animal for sustenance or self-defence but purely for the pleasure of killing. The trophy hunting industry actively encourages the use of less effective and thus less humane weapons like bows, handguns and muzzle-loaded rifles²⁰. Animals killed by trophy hunters can be left to suffer for days once initially wounded. Cecil the lion was shot with an arrow and took around 10 hours to die.

To voters

Polling confirms that the overwhelming majority of the British public agree that trophy hunting has no place in our society, with more than 80% supporting a trophy hunting import ban and 76% wanting a ban applied to all species. A commitment to ban the import of hunting trophies appeared in both **Labour** and **Conservative Party** manifestos in 2019 and has been included in all four of the last Queen's Speeches.

To safeguard biodiversity

The conservation benefits claimed by the trophy hunting industry have failed to materialise. Trophy hunting has been shown to cause population

decline²¹ and negatively impact population viability of a number of threatened or endangered species. The practice deliberately targets mature, large animals whose removal can have a devastating impact on social structures of species like lions²², leopards²³ and elephants²⁴ and can increase infanticide. Trophy hunting also fails to support biodiversity by indiscriminately killing non-target species, such as caracal which may predate on game stock. By ending our involvement in this unethical and unsustainable practice, we can prioritise and catalyse funding to support innovative non-consumptive conservation programmes, which provide genuine protection to at-risk species and their habitats.

NEXT STEPS

Henry Smith MP tabled the government-backed Hunting Trophies Import (prohibition) Bill in July 2022 and it completed its passage through the Commons in March this year. Now awaiting its final stages in the Lords, we urge Peers to robustly oppose amendments to build in 'smart ban' loopholes that would allow trophy trade to continue.

The Government should ramp up funding for non-consumptive conservation programmes to provide sustainable and effective protection for at risk species, delivered in collaboration with the communities who live alongside them. ■



LEAD THE WORLD IN ENDING THE CRUEL AND DANGEROUS FUR TRADE

The UK led the world by banning fur farming twenty years ago. Public and political opposition to the fur trade now resonates around the globe and the UK's action has been followed by eighteen countries across Europe. However, we still allow the importation of real fur from animals kept in terrible conditions on fur farms around the globe, including from Finland and China. If fur is too cruel to farm here, it is surely too cruel to sell here.

WHY IT MATTERS

As sentient beings

The keeping of tens of millions of wild carnivores, such as foxes, mink and raccoon dogs, in metre-square wire mesh cages for their entire lives fails dismally to meet their complex biological and behavioural needs. Unable to act out their natural behaviours such as running, digging and hunting these animals can suffer psychological disorders. Fighting between cage mates and even cannibalism is common.

In the wild, coyotes, foxes and raccoons are caught by the leg or foot in brutal metal traps (banned in the UK for nearly 70 years) where they can remain for hours, or even days, before the trapper returns to bludgeon or suffocate them. In their desperate struggle to break free, the animals can break their teeth or even gnaw off their own limbs.

There is no such thing as humane fur farming or trapping; 'assurance schemes' or 'high-welfare fur farming' have been repeatedly and extensively proven to not provide animals with a life worth living. As well as using inadequate welfare measures, these schemes are run and funded by the fur industry.

To prevent pandemics

Industrial fur farms create the perfect petri dish for viruses. Mink on more than 480 fur farms worldwide have been infected with COVID-19, with spillover to humans recorded in at least six countries.

Leading global agencies, including the World Health Organisation, identified the risk and spread of COVID-19 within fur farms, spillover from fur farms to humans and transmission to susceptible wildlife populations in Europe as high, and the World Organisation for Animal Health (formerly OIE) concluded that raw mink skins cannot be considered a safe commodity for international trade.

Two UK virologists have categorised UK fur farming as high risk on a par with live animal markets and urged Governments to "consider the mounting evidence suggesting that fur farming, particularly mink, be eliminated in the interest of pandemic preparedness."²⁵

To voters

The British public are opposed to real fur. Recent polling shows that only 3% of people say they wear fur, and 77% believe the **UK government** should ban the import of animal products, such as fur, where production methods are banned in the UK.

NEXT STEPS

The government has committed to 'explore potential action' on the fur trade. It ran a Call for Evidence, and instructed the Animal Welfare Committee to provide an opinion on the welfare issues associated with the fur trade. Legislation should be introduced as soon as possible to help protect both animals and public health. The **UK government** should raise this issue at global public health fora, including in the creation of the Pandemic Treaty, to ensure that urgent steps are taken to eliminate fur production which gives rise to serious zoonotic disease risk. ■



STOPPING ILLEGAL PUPPY IMPORTS

No accurate data exists but it is likely that a substantial proportion of the English market for puppies is provided by unlicensed English breeders or imported puppies.

The demand for puppies under Covid-19 and the sharp increase in dog prices resulted in an increase in the illegal importation of puppies from countries such as Romania. Alongside this an increase occurred in dogs being imported with cropped ears with the RSPCA seeing a 621% increase in the number of reports of ear cropping during a five year period²⁶.

The Government had a manifesto commitment to crack down on the illegal puppy trade, and introduced the Kept Animals Bill in 2021 to make it illegal to import puppies under six months old, or dogs with cropped ears. The Bill was scrapped in May 2023 with intent to bring the reforms through the less reliable route of Private Members Bills.

WHY IT MATTERS

The illegal puppy trade is a lucrative business worth millions of pounds – according to the Scottish SPCA, the Scottish Market alone is worth approximately £13 million annually²⁷. The UK imports thousands of puppies from breeders in Europe, with the number of commercial licences issued for commercial dog importation rising from 5,694 in 2019 to 12,733 in 2020²⁸. These puppies are often reared in poor conditions, not given adequate veterinary care and taken from their mothers too soon. This results in high numbers of puppies arriving to their new families sick, and in many cases, causing British families both heartache and high veterinary bills. It is estimated that 40% of illegally bred puppies die before they reach five years of age, with 15% getting sick or dying within their first year of birth²⁹.

The British public are vulnerable to countless adverts on classified sites selling puppies from unscrupulous breeders, with many breeders being untraceable after a newly purchased puppy gets sick or dies. We advocate for better regulation of the online classified ad sites to be incorporated into any legislation tackling illegal puppy imports, in order to combat the illegal puppy trade more effectively.

The practice of mutilating dogs by cropping their ears and docking their tails is cruel and unnecessary, often carried out without anaesthetic or pain relief, and has no benefits for the dog whatsoever. Ear cropping can actually be detrimental to a dog's health, behaviour and welfare. The procedure is carried out purely for aesthetic or cosmetic reasons. The wounds can take a long time to heal, need a lot of aftercare and can become infected easily.

To voters

86% of the public support measures to end the illegal puppy trade, 76% support a ban on imports of dogs with cropped ears and 81% support measures to make dog theft a specific offence³⁰.

NEXT STEPS

The **UK Government** should raise the minimum age for dogs to be transported into the UK to six months and limit the maximum number of dogs that can be transported in one journey to three dogs. The Government should also prohibit the transport of dogs that are more than 42 days pregnant, in addition to extending the ban on the movement of dogs with mutilations (e.g. ear cropping and tail docking) to Northern Ireland with a strict exemption for dogs that are being rehomed.

The Model Solution, developed by FOUR PAWS, seeks to implement national digital Identification and Registration (I&R) databases which provide full traceability and identification of stakeholders throughout a dog's lifetime. The **UK Government** should explore strengthening pet and seller traceability through mandatory implementation of the Model Solution, so only registered pets can be advertised online by traceable sellers.

With the scrapping of the Kept Animals Bill we urge the Government to introduce legislation without delay, and for all parties, MPs and Peers to ensure its smooth passage into law. ■



ENDNOTES

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Endnotes continued ►

ENDNOTES CONTINUED...

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