

# Animal Welfare Matters

## A manifesto for animals – a better future for people and planet

Animal welfare concerns consistently rank amongst the top issues raised by constituents with their MPs, and polling in 2022 revealed that 72% of the voting public would like to see the UK Government pass more laws designed to improve animal welfare and protect animals from cruelty.<sup>1</sup> Animal welfare is integral to core policy areas; it is widely accepted that the welfare of animals, human health, and biodiversity and environmental security are interdependent.<sup>2</sup> The exploitation and inhumane use of animals is a key driver of the triple planetary crises of biodiversity loss, climate change and environmental degradation, as well as the emergence of pandemics such as the global COVID-19 pandemic. As such, good animal welfare underpins good human wellbeing and a strong and stable economy, and demands an integrative cross-government approach.

In this briefing, the thirty named organisations jointly present **five key commitments** that we seek from all political Parties prior to the next General Election.

### ***1. A commitment to develop and deliver a cross-government animal welfare strategy***

The 2021 Action Plan for Animal Welfare was an encouraging set of ambitions by the UK Government. This, and Labour's 2019 Animal Welfare manifesto, were both warmly welcomed by animal protection NGOs. To ensure that such ambitions are delivered, and that progress is measured and built upon, it is imperative for the next government to **commit to creating an annually-reviewed five-year animal welfare strategy, for which ministers are accountable to Parliament**. Such a plan would facilitate a cross-departmental approach to ensuring that the needs of animals are given proper consideration throughout policy making, in keeping with the intentions of the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022. Development and delivery of the strategy would naturally be a vehicle to progress commitments 2-5.

### ***2. A commitment to a sustainable future for farming and wildlife***

The climate crisis, and the fact that the UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, brings into sharp focus the need to ensure that our nation's future prosperity and food security are not anchored in fundamentally unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and animals. Our next government must deliver laws, policies and government funding that drive a positive recalibration of our food, land and ocean management systems. There is both a need and an opportunity for the UK to become a global leader in more sustainable food production, based on agroecological principles, including by supporting a just transition to more plant-based diets, and use of public funds to support farmers to phase out intensive confinement farming methods. Such an agricultural and dietary shift is not only vital to 'keep 1.5 alive', it will also relieve the burden on public services caused by diet-related diseases, and help ensure healthy food is accessible and affordable to all.

The next government must commit to 'modernise and simplify' antiquated wildlife laws, per the recommendation of the Law Commission's 2015 review<sup>3</sup>, and end perverse funding and incentives in order to bring to an end to destructive and often inhumane treatment of wild animals, in favour of habitat recovery.

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<sup>1</sup> [Animal Welfare Standards: MRP Poll \(focaldata.com\)](https://www.focaldata.com/animal-welfare-standards-mrp-poll)

<sup>2</sup> as further defined by the [One Welfare](#) framework

<sup>3</sup> [Wildlife Law Final Report - Law Commission](#)

## Specific policy recommendations

1. **The development and adoption of a Food Strategy that ensures access to affordable, nutritious food for all, by implementing production and consumption measures in tandem.** This should include encouraging the public to opt for healthy and sustainable, plant-rich diets in line with climate change and human health concerns. The strategy should ensure that public funds are available to incentivise a shift in UK farming to more sustainable, climate-friendly, ecologically sensitive, animal welfare-friendly agricultural practices, and create a supportive regulatory environment for innovation and growth of alternative protein sources. It should also introduce mandatory animal welfare product labelling, to enable consumers to make informed buying choices.
2. **Legislate to eliminate the worst animal welfare practices in British farming and animal product food production, including:**
  - a) **Bans on ‘enriched’ cages for laying hens, and sow farrowing crates** with a reasonable phase-out period, directing support payments to assist farmers with the cost of replacing cages and crates with safe, more humane systems.
  - b) **Maintain the Animal Health and Welfare pathway priority of implementing the Better Chicken Commitment** which requires slower-growing breeds and lower stocking densities.
  - c) **A ban on all forms of routine antibiotic use on farmed animals**, prohibiting purely preventative antibiotic group treatments and the use of antibiotics to compensate for poor hygiene or inadequate husbandry, and prohibiting imports of animal foods produced using antibiotic growth promoters. The overuse of antibiotics poses a direct threat to human health via the emergence of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).
  - d) **Ensure, as a first step, that the number of animals slaughtered according to religious rites is sufficient only to meet the demand of religious communities within the UK and prohibit the export of meat that comes from animals who were slaughtered without stunning.** In parallel, a commitment should be made to build strong dialogues with religious communities and veterinary professionals, towards the elimination of non-stun slaughter.
  - e) **Expand the Animal Welfare Act (2006) to include decapod crustaceans and cephalopods and ensure that their welfare is protected** during catching, transport, keeping and slaughter, **and expand welfare laws to properly protect the welfare of fish during farming and slaughter.**
3. **Commit to a Wildlife Protection Act** to consolidate, reform and update the UK’s complex and often contradictory patchwork of protection laws for both terrestrial and marine wildlife. Such an update would create a legislative vehicle to effectively prevent marine mammal bycatch including through mandatory monitoring/observers on board all UK commercial vessels and all vessels fishing in UK waters, and establishing gear limitations and closed seasons; protect seals from disturbance; better protect hares; and outlaw cruel and indiscriminate traps such as snares.
4. **Adopt an ethical approach to the goal of eradicating bovine TB** mirroring the approach taken by the Welsh Government which incorporates more robust cattle movement controls and sanctions for biosecurity failures; better and more reliable testing; and the introduction of a cattle vaccine and post vaccine test, in order to reduce the incidence of bovine tuberculosis in cattle, and bring an immediate end to the culling of badgers.

### ***3. A commitment to accelerate the transition to animal-free testing and research***

The UK was one of the top users of animals in research when a member of the European Union, with an annual average of more than 3.5 million procedures conducted on animals over the last decade. Over 77% of UK adults agree that the UK Government should commit to phasing out the use of animals in scientific research and testing<sup>4</sup>, animal ‘models’ have limitations, and there has been encouraging

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<sup>4</sup> [Savanta Comres Polling \(April 2022\)](#)

progress with developing humane alternatives to many animal experiments. The next government should invest and create the conditions to place the UK at the forefront of innovation, inverting the trend of sustained animal use and taking the lead in development and application of innovative, non-animal methods that could better protect human health and the environment.

#### **Specific policy recommendations**

- 1. Develop an Action Plan to Accelerate the Transition to Animal-Free Testing and Research** including a clear commitment to phasing out animal use, with ambitious but achievable objectives to ensure measurable progress. We recommend that this is supported by a legislative framework that establishes key measures to be taken by the Government, such as reporting to Parliament on progress and providing practical and financial support to the scientific community.
- 2. Review animal experiments that cause ‘severe’ suffering** (as defined in UK and EU legislation), with a view to ending this through application of other methods, or by more effective implementation of Refinement.
- 3. Commit to a ban on the export and import of animals for use in research or testing.** Transport is highly stressful for animals used in laboratories, so increased efforts should be made to collaborate with colleagues in other countries, and avoid transporting live animals post-birth or hatch.
- 4. Implement an efficient and progressive chemicals management system** focused on better protecting human health and the environment from harmful substances using state-of-the-art, innovative, animal-free technologies as standard, and minimising the use of animal tests.

#### ***4. A commitment to act as a progressive global leader in animal welfare***

Legislating to improve the welfare of animals domestically must be carried out in lockstep with policy measures designed to improve animal welfare overseas, in order to stop low-welfare products and activities being outsourced. The next government should commit to using our leverage through both trade and diplomacy, and as a member of international bodies like the United Nations, to ensure our ethical values as a country are reflected, according to public expectations.

#### **Specific policy recommendations**

- 1. Enshrine core standards for animal welfare in all future trade agreements in order to safeguard the UK’s hard-won animal welfare standards and protect British farmers.** It is essential that the UK adopts a coherent and consistent approach to trading arrangements with overseas partners, using WTO-compliant levers to drive upward harmonisation of animal welfare standards in agri-food products imported to and exported from the UK. Adherence to core animal welfare standards will ensure British farmers are not at a competitive market disadvantage from imports of products produced to lower welfare standards overseas.
- 2. Ban the import, transshipment and sale of products that are illegal to produce in the UK on animal welfare grounds, such as fur, foie gras and whalemeat.** Banning cruel treatment of animals domestically but maintaining the UK’s role in global trade is a double-standard. Now outside of the EU, the UK is free to reflect the public’s moral objection to these products by prohibiting such trade.
- 3. Ban the domestic sale and advertisement of low welfare animal experiences abroad to stop travel companies in the UK selling cruel animal activities,** such as elephant rides and swim-with-dolphin experiences. The inhumane training methods animals endure to learn tricks include beatings, forced isolation, confinement, and the withholding of food, and would not meet domestic animal welfare standards.
- 4. Lead global efforts to secure multilateral recognition of the need to shut down global animal trades that present unacceptably high-risk of zoonotic diseases with pandemic potential,** such as the bushmeat trade, live animal markets, and fur farming; and **take a lead in multilateral**

**negotiations to ensure that animal welfare is an integral part of the work of the United Nations , and embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals and the development of the One Health approach**, recognising the links between human wellbeing, animal welfare and the health of our environment.

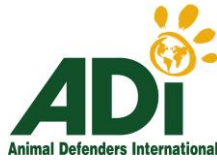
## ***5. A commitment to tackle crime against and abuse of animals***

While shocking in their own right, many crimes and acts of violence towards animals are also well understood to correlate with, and be strong predictors for, crime and violence to humans. Despite this there are inconsistencies and loopholes within key pieces of existing animal protection legislation that render them weak and/or open to exploitation. Additionally, there is an overarching lack of recording, reporting and joined-up thinking across departments and agencies to fully understand the scale of animal (especially wildlife) crimes and their interplay with wider criminal activities in society. Furthermore, the welfare of pets (companion animals) is poorly safeguarded, enforcement is patchy and often carried out by poorly-trained and under-resourced enforcers, and there is a lack of protections for owner safety and wellbeing.

### **Specific policy recommendations**

- 1. Amend the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act to eliminate two-tier sentencing for animal cruelty** so that all animals, whether domestic, under human control or wild, are protected by the same five-year maximum sentence for animal cruelty.
- 2. Strengthen the Hunting Act**, closing loopholes that facilitate the illegal hunting of foxes, deer and hares, including: prohibiting the use of dogs below ground; removing the exemption for ‘research and observation’; introducing a new ‘recklessness’ clause and a ‘vicarious liability’ clause; increasing sentencing powers; and introducing welfare standards for the keeping of dogs.
- 3. Make wildlife crimes notifiable and recordable** and use insights from this data to develop and implement a clear wildlife crime policing strategy. Once reporting is in place, the government should commission a biennial report collating and analysing data on animal crimes and recommending actions to deliver effective and coherent cross-departmental responses.
- 4. Ensure licensing under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regs 2018 covers all necessary activities including rescue centres, groomers and trainers**, both to drive improvements in standards and to prevent the animal welfare harms, and to reduce financial and emotional damage to families resulting from the risks associated with unqualified practitioners.
- 5. Safeguard the welfare of dogs and cats, and safety and wellbeing of owners by:**
  - a) Implementing the provisions of the Kept Animals Bill to stop illegal and low welfare import (e.g. animals who have been subject to mutilations that are illegal in the UK such as dogs with cropped ears and declawed cats), and making pet abduction a specific offence in law;
  - b) making cat microchipping mandatory and update pet microchipping laws to strengthen requirements to maintain records, improve processes between databases and establish a single search point across databases;
  - c) repealing outdated breed specific legislation and replacing it with an updated dog control law that is preventative and based on evidence;
  - d) developing mechanisms to prohibit the breeding of dogs and cats (and other animals) whose conformations cause them health problems.
- 6. Strengthen regulations controlling the use of animals in sport**, including a ban on use of the whip in horse-racing and abolishing greyhound racing, via a managed shutdown.

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