

Government backs Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill as it takes crucial step forward

The Government is backing legislation for tougher prison times for those who cruelly mistreat animals, as plans to introduce more stringent sentences move a step closer today (Friday 23 October).

The Bill, [introduced in Parliament by Chris Loder MP in February](#), will see the most serious perpetrators of animal cruelty face up to five years in prison, up from the current maximum of six months. Today, the Bill will have its Second Reading in the House of Commons, backed by the Government.

These tougher prison sentences would be among the toughest sanctions for animal abuse in Europe, strengthening the UK's position as a global leader on animal welfare.

The Bill follows a [public consultation in 2017](#), in which more than 70% of people supported the proposals for tougher prison sentences for those guilty of animal cruelty offences. This could include dog fighting, cruelty towards domestic pets or gross neglect of farm animals.

Chris Loder, MP for West Dorset, said:

It is high time as a nation that we take the lead on global standards for animal welfare and hand down tougher custodial sentences for those who inflict the worst kinds of cruelty on innocent animals.

My Bill, which I'm pleased has cross-party support and is fully endorsed by the RSPCA and other animal welfare charities, delivers a strong message to animal abusers that their behaviour will no longer be tolerated. We need to get it on the statute book and send a clear signal to potential offenders there is no place for animal cruelty in this country.

Animal Welfare Minister Lord Goldsmith said:

There is no place for animal cruelty in this country and this crucial piece of legislation will bring in more stringent sentences for animal abusers who commit the most heinous crimes, cementing our role as a global leader in animal welfare.

In addition to supporting this Bill, we are taking steps to ban

primates as pets, crack down on the illegal smuggling of dogs and puppies, and we will be making good on our commitment to end excessively long journeys for slaughter and fattening of farm animals.

I would like to thank Chris Loder MP for introducing this vital Bill. We will do all we can to support its swift passage through Parliament.

RSPCA chief executive Chris Sherwood said:

We're thrilled that The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill has passed through this stage and that we're one step closer to getting real justice for abused and neglected animals in this country.

In the three years since the Government pledged to increase the maximum sentence under the Animal Welfare Act from six months to five years, immediate custodial sentences have been imposed on 132 individuals following RSPCA investigations into cruelty and these included horrendous cases such as a dog who was kicked to death by her owner and a man who bit off a kitten's ear.

Tougher sentencing would give courts more flexibility to impose longer prison terms on those people guilty of the most serious offences to better reflect the severity of the crimes and to act as a stronger deterrent to others.

The Second Reading of the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill is due to conclude on 23 October. The Bill will then go to Committee Stage, with Report Stage and Third Reading following this, before transferring to the House of Lords for further scrutiny.

You can track the progress of the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill and read debates on all stages of the Bill's passage on the [Parliament website](#).