

The government sets out its action plan for better animal welfare

ACTION PLAN FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

What are we doing?

We are a nation of animal lovers. The UK was the first country in the world to pass legislation to protect animals in 1822, and we have achieved remarkable things in this area ever since. However, we want to go further, setting new higher ambitions which continue the tradition of protecting animals in the UK and abroad.

Our Action Plan for Animal Welfare sets out Government's plans on animal welfare for this Parliament and beyond. The document provides a high-level overview of over forty policy reforms we intend to tackle across five different workstreams, outlined below with our key proposals pulled out:

- Sentience and Enforcement

Our landmark Sentience Bill will recognise and enshrine animal sentience in law, and will create an expert committee on animal sentience to report on government decisions, holding Ministers accountable to Parliament for animal welfare in policy making, in a targeted and proportionate way. In addition we will support more legislation to improve enforcement – such as the use of penalty notices.

- International Trade and Advocacy

We will ensure our high animal welfare standards are not compromised in our trade negotiations and we will use our position as a global leader for international advocacy on animal welfare. Legislation will be introduced to ban the import of hunting trophies from endangered animals abroad, to ban the import and export of detached shark fins, and to stop the advertising and sale here of unacceptable animal attractions abroad. We will explore next steps on the fur and foie gras trades and implement the Ivory Act.

- Farm Animals

As part of protecting and enhancing the welfare of farm animals we will end the export of live animals for slaughter and fattening. Our upcoming consultation on food labelling will consider reforms to make it easier for consumers to purchase food that aligns with their welfare values. We will support livestock farmers financially via our 'Animal Health and Welfare Pathway'. Further reforms in this area include introducing effective powers to tackle 'livestock worrying' and considering other improvements to welfare on the farm, such as examining the use of cages for laying hens and farrowing crates for pigs.

- Pets and Sporting Animals

We will bring forward legislation to tackle the trade in puppy smuggling and introduce compulsory cat microchipping. Our cross-Government taskforce will crack down on pet theft and we will also take forward wider reforms such as

the licensing of animal sanctuaries, as well as consider improvements for racing greyhounds and for equine identification.

- Wild Animals

Keeping primates as pets will be prohibited by law, and we will consider further legislation for a close season for hares whilst cracking down on the illegal practice of hare coursing. We will improve standards for zoos, including in relation to their conservation activities. We will also consider restricting the use of glue traps for pest control and bringing forward measures to tackle wildlife crime.

Why now?

The coronavirus outbreak has underlined the importance of animals in our lives. From the overwhelming companionship provided by our pets, to the importance of a secure food supply chain founded upon high-welfare farming, to conserving and protecting wild animals, animal welfare has never been more important.

Now we have left the EU and our Transition Period has ended we have the opportunity to go further than ever in protecting our animals. In areas that were previously under the jurisdiction of EU law we can now more freely make our own reforms and fulfil our manifesto commitments on animal welfare.

What are the next steps?

To enact these plans the Government has an ambitious programme of legislation in the upcoming session, including the Animal Welfare (Sentience), Kept Animals, and Animals Abroad Bills, which will deliver all of the Government's manifesto commitments on animal welfare. All non-legislative work will be progressed in parallel. Legislation on many of the policy areas referenced in these plans will be introduced in the coming months. Where we have committed to gather further evidence ahead of introducing any changes we will work closely with stakeholders and the public on this.

For more information on the Action Plan for Animal Welfare please contact animals.bill@defra.gov.uk

End of HMG document

Those of you who have written to me with views on meat labelling should write in to the address above with your views as the government is looking at changes.