



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



OUR ACTION PLAN FOR ANIMAL WELFARE





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Foreword by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

We are a nation of animal lovers. The UK was the first country in the world to pass legislation to protect animals in 1822 with the Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act. We built on this to improve conditions related to slaughterhouses in 1875, and then passed the landmark Protection of Animals Act in 1911. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 introduced a robust framework and powers for protecting all kept animals in England and Wales.

Since 2010 we have achieved remarkable things in animal welfare. On farms we introduced new regulations for minimum standards for meat chickens, banned the use of conventional battery cages for laying hens and made CCTV mandatory in slaughterhouses in England. For pets, microchipping became mandatory for dogs in 2015, we modernised our licensing system for a range of activities such as dog breeding and pet sales, have protected service animals via 'Finn's Law' and banned the commercial third-party sales of puppies and kittens ('Lucy's Law'). In 2019 our Wild Animals in Circuses Act became law, and we have led work to implement humane trapping standards.

But we are going to go further. Our manifesto was clear that high standards of animal welfare are one of the hallmarks of a civilised society. We have a long tradition of protecting animals and that will continue - and we will continue to support such efforts overseas.

Our departure from the EU has provided us with an opportunity to do things better. We can take action to ban the live exports of animals for slaughter



and fattening, take forward legislation on puppy smuggling and now we are an independent trading nation and have regained our own voice on wildlife conventions, world forums and organisations we can take a more assertive role on the world stage.

This action plan sets the foundation for this, laying out our aims and ambitions for animal welfare domestically and internationally.

Our proposals will shape how we interact and care for our animals, including our pets, farmed animals and kept wild animals. This includes setting new higher ambitions as well as tackling problems more effectively. In addition to treating our own animals in the right way, I intend to address some unacceptable practices abroad and set a clear global sense of direction including on international conservation and trade.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has put a spotlight on animal welfare. From the overwhelming support and comfort provided by pets, to the importance of a secure food supply chain founded upon high-welfare farming, high welfare standards have never been more important.

This is not the last word on animal welfare. The way we treat animals reflects our values and the kind of people we are. We will continue to raise the bar, and we intend to take the rest of the world with us.

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP

Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs





Executive summary

We have a world leading record on animal welfare, and over the last decade have made great strides in ensuring we offer animals the care, respect and protection they deserve. We have made CCTV mandatory in slaughterhouses, improved the licensing of dog breeding, pet sales and animal boarding, put an end to the commercial third party sale of puppies and kittens, banned plastic microbeads and straws which harm marine life, and stopped the use of wild animals in travelling circuses.

The UK government provides global leadership in protecting and improving biodiversity. We are taking international action to protect endangered species and to drive higher standards abroad. Examples include our agreement and implementation of the global biodiversity framework at the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2021 and protecting 30% of our waters, with the commitment to protect over 30% of our land by 2030. We are leading the charge in advocating for the 30by30 target to be adopted globally at the Convention on Biological Diversity COP15.

The health and welfare of our animals is intertwined with the health of our planet. We are implementing our [25-year Environment Plan](#), taking our landmark Environment Bill through Parliament, hosting the essential COP26 summit in Glasgow, and delivering our 10-point plan for a [Green Industrial Revolution](#). COVID-19 has also put the spotlight on global health and biosecurity, demonstrating the delicate balance between the human and animal kingdoms.



This action plan sets out the breadth of work we are undertaking, and our intention to drive forward reforms across 5 key strands:

1. An expert committee on **animal sentience** will report on government decisions, holding ministers accountable for animal welfare in policy making. We will apply new higher maximum penalties for **animal cruelty** and introduce a new system of penalty fines for people who are cruel to animals.
2. We will ensure our high animal welfare standards are not compromised in our trade negotiations. We will use our position as a global leader for **international advocacy** on animal welfare to forge new relationships with our trading partners and other nations across the globe to promote high animal welfare.
3. We will protect and enhance animal welfare for **farm animals** by ending the export of live animals for slaughter and fattening. We will consult on how labelling can be reformed 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](#)', and ensure effective powers are available to tackle 'livestock worrying' – knowing the trauma that attacks on livestock can inflict. Alongside this work we will introduce other reforms to improve farm welfare, including examining the use of cages for laying hens and farrowing crates for pigs.
4. We recognise how important **pets and sporting animals** are to people's lives and will tackle the trade in puppy smuggling, crack down on pet theft and take forward other reforms in this area.
5. We will increase protections for kept **wild animals** by ending the low-welfare practice of keeping primates as pets, improving standards in zoos, and enhancing conservation.

This work will be delivered through a broad programme of legislation and non-legislative reforms. We have primary legislation planned and we intend to introduce a series of bills, focusing on; sentience, animals kept here in the UK, and the welfare of animals abroad. These bills will be accompanied by a programme of secondary legislation. We are also planning future legislation on important issues such as increasing the protection afforded to our iconic species of hare, and other important issues.





Devolution and engagement

Responsibility for animal welfare is devolved to the devolved administrations and legislatures in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

However, animal welfare transcends boundaries and there are clear benefits from working collaboratively across the UK to achieve shared aims. This action plan sets out our aspirations for animal welfare on the international stage, and in line with the goals of the Animal Health and Welfare [Common Framework](#) being developed by the UK Government and the devolved administrations, we will liaise and work closely with all the administrations across the UK to ensure we give animals the care, respect and protection they deserve.

We will engage more widely as we take forward the proposed policy reforms in this action plan, to ensure that our final measures are well considered and are guided by the latest evidence.





Sentience and enforcement

At the heart of our reform programme is our commitment to recognise in law **the sentience of animals**. The UK has consistently led the way on sentience; indeed, the UK was one of the key members that lobbied for the recognition of animal sentience in Article 13 of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. The UK's Animal Welfare Act (2006) recognised in law that animals can feel pain and suffering, and now we have left the EU and the transition period has finished, we can go further. Explicitly recognising and enshrining animals as sentient beings in law will be at the very heart of central government decision making going forward.

- We will make sure government ministers are held accountable to Parliament for the way they take animal welfare into account when making policy decisions. This includes creating an Animal Sentience Committee to look at and report on government decisions.
- We have commissioned research into the sentience of decapod crustaceans and cephalopods, and, in light of the findings, we will consider further protections.

Our work on sentience will be underpinned by strengthening the penalties for people who abuse animals.

- We have delivered our manifesto commitment and **tougher penalties for animal cruelty** will come into force now the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill has received Royal Assent. This means that the maximum prison sentence for animal cruelty will be raised from six months to five years from 29 June 2021.
- We will support legislation to introduce a new system of **penalty notices** enabling more flexible and proportionate enforcement through a new range of fines to be applied to those who are cruel to animals.





International trade and advocacy

Our work on animal welfare extends beyond our own borders; we want to solidify and enhance our position as global leaders in this field by promoting high animal welfare standards across the world. We will build upon the opportunities presented by our departure from the EU to build an **independent trading policy**, in which animal welfare will play an integral part and which will complement our strong domestic standards. Our manifesto was clear that in all of our trade deals, we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards.

We have planned reforms using international advocacy and trade:

- The UK has a strong track record in marine conservation, and we have been pressing for stronger international action to protect sharks against unsustainable fishing practices and shark finning. Shark finning is the practice of removing a shark's fins at sea and discarding the finless body back in the water. It is a barbaric practice that has rightly been banned in the UK for nearly 20 years, but we do still import shark fins which may contribute to the practice. To this end, we will bring in legislation to **ban the import and export of detached shark fins**.
- In line with setting a global example on animal welfare, we also want to make sure that businesses do not benefit from selling attractions, activities or experiences to tourists involving the unacceptable treatment of animals. For example, animals such as Asian elephants may be subjected to cruel and brutal training practices to ensure their obedience. We will legislate to **ban the advertising and offering for sale here of specific, unacceptable practices abroad**. Our intention is that this will steer tourists towards visiting attractions that involve animals being cared for and treated properly.



- Fur farming has been banned on ethical grounds in England and Wales since 2000, and since 2002 in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Whilst there are existing import restrictions on seal, cat and dog fur, it is still possible to import other **fur** from abroad, so we will explore potential action in this area. Equally, the Government has made clear that the production of foie gras from ducks or geese which have been force fed raises serious welfare concerns. The production of foie gras by force feeding is already illegal in the UK. Now the transition period has finished, we are committed to building a clear evidence base to inform decisions on banning the import or sale of **foie gras** and other products derived from low-welfare systems.

These reforms complement our wider drive towards improving global welfare standards and curbing the loss of global biodiversity.

- Our manifesto commitment made clear that **in all of our trade negotiations, we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards**. To support the reforms set out elsewhere in this action plan, UK farmers should not be undercut by unfair competition. The Government will use the most suitable tools available to make sure this commitment is upheld.
- We will use our trade policy to further our animal welfare agenda through influencing international partners. We have retaken our independent seat at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). We will press for WTO rules to treat animal welfare criteria as a key consideration in trade discussions. We want to go further with international cooperation and collaboration, and to encourage shifts worldwide towards higher welfare forms of livestock production. We will support this by seeking cooperation commitments in our new trade agreements.
- We are implementing the **Ivory Act** this year to ban dealing in elephant ivory, and we plan to consult on extending the Ivory Act to other species later this year.



- We will undertake significant work to focus on marine biodiversity and conservation, such as championing conservation measures at the Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), and through the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) and Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).
- We will deliver on our 2019 Manifesto Commitment to ban the import of hunting **trophies from endangered animals abroad**, by bringing forward legislation to ensure UK imports and exports of hunting trophies are not threatening the conservation status of species abroad.



This publication is out of date and has been archived.



Farm animals

We recognise the invaluable contribution farmers make to this country. Our priority is to support them and encourage sustainable food production to ensure we have a secure and environmentally sustainable supply of healthy food with improved standards of animal welfare.

Taking advantage of our status as an independent trading nation, we will legislate to **end the export of live animals for fattening and slaughter**. Our departure from the EU has provided us with a much-awaited opportunity to address this long-standing ambition.

The government has consulted on a number of other **welfare in transport reforms**, such as setting maximum journey times, space allowances for animals and temperature controls. We are now considering this policy area in further detail to determine what will be taken forward in future legislation to improve transport conditions for animals.

We have a strong track record for raising the bar when it comes to farm animal welfare standards, such as banning battery cages for laying hens, sow stalls for pigs and veal crates for calves. We want to continue to build on this and we are currently considering the case for introducing further reforms, on areas such as the use of farrowing crates for pigs and cages for laying hens.

We also want to promote the production of healthier, higher welfare animals. Free of the prescriptive, top down rules of the EU, we will phase out area-based subsidies and instead support the choices that farmers and land managers take on their holdings. We are working with industry to implement the **Animal Health and Welfare Pathway**, which will launch in 2022. As a first step we will financially support Annual Health and Welfare Reviews, which will lead to improved farm animal health and welfare, including better biosecurity and



diagnostic testing. We will also support livestock farmers financially to pay for health and welfare enhancements that are valued by the public and not currently delivered sufficiently by the market or through existing regulatory standards. To reinforce this, we will consult on how **food labelling** can be reformed making it easier for consumers to purchase food that aligns with their values. For example, by clarifying confusing and misleading terms. We are also exploring complementary market interventions that could sit alongside labelling reforms to stimulate market demand for higher welfare products. For example, we are looking at animal welfare in our update to the Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services.

This is part of a wider package of farm welfare reforms

We have a long history of detailed rules to protect animals when they are killed or slaughtered, including the recent introduction of mandatory CCTV in slaughterhouses. Following our recent review of the welfare at slaughter legislation, we will be considering what further **welfare at slaughter improvements should be made.**

- We are aware that dog attacks on livestock are a serious and growing concern to rural communities, police forces and farmers. Livestock worrying can cause much emotional distress, to all who see the aftermath and can be economically catastrophic to the livelihoods of our farmers. To address this, we will legislate to ensure that new powers are available to the police so they can respond to the most serious incidents of **livestock worrying.**





Pets and sporting animals

Pets are central to so many families and we want to ensure their welfare is protected, and that sporting animals are cared for responsibly.

One of our key reforms here is to **end the abhorrent, cruel practice of puppy smuggling and low-welfare pet imports**. Now the Transition Period has finished, and we have left the EU, we have the opportunity to go further than ever. We have been working closely with our colleagues across the Devolved Administrations and NGOs to provide protection for those animals brought in by these unscrupulous traders, and to prevent the trade as much as we can. We committed to cracking down on puppy smuggling in our manifesto and we will legislate to:

- Reduce the number of pet dogs, cats and ferrets that can be moved under the pet travel rules which apply to non-commercial movements, in order to prevent unscrupulous traders from exploiting our pet travel rules.
- Bring in powers which enable us to go further, to:
 - Increase the minimum age that dogs can be non-commercially moved or commercially imported into Great Britain.
 - Restrict the ability of unscrupulous traders to move heavily pregnant dogs into Great Britain both commercially and non-commercially.
 - Prioritise the health and welfare of dogs by prohibiting the importation and non-commercial movement of dogs into Great Britain that have been subject to low welfare practices, such as ear cropping or tail docking, in line with our domestic legislation on these practices.



We will crack down on **pet theft**, which is reported to have increased markedly since the start of the pandemic, knowing the devastating impact this offence, and the fear of it, can have on families and pet owners. We have worked across government to set up a **taskforce to tackle this issue**. This taskforce will:

- gather, research and commission work to build a clear evidence base of the scale of any issue.
- consider the issue from end to end, including causes, prevention, reporting, enforcement, prosecution and sentencing.
- make clear and timely recommendations on ways to improve the situation around pet theft.

We will introduce **compulsory cat microchipping** to ensure lost or stolen cats can be reunited with their owners as quickly as possible. In addition, we are reviewing the operation of the current microchip database systems, which also apply to dogs, with a view to introducing improvements. We are also considering reforms to provide greater assurance that microchip database information is checked appropriately, for example in cases where healthy dogs are presented to vets for euthanasia, as campaigned for via the **'Tuk's Law'** movement.

We will also:

- Continue our initiatives to educate the public on how to source dogs and cats responsibly. Launched in March 2020, our National 'Petfished' Communications Campaign aims to raise awareness of issues associated with low-welfare and illegal supply of pets.



- Pursue the **licensing of animal sanctuaries, rescue and rehoming centres** including for cats, dogs and horses.
- Consider changes to **equine identification** and traceability to improve biosecurity and animal welfare with key stakeholders, and we plan to consult on proposals later in the year.
- **Ban remote controlled electronic training collars** ('e-collars'), given their scope to harm cats and dogs.
- Consider further protections for **racing greyhounds**, including further steps to raise welfare standards at trainers' kennels.
- Ensure the **horse racing** sector addresses key animal welfare issues such as fatality levels.
- Ensure that **dangerous dogs legislation** continues to provide effective public safety controls.
- Continue to commit to maintaining high standards of protection where procedures are undertaken on live animals for **scientific or educational purposes**.





Wild animals

We have an ambitious programme of work that looks both at kept wild animals, and at the conservation of those in the wild. This theme covers both and includes:

- We will legislate to **prohibit primates as pets** and potentially other animals. Keepers that are able to provide welfare standards akin to those of licensed zoos will be able to keep their primates under a new licensing regime, subject to conditions and inspections. Ownership of these exotic animals with complex needs will be phased out for keepers unable to meet these standards. We are considering whether these restrictions should apply to other wild animals that are kept as pets.
- We plan to improve current requirements applying to **zoos** including in relation to their conservation work.

Looking towards animals in the wild, the Government is committed to protecting domestic biodiversity. We are considering legislation to introduce a **close season for brown hares and year-round protection for the small population of mountain hares in England**. A close season will reduce the number of leverets left motherless during the breeding season, giving them a better chance of survival. As well as being an important step in hare welfare and conservation, this measure also builds on the work being delivered through our ambitious 25-year Environment Plan and Environment Bill, to improve protection for our wildlife and increase biodiversity.

We will also bring in legislation to **crack down on the illegal practice of hare coursing**. Although hare coursing is prohibited under the Hunting Act, it remains a serious problem. As well as being an important animal welfare issue, its continued practice causes serious harm in rural communities through associated criminality. Our proposals will provide law enforcement with more tools to address the issue effectively, and thereby serve to protect our brown hare population and our rural communities from this barbaric practice.

We will also look to restrict the use of **glue traps** as a means of pest control to help make sure rodents are despatched in a humane manner. Glue traps can cause immense suffering to rodents and other animals that inadvertently fall victim to their use.

In addition, we will:

- Investigate restricting the use and/or sale of **lead ammunition** over all environments. Research suggests up to 100,000 wildfowl die each year due to lead poisoning from spent gunshot.
- Launch a call for evidence on the use of **snares**. Some people consider that snares are an inhumane and unnecessary means of trapping wild animals, while others maintain they are an essential tool in controlling foxes and rabbits. The Government considers it timely to open this call for evidence to make sure it has the very latest understanding on this issue.
- Tackle **wildlife crime**. This is why we recently invited the UN to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the UK's preventive and criminal justice responses which are crucial to curtailing wildlife and forest crime nationally and internationally. We will review and take on board lessons from this analysis.





Next steps

We will engage with all key parties to develop and deliver our plans, including the public, welfare organisations and businesses. In the remainder of this Parliament we plan to implement proposals through a programme of primary legislation, including the Animal Welfare (Sentience), Kept Animals, and Animals Abroad Bills, secondary legislation, and other non-legislative measures.

We want to use the opportunities we have to introduce tangible, enduring change which elevates the way we treat animals to the next level. We will drive this work forward as a key government priority and ensure that all animals are afforded the care, protection and respect they deserve.



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Our Action Plan for Animal Welfare

We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We're responsible for improving and protecting the environment, growing the green economy and supporting our world-class food, farming and fishing industries.

We work closely with our 33 agencies and arm's length bodies on our ambition to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for the next generation, and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.



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