

# ANIMALS MATTER



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



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*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, and polling shows that 71% believe that passing good animal welfare laws shows compassion and concern for those who don't have the power to protect themselves.*

*This briefing sets out the rationale for Government action on some key animal welfare issues. We hope to see commitments on these issues in the Government's upcoming Animal Welfare Strategy. We are also calling for Government and MPs to support an annual Parliamentary debate to monitor and discuss progress on the Animal Welfare Strategy. ■*

## SUPPORT FARMERS TO END THE USE OF CAGES AND CRATES

Every year, over seven million farmed animals in the UK are confined to cages for all, or part of, their lives despite a wealth of robust evidence demonstrating that such cages are highly detrimental to welfare.<sup>1</sup> How can the UK Government claim to be a global leader in animal welfare when we continue to fall behind those European countries which have already banned archaic caged systems?

### WHY IT MATTERS

Cage-free farming systems, which allow each animal to express their individual needs, are already widely: (a) used in the UK and internationally and have been proven to be economically viable; (b) supported by the general public; and (c) endorsed by all UK major political parties.<sup>2,3</sup>

Over **100,000** people signed a petition for the Government to “**End the Cage Age**”.<sup>4</sup>

**82%** of UK eggs are already from **cage-free systems** yet the remainder come from **7 million caged hens** each year.<sup>5</sup>

Circa **150,000** sows are confined in cramped metal crates two or three times a year for up to **five weeks at a time**.

### NEXT STEPS

We are therefore calling for the prohibition of: (a) barren, enriched and ‘combi’ cages for laying hens; (b) farrowing crates for sows. The Government must also ensure that farm subsidies, are specifically targeted to support farmers to transition to higher welfare cage-free systems. ■

## INTRODUCE MANDATORY ANIMAL WELFARE LABELLING ON FOOD

Defra’s own research shows that labelling meat and dairy products with the method of production will help put more money in farmers’ pockets and will benefit the UK economy.<sup>6</sup> Currently consumers do not have the information they need to buy meat and dairy products according to their ethical values.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Consumers have said they wish to see clearer information on food so that they can make informed purchasing decisions. Recent responses to a Government consultation showed that over 99% of individuals and more than two-thirds of businesses and organisations respondents support the introduction of Mandatory Method of Production (MoP) labelling.<sup>7</sup> Introducing MoP labelling will empower consumers to make informed choices about the food they purchase and help to ensure British farmers are not undermined by low-welfare imports.

**84,000 people** signed a petition supporting Honest Labelling.<sup>8</sup>

MoP labelling would benefit **111 million animals annually**, farmers by **£46m/yr** and the economy by **£139.9m** over a 10 year period.<sup>9</sup>

The Government has **already committed** to considering MoP labelling as part of animal welfare strategy.

### NEXT STEPS

We call for the rapid introduction (following a reasonable but limited phase in period) of a mandatory MoP labelling scheme which applies to both domestically produced and imported fresh and minimally processed animal products such as pigmeat, chicken and eggs in a range of settings, as outlined in the fairer food labelling consultation. ■



## LICENSING ANIMAL SHELTERS TO IMPROVE WELFARE STANDARDS

In England, hundreds of animal shelters operate without any requirement to be licensed. While many are run well, some do not provide a standard of care required to meet the welfare needs of the animals in their care. Scotland introduced a licensing system for animal rescues and sanctuaries in 2021, and Wales will consult on a scheme in 2026. England, which has more than three quarters of UK rescues, must not be left behind.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Requiring rescue centres to be licensed would improve the welfare of kept animals by driving improvements in levels of care through the establishment and enforcement of higher welfare standards which both: (a) protects ill-equipped persons from taking on overwhelming animal rescue operations and; (b) provides the public with greater confidence as to the wellbeing of

**223 dogs** were seized from a failed animal shelter, where **57% had to be euthanised due to suffering.**

Currently **anyone** could set up an animal shelter on their property **tomorrow without any expertise.**

**Scotland** introduced animal shelter licensing in **2021.**

the animals they seek to adopt, avoiding unscrupulous third parties wrongly masquerading as rescue centres.

### NEXT STEPS

The UK Government has promised a consultation since 2021 and should close the loophole of allowing unregulated English rescues to undermine the legislation in the other devolved regions. ■

## INTRODUCE CORE ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS IN TRADE POLICY

Previously signed free trade agreements with Australia and other countries permit the import of food products produced in ways that are, or could be, illegal in Britain. UK trade policy must be designed to promote trade in high-quality goods and services, rather than a “race to the bottom” in which good practices in the UK are undercut by lower-welfare imports of agri-food products.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Allowing the importing of animal products that are illegal to produce in the UK effectively offshores cruelty and undermines a century of work improving animal welfare. Trade deals without animal welfare safeguards further risks both UK food security and the strength of our agricultural economy, with the National Farmers’ Union citing the concerns that cheaper produced lower welfare animal products will undercut higher welfare British farmers, forcing them out of business.<sup>10</sup>

**Over 4 million people** work in the UK ‘farm to fork’ **food chain.**

**84% of people** in the UK support putting restrictions **on low-welfare imports** that do not meet UK standards.<sup>11</sup>

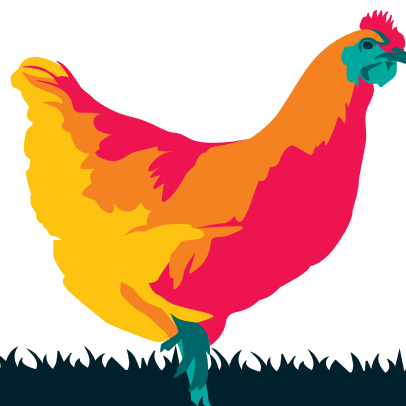
The Trans-Pacific trade agreement permits imports of animal products made from processes **banned in the UK.**

### NEXT STEPS

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 use such core standards to promote trade in higher welfare animal products and help bring up welfare standards abroad. ■



## **BAN THE IMPORT OF HUNTING TROPHIES INTO THE UK**

**Trophy hunting is a cruel and outdated practice which can negatively impact populations of threatened and endangered species in various ways, including disrupting social structures, reproduction rates and causing infanticide, whilst failing to provide adequate or sustained conservation funding.<sup>12</sup>**

### **WHY IT MATTERS**

The fact that 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 absurd. Opposition to this appalling practice galvanised following the killing of Cecil the lion but ten years on nothing has changed. However, Britain can lead the way by passing the world's most comprehensive ban on the import of hunting trophies and ending our involvement in this outdated damaging practice.

**85% of the British public** support a hunting trophy import ban.

Species including **elephants, leopards** and **giraffes** continue to be targeted by UK hunters.

**4 x increase in UK hunting trophy imports** according to most recent data.

### **NEXT STEPS**

A ban has been promised by the UK Government for many years and introduced twice as Private Members Bills, but has so far failed to make it on to the statute books, despite widespread support. The legislation is already drafted and now just needs to be introduced on government time to ensure swift passage through Parliament. ■

## **LEAD THE WORLD IN ENDING THE CRUEL AND DANGEROUS FUR TRADE**

**The UK led the world by banning fur farming over twenty years ago and has since outlawed the sale of cat, dog and seal fur. Despite these prohibitions, the UK still imports real fur from an estimated one million animals kept in terrible conditions on fur farms in countries such as Finland and China. 77% of British people back a ban on the import and sale of animal fur.<sup>13</sup>**

### **WHY IT MATTERS**

There is no such thing as humane fur farming or trapping; 'assurance schemes' have been repeatedly and extensively proven to not provide animals with a life worth living and are run and funded by the fur industry.<sup>14</sup> The keeping of millions of wild carnivores, such as foxes, mink and raccoon dogs, in wire mesh cages for their entire short lives fails dismally to meet their welfare needs, they are unable to act out their natural behaviours with disease and cannibalism being common. In the wild, animals are caught in brutal metal traps where they can remain for days before the trapper returns to bludgeon or suffocate them.

The stressful and unsanitary conditions endured by thousands of animals living in unnatural proximity

**More than 1.5 million people** signed the Fur Free Britain petition.

**Over 1500 fashion brands** and retailers have already **abandoned fur**.

**95% of fur** is produced from **intensive battery cage farm** systems.

on fur farms create the perfect petri dish for viruses to reproduce and even mutate. Mink on almost 500 fur farms worldwide have been infected with COVID-19, and leading virologists have described fur farming as 'a roll of the dice' that could easily cause the next pandemic.<sup>15</sup>

### **NEXT STEPS**

We encourage the Government to support Ruth Jones MP's Private Members Bill to ban the commercial trade and import of fur to ensure the prohibition becomes law in this Parliament. ■



## STRENGTHENING THE HUNTING ACT 2004

Over 20 years ago the Hunting Act was signed into law with a goal of ending the hunting of animals with dogs in England and Wales. Two decades later loopholes within the Act are being exploited by hunters, inflicting terrible suffering to dogs, foxes and deer, and causing distress and violence in rural communities. It's time to close the loopholes and end hunting with dogs for good.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Hunters have described the 'smokescreen' of trail hunting which allows them to continue killing animals with packs of dogs.<sup>16</sup> Senior Police chiefs have highlighted how the criminal offences in the Hunting Act are rendered unworkable by the exemptions within the legislation, allowing hunters to break the law with shocking impunity.<sup>17</sup> Illegal hunting is a serious rural antisocial behavioural issue, with hundreds of reports of hunt members trespassing on private land and intimidating members of rural communities who stand up to them.<sup>18</sup>

### NEXT STEPS

Scotland has already strengthened its hunting legislation to close many loopholes. The UK Government must strengthen the Hunting Act in England and Wales by banning trail hunting and removing other exemptions; adding a recklessness clause to stop the cover of 'accidental' hunting; and introducing custodial sentences as a stronger deterrent. ■

76% of poll respondents wanted to see the Hunting Act **strengthened** to prevent animals being killed with dogs.<sup>19</sup>

Dogs used in trail hunting may be **injured or mistreated themselves** during the chase.

1,400 eyewitness reports of **suspected illegal fox** hunting activity reported in the 2023/2024 fox hunting season.<sup>20</sup>



## ENDNOTES

- 1 *Compassion in World Farming "Scientific briefing on caged farming: overview of scientific research on caged farming of laying hens, sows, rabbits, ducks, geese, calves and quail" (2021) [https://www.ciwf.org.uk/media/7446651/150603\\_ciwf-february-2021-scientific-briefing-on-caged-farming.pdf](https://www.ciwf.org.uk/media/7446651/150603_ciwf-february-2021-scientific-briefing-on-caged-farming.pdf)*
- 2 *Most UK supermarkets have announced that they will no longer sell shell eggs from caged hens post 2025*
- 3 *94% of the British public consider it unacceptable for chickens to be kept in cages with 750 sq. cm of space (i.e. to use enriched cages) and 96% disapprove of keeping pigs in tight cages where they cannot turn around for weeks (i.e. farrowing crates) Bryant Research, Prevalence of 'unacceptable farming practices' <https://bryantresearch.co.uk/insight-items/unacceptable-farming-practices/> " (February 2025).*
- 4 *Petition "End the use of cages and crates for all farmed animals" (2025) <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/706302>*
- 5 *Defra, "Latest UK egg statistics" (2025) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/egg-statistics#uk-egg-production-methods>*
- 6 *Defra "Fairer food labelling public consultation. This impact assessment relates to Part B: Method of production labelling proposals within the above consultation" (2024) [https://consult.defra.gov.uk/transforming-farm-animal-health-and-welfare-team/consultation-on-fairer-food-labelling/supporting\\_documents/Fairer%20Food%20Labelling%20Impact%20Assessment%20%20PUBLIC.pdf](https://consult.defra.gov.uk/transforming-farm-animal-health-and-welfare-team/consultation-on-fairer-food-labelling/supporting_documents/Fairer%20Food%20Labelling%20Impact%20Assessment%20%20PUBLIC.pdf)*
- 7 *Defra "Summary of responses and government response to the public consultation on fairer food labelling" (2025). <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/fairer-food-labelling/outcome/summary-of-responses-and-government-response>*
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- 9 *[https://consult.defra.gov.uk/transforming-farm-animal-health-and-welfare-team/consultation-on-fairer-food-labelling/supporting\\_documents/Fairer%20Food%20Labelling%20Impact%20Assessment%20%20PUBLIC.pdf](https://consult.defra.gov.uk/transforming-farm-animal-health-and-welfare-team/consultation-on-fairer-food-labelling/supporting_documents/Fairer%20Food%20Labelling%20Impact%20Assessment%20%20PUBLIC.pdf) (pg. 21 and pg.22)*
- 10 *National Farmers Union "NFU rebuts Telegraph claims that cheap imports benefit food security" (2024) <https://www.nfuonline.com/updates-and-information/nfu-rebuts-telegraph-claims-that-cheap-imports-benefit-food-security/#:~:text=NFU%20rebut%20Telegraph%20claims%20that%20cheap%20imports%20benefit%20food%20security,-1%20April%202024&text=NFU%20President%20Tom%20Bradshaw%20says,UK>*
- 11 *Bryant Research "Post-Brexit Trade Deals and Low Welfare Imports: An urgent cautionary warning for the UK" (2023) <https://bryantresearch.co.uk/insight-items/low-welfare-imports/>*
- 12 *Chardonnet, B, IUCN "Africa is changing: should its protected areas evolve? reconfiguring the protected areas in Africa" (2019) [https://conservationaction.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/etudesAP\\_configAP\\_EN.pdf](https://conservationaction.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/etudesAP_configAP_EN.pdf)*
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- 16 *<https://www.league.org.uk/what-we-do/hunting/trail-hunting/#smoke>*
- 17 *England and Wales law on foxhunting unworkable, says police chief | Hunting | The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jun/29/foxhunting-law-in-england-unworkable-says-police-chief>*
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- 19 *[https://electoralcalculus.co.uk/blogs/DataTables\\_LACS\\_Jun2024.xlsx](https://electoralcalculus.co.uk/blogs/DataTables_LACS_Jun2024.xlsx)*
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# ANIMALS MATTER

### Robert Espin

Senior Manager

**Humane World  
for Animals**

respin@humaneworld.org

### Harriet Main

Public Affairs Manager

(Westminster)  
**RSPCA**

harriet.main@rspca.org.uk

### James West

Chief Public Affairs Manager

**Compassion in  
World Farming**

policy@ciwf.org

### Arthur Thomas

Public Affairs Advisor

**FOUR PAWS UK**

arthur.thomas

@four-paws.org



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