

Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Bill: Briefing for Committee January 2024

This briefing is on behalf of Wildlife and Countryside Link ([Link](#)), the largest nature and animal welfare coalition in England, bringing together 82 organisations to use their joint voice to protect the natural world.

The Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Bill prohibits the live export of specified British livestock for slaughter or fattening abroad.¹ This is a welcome prohibition as live exports see animals crammed into vehicles on long, stressful journeys causing them to suffer from exhaustion, dehydration and even death. This Bill will prevent animals from suffering these extreme stresses², and avoid them being reared or slaughtered in countries that may have lower slaughter or farming standards than the UK.

At Committee of the whole House on 15.01.24, Link's [animal welfare group](#) urges MPs to:

Advocate swift progression of the Bill

The pausing and then abandonment of the Kept Animals Bill, which contained measures to prohibit live animal exports, has delayed the pace of reform.

As a result, live animal exports remain legal under UK law. Although no live animal has been exported from the GB to the EU for slaughter since December 2020, this is due to a lack of suitable post-Brexit Border Control Posts (BCPs) in French and Belgian ports, rather than the imposition of any permanent barrier to the trade. The creation of new BCPs (or upgrades to existing ones, such as the BCP at Calais) could allow a swift resumption of the trade; in July 2023 Government Minister Lord Benyon stated that the UK and French Governments were in active talks about creating a suitable BCP at Coquelles.³ FOI data from 2019 shows around 35,000 sheep and calves were exported from Great Britain for slaughter or fattening in the EU. New BCPs could see exports resume at a similar scale if a ban is not enshrined in law.

As the Secretary of State for Food, the Environment and Rural Affairs said at second reading of the Bill:

“Given the demand from Europe’s slaughterhouses for livestock, especially British sheep, there is no reason to think that this trade would not resume at the first opportunity.”⁴

¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0017/230017.pdf>

² <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/our-campaigns/ban-live-exports/>

³ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2023-07-10/debates/DFCD59E8-8F9E-47E0-9612-C3F2A5153319/LiveAnimalsExportBan>

⁴ [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-12-18/debates/1BBCDA13-C062-4973-A369-FF8D804679BF/AnimalWelfare\(LivestockExports\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-12-18/debates/1BBCDA13-C062-4973-A369-FF8D804679BF/AnimalWelfare(LivestockExports)Bill)



Failure to pass a legal prohibition on live exports within the current Parliament would extend the time period in which the live exports trade could resume, risking the infliction of unnecessary suffering upon millions of farmed animals.

There is also a democratic imperative to progress proposals contained in the governing party's 2019 General Election Manifesto, benefiting from overwhelming parliamentary and public support⁵, within the current Parliament. This is not a partisan issue: the policy was also included in the Labour Party's 2019 animal welfare manifesto⁶ and the SNP's 2021 Manifesto.⁷ The Liberal Democrats and the Greens have expressed their opposition to live exports for slaughter.

As such, we urge MPs to keep the pressure on the Government to make the parliamentary scheduling decisions required to swiftly progress the Bill through subsequent stages.

Support amendment 5: An enabling power to future-proof the Bill

The prohibition on live exports in the Bill would currently apply to calves, sheep, pigs, wild boar, goats and equines (see clause 1). Whilst these are historically the main farmed animal groups subject to live exports for slaughter, this is not an exclusive list and other animals are exported live from GB.⁸ It is also the case that a lack of historical precedent for a particular animal is not a guarantee that live exports will not take place in future, especially as UK livestock farming continues to evolve.

We believe that it is reasonable for the Secretary of State and the devolved Governments to have the power to extend the export ban to other species, if they felt that the science justified such a move. It may be that the power is never needed, but it would seem sensible to allow for the possibility that other species may need to be added to the exclusion list in future, without the need for further primary legislation.

Amendment 5⁹, tabled by Ruth Jones MP, would provide this enabling power, allowing the Secretary of State (for England), and the Scottish and Welsh Ministers for Scotland and Wales to add additional groups of livestock to the scope of the Bill, through a Statutory Instrument subject to the affirmative procedure. This would effectively 'future-proof' the Bill.

As a comparable example, a similar power exists in the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022.¹⁰ Clause 5 (2) in that Act essentially says that, should the science materialise in sufficient strength to persuade the Secretary of State of the day of the need to identify other animals as sentient beings, other species

⁵ <https://www.rspca.org.uk/-/news-new-defra-secretary-urged-to-ensure-live-exports-ban-is-top-of-in-tray->

⁶ <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Labours-Animal-Welfare-Manifesto.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.snp.org/manifesto/>

⁸ See for example adult poultry: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-29/24345>

⁹ https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0017/amend/animalwelfare_rm_cwh_0108.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/22/enacted>



can be added to the legislation via secondary legislation. The suggested addition to the Livestock Exports Bill would follow this precedent.

An enabling power, if added to the Bill at committee stage, could also pre-empt extensive discussion at future stages of whether particular groups of animals should be added to the scope of the Bill. This simple, holistic measure could help expedite the progression of the Bill through Parliament.

We encourage MPs to speak in favour of amendment 5, to allow the addition of new animals to the legislation by secondary legislation if future evidence directs this course of action.

For questions or further information please contact:

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