

Baroness Hayman of Ullock
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Department for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

Daniel Zeichner MP
Minister of State
Department for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

Sent by email

2nd August 2024

Dear Baroness Hayman and Mr Zeichner,

Re: Opportunities to advance animal welfare

Congratulations on your appointment to Defra, and your respective Ministerial responsibilities for the animal welfare and farmed animal welfare briefs.

We are writing on behalf of animal welfare and wildlife organisations belonging to the Wildlife and Countryside Link coalition to offer our collective assistance in delivering the welfare policy commitments contained in the Labour manifesto. The welcome promise to improve animal welfare will, if delivered, reduce unnecessary suffering for millions of companion, farmed and wild animals and realise the public's strong desire to see more humane treatment of all species.

As policy experts, service providers and campaigners, we stand ready to provide frontline experience, policy expertise and public support to aid the delivery of your welfare pledges. On the commitment to ban trail hunting, we can set out the evidence showing how trail hunting and other loopholes are used to circumvent the Hunting Act, and provide detailed blueprints to close the full range of these loopholes. On the badger cull, we can demonstrate the strong public support and ecological and welfare imperatives to immediately cancel live supplementary badger control licences, cease issuing any further intensive culling licences and to switch to other methods to eradicate Bovine TB. This would prevent thousands of unnecessary badger killings going forward.

Successful implementation of these policies, the wider manifesto pledge to improve animal welfare across the board and the election campaign commitment to complete welfare legislation that failed to progress under the previous government, will materially advance progress towards key Defra nature recovery and food security objectives. Ending the unnecessary large-scale killing of a keystone mammal species will help to stabilise local ecosystems disrupted by a decade of badger culling, boosting nature recovery. Improvements to farmed animal welfare will in turn improve the health of British farm animals, helping to ensure the long term robustness of livestock farms. Improved animal welfare is not just a nice to have, it can be a contributing factor to the successful achievement of departmental priority objectives.

As well as offering our support for your work, we also wanted to highlight two upcoming opportunities for swift progress on animal welfare improvements.

We welcome the review of the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) announced on 30th July. This will provides the means by which shortfalls in the previous administration's plans to recover the natural

environment can be speedily addressed. There is a significant shortfall in the current EIP concerning wildlife crime, the illegal killing of wild animals and disruption of their habitats which causes unnecessary suffering and harms species recovery efforts. The current EIP mentions only international efforts to combat wildlife crime, whilst neglecting to set out actions to improve the prosecution of wildlife crime in the UK. This should be speedily addressed within the revised EIP, with commitments to make key wildlife crimes against habitats and species properly recordable at a nationwide level and notifiable to the Home Office, to enable national data collection and, in turn, strategic and tactical crime prevention. In addition, Sentencing Guidelines should be developed for wildlife crime and permanent funding should be made available for the National Wildlife Crime Unit and police wildlife crime teams.

Just as wildlife crime has been neglected within the EIP, we are concerned that farmed animal welfare improvements have not been appropriately prioritised within Defra's grants. The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway is a welcome funding source for farmers looking to improve their welfare practices but does not adequately prioritise to achievement of government policy priorities, namely supporting industry-wide structural transitions such as a phase out of the use of cages for laying hens and farrowing crates for pigs. The updated Agricultural Transition Plan, which Defra will have to produce when the current iteration runs out later this year, should include increased provision for largescale infrastructure farm improvements to eliminate cage confinement, as well as enhancements to the current Animal Health and Welfare Pathway and measures to boost biosecurity in livestock farming. These welfare improvements should be supported by sufficient budget allocation within the new farming budget, set through the Comprehensive Spending Review.

We hope these early opportunities to improve animal welfare can be seized, to start delivery on the new mandate for welfare reform. We would like to meet with you to discuss these and other opportunities, including the possibility of publishing a new Defra Animal Protection Strategy. Such a Strategy would package reforms together, ensure clarity of ambition across Defra and other government departments with welfare roles (such as the Department for International Trade) and boost the remit of the Animal Welfare Committee and Animal Sentience Committee. There is also an urgent need to introduce the Activity Regulations that will identify the activities involving animals abroad which it will be illegal to advertise or sell in the UK under the Animals (Low Welfare Activities Abroad) Act 2023. We urge you to develop and implement this secondary legislation without delay, taking into account the recommendations from animal protection organisations. We hope to hear from your teams about plans for sustained engagement between Defra and welfare and wildlife organisations, to discuss such proposals further and enable us to support you.

Thank you for your consideration of these policy recommendations and meeting request. We look forward to working with you to deliver your manifesto commitments for animals, and to contributing to the achievement of Defra's nature and food objectives.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Bass
Senior Director Campaigns and Public Affairs, HSI UK
Chair of Link Animal Welfare Group

Dominic Dyer
Wildlife advocate, Born Free
Chair of Link Wildlife Crime Group

Replies can be sent to matt@wcl.org.uk

This letter is supported by the following organisations:

Bat Conservation Trust
Born Free
Compassion in World Farming
FOUR PAWS UK
Hare Preservation Trust
Humane Society International UK
Institute of Fisheries Management
League Against Cruel Sports
Naturewatch Foundation
Peoples Trust for Endangered Species
RSPCA
Whale & Dolphin Conservation
Wild Justice
Wildlife & Countryside Link