



February 2024

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill.

As the highest ranked G7 nation on World Animal Protection's Animal Protection Index, the UK is a world leader on animal welfare. In 2021, the Government's Action Plan for Animal Welfare set out reforms for this Parliament and beyond. Since then, the Government has enacted many of the reforms. This includes passing the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act, recognising the sentience of vertebrate animals and some invertebrate animals. In addition, the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act introduced tougher sentences for cruelty, increasing maximum sentences. The Ivory Act came into force in 2022 and was recently extended to cover five more endangered species. In April, the Government made cat microchipping compulsory.

The Government remains fully committed to delivering its manifesto commitments on animal welfare. I am aware that the Kept Animals Bill, introduced in June 2021, faced the risk of scope-creep. In light of this, and the successful progress made so far with single-issue legislation in this Parliament, the Government will be taking forward the measures originally in the Kept Animals Bill individually when parliamentary time allows. Ministers believe this to be the quickest and most effective way of achieving our aims.

In the King's Speech, the Government announced the Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Bill, which will ban the export of cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and horses for slaughter and fattening from Great Britain, stopping unnecessary stress, exhaustion and injury caused by exporting live animals. This Bill will ensure that animals are slaughtered domestically in high welfare slaughterhouses in the UK, reinforcing the UK's position as a world leader on animal welfare.

This Government is committed to cracking down on puppy smuggling and will ban the imports of young, heavily pregnant or mutilated dogs. Applying strengthened penalties will send a clear message that animal cruelty will not be tolerated and will enable our courts to take a firmer approach to cases where pets are illegally imported. The UK has one of the most rigorous pet travel border checking regimes in the world and I am aware that every dog travelling into Great Britain on approved routes has its microchip and paperwork checked to make sure they are all properly vaccinated and are old enough to travel.

Ministers have also taken action to tackle the practice of puppy farming. Following the introduction of Lucy's Law in 2020, everyone must now buy directly from breeders or consider adopting from rescue centres, which is a major step in stopping the illegal pet trade. If an individual sells puppies or kittens without a licence, they could receive an unlimited fine or be sent to prison for up to six months.



Chris Heaton-Harris

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The Government takes the issue of livestock worrying very seriously and my ministerial colleagues and I fully recognise the distress this can cause farmers and animals, as well as the financial implications.

I welcome the Government's support for the proposed Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Bill, a Private Members' Bill sponsored by Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, which would grant the police greater powers to respond to livestock worrying incidents more effectively - making it easier for them to collect evidence and, in the most serious cases, seize and detain dogs to reduce the risk of further attacks.

I would like to assure you that my ministerial colleagues and I fully recognise the impact that the theft of a much-loved pet can have on both pets and families. In 2021, the Government set up the Pet Theft Taskforce to investigate concerns about a perceived increase in pet theft. This taskforce gathered, researched and commissioned work to build a clear evidence base of the issue and worked with police, law enforcement, and experts to formulate recommendations. Since publication of the report, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice have worked on implementing the taskforce's recommendations.

The proposed Pet Abduction Bill, introduced by my colleague Anna Firth MP, would introduce a new criminal offence in relation to the theft of a dog or a cat. I know that the Government supported the Bill during its Second Reading, and I will support this Bill when it returns to the House.

The practice of non-exempted mutilations such as cropping dogs' ears is abhorrent and has rightly been banned in the UK for 15 years. The cropping of a dog's ears is an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Since the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021 came into force, anyone convicted of such an offence faces being sent to prison for up to five years, or receiving an unlimited fine, or both.

However, I am aware that the importation of dogs with non-exempted mutilations such as cropped ears or docked tails is still allowed under the current pet travel rules. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) ran a consultation on changes to the commercial and non-commercial movement of pets into Great Britain, which included a proposal to ban the import of dogs with cropped ears. Defra is carefully reviewing the feedback gathered from the consultation. I look forward to reading the Government's response in due course.

The Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill, sponsored by Selaine Saxby, seeks to tackle the import of dogs with cropped ears. The Bill aims to introduce stringent measures to regulate the import of the titled pets, ensuring their health and safety during transportation and deterring illegal trade practices. Its Second Reading is scheduled for Friday 15th March. I am supportive of the ambitions of the Bill and will follow any developments relating to this Bill closely.

My ministerial colleagues in Defra are committed to animal welfare and to delivering continued improvements, both in this Parliament and beyond.



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Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris'.

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY