



## MINUTES

15<sup>th</sup> September 2015

**All Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare**  
**1700-1800hrs Committee Room 19, House of Commons**

**Political Members Present:** Angela Smith MP, Baroness Masham, Rebecca Pow MP, Henry Smith MP, Baroness Mallalieu, Sir Roger Gale,

**APGAW:** Marisa Heath, Peter Egan

**Associate Members Present:** Arnot Wilson (Dog Union), Ben Myring (RCVS), Stephen Charlton (Cockapoo Club GB), Michael Webb (Battersea Dogs & Cats Home), Ben Sundell (Battersea Dogs & Cats Home), Linda Goodman (CARIAD), Fiona Wright (Independent), Vicki Craighill (PDSA), Debbie Matthews (Vets Get Scanning), Marc Abraham (PupAid), Steve Goody (Blue Cross), Becky Thaites (Blue Cross), Tom Sheppard (LACS), Tom Quinn (LACS), Lorraine Platt (Conservatives Against Foxhunting), Kirsten Anderson (Network for Animals), Drusillia Summers, Amy Waddell (BVA), John Blackwell (BVA), James Legge (Countryside Alliance), James Somerville-Meikle (Countryside Alliance), Brian Fanshawe (Council of Hunting Association), Kirsten Anderson (Network for Animals), Graham Cooper, (Farmer), Kye Murray (Researcher), Kevin Flack (IFAW), Vanessa Nice-Amoroso (IFAW), Escalouinda Koreman (Four Paws), Dr Daniel Allen, Kay Peggs (University of Westminster), Martin Taggart (NEWC), Nick Palmer (Cruelty Free International), Chris Laurence (RSPCA) Amelia Findun (BVA), Fiona Pereira (Animal Aid), Claire Bass (HIS), Pola Pospieszalska (K9 Angels), Allen Parton (Hounds for Heroes), Angie Greenway (ADI), Shakira Free (Vet Nurse), Nik Oakley (Dogs Lost), Richard Jordan (Pet Theft Awareness), Dr Toni Shepherd (LACS), David Bowles (RSPCA), Sue Starkey (Run Free Alliance), Christine Wynne (Run Free Alliance), Claire Robinson (RSPCA), Jim Barrington (Countryside Alliance), Richard Ryder (RSPCA)

### **Welcome:**

Rebecca Pow MP and Henry Smith MP introduced themselves and explained they would be co-chairing the meeting.

Rebecca Pow MP – This meeting is to review the Hunting Act following the debate in July over proposed amendments to the 2004 legislation. We wish to have an informed discussion to look at both sides of the argument. We need to set out the facts in a balanced way. We have three questions to ask our panel and the first is has the Hunting Act been effective?

### **Jim Barrington (Countryside Alliance/Animal Welfare Consultant/former director of League Against Cruel Sports)**

To answer that you have to ask what was the original aim of the Hunting Act? If it is animal welfare why was it restricted to hunting with dogs? If you are concerned about wild animals surely it needed to be looked

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**Marisa Heath, Secretariat**

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at in a holistic way. There is no evidence which justifies the Hunting Act, just opinion and not research. It is worth noting that many years ago the RSPCA had moral objections but realised it should not be completely banned as it would lead to worse things. Now the RSPCA policy has changed from that yet I am not aware of the evidence that has led to this shift. Prosecutions have been around 300 but the vast majority are for poaching which was already illegal. The real aim was to get hunts abolished and out of the 376 prosecutions only 24 have involved organised hunts and in some examples it has been technical offences such as using three dogs rather than two dogs to catch a wounded deer. That does not seem to be animal welfare focused so I would say little research has been done on the effects of the Hunting Act, lots of money and time was spent getting it onto the Statute Books but not a penny and little effort to see what the effect is. The only money that has been spent on this has been by the pro-hunt groups and the evidence they have seen is that animal welfare has not been improved.

### **David Bowles (RSPCA)**

Today is the Countryside Alliance AGM and I would like to extend my congratulations to Tim Bonner who has become Chief Executive. I hope that we can work to see the Hunting Act enforced to the extent that Parliament set out. The Hunting Act was brought in a year after Parliament introduced their 5-year reviews of legislation so we have never had a review of that particular Act which would have been useful. The RSPCA obviously came at it from an animal welfare perspective and so that is the prism from which I am going to judge whether it has been effective. The words animal welfare do not appear in the Act but if you look at it what it was intended to do then firstly it sought to prohibit hare coursing and secondly, it intended to make provision about hunting wild mammals with dogs with some exceptions. The hare coursing has been effective, we do not have the Waterloo Cup anymore, we do not have legalised hare coursing and that has been a positive for animal welfare. Burns who did the review of hunting in 2001 was clear that hunting hares with dogs seriously compromises the welfare of that animal and indeed there was a number of post-mortems which suggested that the welfare of the hare was seriously damaged. Hare coursing is now being enforced by police forces as there is a link between illegal hare coursing and some rural crime issues such as burglary and intimidation. That is why we are seeing this becoming a priority for police in rural areas, the Police & Crime Commissioner has agreed that hare coursing is a problem, not for animal welfare reasons alone, but for crime in general. Cambridge has shown a huge degree of enforcement on this issue and there has been a knock on effect of reducing rural crime. The Act was supposed to prohibit the baiting and fighting of wild mammals with dogs and we believe it has been successful at doing this. Our enforcement has got a lot better, inspectors go out and apprehend people who intend to dig up wild mammals to bait dogs or use them for fighting. On the statistics, the Hunting Act has been in for 10 years, during the first 9 years we have had 513 proceeded against under the act, 311 were found guilty which is a 60% success rate. Compared to other pieces of wild mammal legislation, for example the Badgers Act, where we had 333 people proceeded against with a 63% success rate, it has been about the same success rate but more people were proceeded against under the Hunting Act. That would suggest it has been effective. Now we need to work out which of those are on illegal hare coursing, using wild mammals for bait and which for red coat hunts. Unfortunately we do not have the data as it is not split down so I think there is a useful piece of work to look at that. Most of the heat is on red coat hunts but the number of prosecutions on this have been far fewer than other incidents. RSPCA have taken 5, League Against Cruel Sports have had 4 successful prosecutions, IFAW has had 4 and the CPS probably another 10. So in total 20-30 successful prosecutions of red coat hunts compared to the 311 people under the entire Act. On stag hunting we have very good evidence because it was done by Professor Bateson in 1997 that hunting with hounds seriously comprises the welfare of the hunted animal. Red deer are not well adapted by their evolution to cope with the level of activity imposed when hunting with hounds. Foxes have very little data and we need more research. We need some wording around the intention of the Act as some people are going out saying they did not intend to hunt wild animals with dogs but it is difficult if not impossible to prove it was not their intention to do it. Tim Boner said one of his greatest successes was ensuring that the countryside is still going hunting and that

is an important quote. "The RSPCA has no problems to hunts going out and are pleased that attendance numbers are growing - our issue is with stopping animals being killed illegally.

**Dr Jeremy Naylor (Veterinary Scientist/Academic Researcher on Hunting)**

It comes down to a large extent as to whether the Act was set up for the moral or measurable outcomes of hunting. The Hunting Act was established following the Burns Enquiry which looked at all different aspects of the matter of hunting mammals with dogs and at no stage was the statement made that there was any evidence that hunting was a cruel pastime the way it was conducted and his conclusion was that any legal means of controlling fox populations was not necessarily any less comprised for the welfare of foxes than hunting as it was known. Despite the amount of attention, time and expense given to the subject the conclusions did not get very far, in most cases legislation is brought about based on evidence based criteria so the question on whether the Act has been effective depends on how you look at it. If you are considering overall welfare of the hunted animal I do not think any evidence exists to say whether welfare has been improved. We have recently addressed some aspects of this with an objective study looking at one of the exemptions of the Hunting Act as there was universal agreement from all sides that there was still a role for the management of fox populations. This Act did not eliminate the ability to kill foxes as populations needed to be controlled. Was the Hunting Act based on objective scientific insight to enable it to be effective? The simple answer is no to this and so it is difficult to measure whether it has indeed been effective.

**Dr Toni Shephard (League Against Cruel Sports/PhD in Behaviour Ecology)**

We can declare that the Hunting Act is effective if we achieved what we set out to achieve in the beginning. If we take the premise that there is no research to show foxes and hares suffer, and cast doubts on deer although Professor Bateson is the pre-eminent behavioural scientist in Britain, than really from a scientific point of view we have to resort to Occam's razor. Has a fox, hare or deer evolved to being chased for long distances by 40 dogs, dozens of hunters on horseback shouting, horns blowing and if a fox goes to ground meaning he is fit and health enough to escape, terriers are sent down the hole to locate it, then it is reasonable to say that no animal has evolved to cope with that sort of stress, that is not natural. The Burns Enquiry concluded whether in relation to deer or other animals, that human interference in relation to hunting sits uncomfortably with the natural environment. Until we see further evidence, any reasonable person can assume an animal having to cope with extreme stresses will suffer, stress myopathy, which causes painful muscle damage, has been well documented in hares who escape predators and let's not forget a third of hunts hunt brown hares, a species in decline and designated a conservation priority. The Hunting Act has at least been effective in helping to conserve these hares if nothing else. It can be argued that the most important role of laws is to act as a statement of society's beliefs sand values and we know the overwhelming majority of people in Britain, more than 80%, declare they are opposed to hunting with dogs. This law reflects that view. Any attempts to repeal or weaken this Act that has more public support than many of the laws on the Statute Book would be a huge slap in the face for democracy.

Lady Mallalieu – I have seen hunting first hand and I have never seen some of things mentioned like baiting. If it does take place it should be stopped. I live part of the time on Exmoor which is a big hunting area but also a big shooting area. The introduction of the Hunting Act coincided with the growth of commercial shooting. What I have noticed is in the old days some foxes would get caught in the hunt but now foxes are being caught by snares and lamping. There is no closed season and this leave orphaned cubs. Far greater suffering has been caused and we often see foxes wounded by shooting. The Act has not improved animal welfare for this reason.

Jim Barrington - Jim Barrington – Although people say there is not much data, there was research done into wounding of foxes by shooting which was ignored as the anti hunting groups were of the position that shooting was more humane than hunting. It was peer reviewed and it shows it is possible that close to 50%

of foxes are shot badly leave them wounded. There are consequences to these activities and you cannot look at hunting in isolation. Other things will fill the vacuum. Thousand of hares were shot on estates when the hare-coursing ban came in as a direct consequence of the Hunting Act. As another example, an increase of 16% by sheep farms using snares has occurred. We need to get a principled piece of law that seeks to prevent any unnecessary suffering for all wild animals based on evidence, not opinion and prejudice.

Dr Toni Shephard - The League campaigns against snares as we believe they are inhumane. There is research out there demonstrating that routine fox control does nothing to reduce the fox population and the Burns Enquiry queried this. Any fox ecologist can tell you that their territorial nature means there is always a large pool of foxes that go from territory to territory so when you kill a fox a new one simply comes into that space.

Henry Smith MP – The next question is some amendments were tabled in House of Commons in July proposing to bring the law in England and Wales in line with Scotland, essentially allowing a greater number of hounds to be used in hunting. Would this have improved the Hunting Act?

Jim Barrington – Improving flawed legislation I suppose would be a good step but that is all it is. We have to be clear what was proposed. When Scottish law went through it was hailed as a highly important piece of legislation by the League Against Cruel Sports who stated that it sought “to protect foxes and other mammals from the sickening cruel blood sport of hunting.” Is it not odd that when you try to do the same thing in England and Wales it is not a minor amendment but a legalising amendment? It was seen as repealing the Hunting Act. There was a lot of misinformation put around by this. It was proposed under a Statutory Instrument which cannot overturn the main purpose the law. This is contrary to what people were saying, that this was repeal, MPs included. They were conning the public. You cannot overturn the law with a Statutory Instrument process. It was the loosening up around an exemption which is already in place allowing the use of dogs which was agreed at the time of the Act.

David Bowles – The amendments would have brought hunting back in via the backdoor. The RSPCA had two issues – first proving the case and it was not proven that there was a problem with only using two dogs. I look forward to JDr Naylor’s research on this subject being peer reviewed and published and I know the Defra civil servants had concerns about it and did not feel it proved the case. If the case has not been proved why should you amend the legislations? The RSPCA believes the legislation on all of the amendments would have had a catastrophic affect, really driving a coach and horses through the Hunting Act. It has been effective on hare coursing and catching illegal people outside of hunts who dig up, bait and use wild animals with dogs for fighting. It is not on those areas that it needs improvement or changing. It is red coat hunting. These are a tiny percentage of a number of cases but the RSPCA have taken 5 hunting prosecutions; won 2, drawn 1 and lost 2 and it is the last one we lost which persuaded us that the problem it is difficult to work out the intention of a hunter particularly when he is following a trial and says he is following a trial or his dogs get disturbed by a fox which they follow. It is difficult to work out the intention of a human so we need to tighten that up and we would like something on the Recklessness clause which is in the Badgers Act where it is clear. It says it is an offence if you intend to do any of the issues or are being reckless to your inactions or that your actions could have any of these consequences and we would prefer to see the legislation tightened up with the Hunting Act.

Dr Naylor - I have been personally involved in this issue and we conducted a study in the Scottish borders looking whether there is a difference in the ethnicity of flushing foxes out from areas of terrain to using guns with a pair or pack of dogs. We conducted this study with the local hunt using a pack of hounds and then a pair of hounds on another occasion. We were able to observe and count how many foxes were flushed and the time taken for them to be flushed. When foxes are flushed from terrain in some cases they just hear the

huntsman and dogs and they will quietly come out to look for another area. However, in other cases they will emerge in a more agitated and rapid manner and the hounds go in after them 'speaking' which is their way of vocalising in a particular way, which is regarded to be when they pick up a strong scent of the fox. We were able to work out the timing of when the hounds went in, when the speaking occurred and when foxes were seen to come out. This was important as in the lead up to the Hunting Act being introduced the duration for which an animal was pursued was considered to be indicative of a compromise to their welfare. This study aimed to provide evidence to help inform this debate in view of the time that was taken for the foxes to be actively pursued. To quickly summarise, the results measuring the number of foxes flushed with a pack of hounds versus two hounds was much greater; twice the number of foxes were flushed and in half the time. So that illustrates the efficacy of the exemption proposed in July which set out to use a pack which was more effective to flush out a fox than a pair of hounds. In many cases the duration of the two-hound pursuit was on average two and a half times greater compared to the pack. The statistical analysis has been looked at independently and it has been put in for peer review and the answers are clear-cut. I think that information will inform the debate and once it is peer review it will strengthen the case. If you take the view that the duration of pursuit is relevant to the welfare then there is clear data to suggest that the duration of pursuit with two dogs is much longer than a pack.

Dr Shephard – I need to take issue with the idea that all this amendment was going to do was to bring England in line with Scotland as that is not true. So the Hunting Act has various exemptions to the use of two dogs to flush a wild mammal as a means to control that species to protect livestock or crops. In Scottish law they can do this using unlimited numbers of dogs, however there were several other proposals in the amendment. You can use two dogs to flush injured animals which you can do in Scotland, however the amendment wanted to not only increase that number but also to widen that exemption to include diseased animals which would have made our law weaker than Scotland. The concerns here are to a trained eye to identify an injured animal is possible by the gait or limp or open wound but to spot a diseased animal using the naked eye is very difficult so you would have found situations where animals were hunted with a full pack of hounds under the excuse that they were trying to relieve its suffering because of mange or something. Another exemption in the Act was the research and observation using two hounds to flush a wild mammal for research purposes. That does not exist in Scotland so our law is already weaker on that point. The draft amendment wanted to increase the number of dog available for that exemption so there would be no limit in the dogs used. This means anyone could claim to be going to flush out wild mammals for research purposes and if they accidentally kill the animal they would not be prosecuted as hunting has to be an intentional activity under the Act. Those changes do not get mentioned, it would not have brought parity with Scotland and our law would have been weaker. There are two areas where the Scottish law is stronger than ours and yet there was no attempt to bring parity on those areas. In Scotland you can go to prison for hunting illegally but you cannot in England with the maximum £5000 fine. There are serious welfare problems with using more dogs as they are much more likely to catch the animal and kill it or wound it before it breaks from cover and is shot. It is also more difficult to get a clean shot on the mammal when it is being chased by 40 dogs and we just had a case where autopsy showed the fox had broken cover and it was only wounded by the shot then killed by the hounds. How many animals are killed by the dogs before a shot is taken and how many are wounded? Those are the questions the civil servants wanted answered in Dr Naylor's paper which were missing.

Angela Smith MP – I believe it is right to say that the study Dr Naylor referred to was seriously questioned by civil servants in 2013 and was not peer reviewed. Can Jim tell us whether the Countryside Alliance was involved in the drafting of the Statutory Instrument and if so how much involvement did the organisation have? The Countryside Alliance were very well prepared with press releases and material for supporter coming out immediately as soon as notice came up about the SI.



Jim Barrington – I have little information on that. I suspect whenever an issue that involves hunting, wildlife control and management arises that the Alliance does have an input. That is normal and sensible but to what degree I am not sure as I am only a consultant to the Alliance.

Dr Jeremy Naylor– The study that we undertook was reviewed by certain scientists and the civil servants did review it but frankly some of the questions they asked were totally irrelevant to the study. We set out to answer specific questions and an example was fox predation. The civil servants asked us why did we not measure the number of lambs taken by foxes but that was never anything we tried to study. We were looking at the efficacy of using two dogs versus a pack of dogs in order to flush foxes out of terrain. It was a tightly designed study. That study has now been submitted for independent peer review.

Angela Smith MP – So it is being peer reviewed at the moment and therefore the Government put the SI down on the floor of the House before the peer review of the study was even completed which is very strange.

Baroness Mallalieu – I am aware of reports put down over how difficult it has been to track down injured animals, particularly injured deer with two hounds currently allowed. There are more injured deer than ever before as a pack of hounds could be used to find injured animals and then shooting them. This was part of the issues taken into consideration during the rationale of the Statutory Instrument to deal with injured animals in wooded areas.

Dr Jeremy Naylor – In undertaking our scientific study we tried to shape it in a way that was relevant to the areas we were looking at. It is interesting that when you take two dogs into an area of say 20 acres you will not find many foxes or flush many out. It is common-sense that you are more likely to come across the foxes with more dogs. There were periods in large blocks of terrain where sometimes it would seem the fox was pursued for considerable periods of time as it was going around in circles with two dogs where a pack would stop that happening.

Dr Shephard – The big worry is that in dense cover and large areas a pack of dogs will act as a pack and the huntsman is less likely to be able to control them. That is why it was limited to two dogs as there would be more control. I do not doubt Dr Nailer’s paper but I have concerns over how many are killed when they are flushed and how many are shot and wounded. I also have doubts that killing foxes in this way controls numbers.

Jim Barrington – Before the Hunting Act went through the only research was on the wounding front by Dr Nick Fox. There were many ridiculous statements not based on research made which saw a law passed and at least having some sort of scientific work even not peer reviewed is a step in the right direction.

Rebecca Pow MP – The third question is how do you think the Hunting Act could or ought to be improved?

David Bowles – I think I have answered this question which is around the intention issue. It is going to be difficult for any prosecution agency to deal with this. The RSPCA has made a decision to hand over prosecution of red coat hunts to police and the CPS and so it is up to them to do that but we believe it is difficult to work out the intention. That piece needs to be improved with the reckless issue. One example demonstrating that the amendment was not just about the flushing of dogs to the fox is that a week before the amendment was discussed there was a strange court case where the police pulled over a guy who had a broken rear lamp and asked to look into his boot. He ran off with a sack over his shoulder and the police chased him caught him and found a live fox in the sack. Who knows what he was doing with that fox but he said he had permission from the hunt to have the fox but he did not have that permission on him. He was

prosecuted because of that but under the amendment he could have waited for a week to get that permission and it could have been forthcoming. Who knows what the man was planning to with a fox in a sack in his car at midnight but obviously it is not likely he was planning to do behaviour studies.

Jim Barrington – The discussion always starts with the position that all hunting with dogs is wrong but it is a very natural process and one which wild animals have adapted to whether it being hunted by wolves or coyotes. The chase is a test and the weak get caught sooner. We rarely hear what people stand for, how do we address wildlife management, what do people want? I understand people disliking certain things but if you were genuine about animal welfare why not have a wild animal welfare law that seek to protect all wild animals from unnecessary suffering in all circumstances and the offence are based on evidence. If hunting is cruel bring forward the evidence and we can go from there.

Dr Shephard – As a behaviour ecologist I cannot let the comment about hunting go. I have seen wolves in the wild and the average size is about 12 individuals whereas the pack of hounds is about 40. Wolf packs are not accompanied by horses, riders, quad bikes, horns vehicles, wolf packs do not send men out in the morning before a hunt to block up every single hole in the ground so that the fox cannot escape and perform its natural behaviour such as going to ground. Wolves do not dig out foxes once they have gone to ground and then shoot them or throw them in front of the hounds. Wild animals do not behave in this appalling manner. So there is no comparison. We would like the Act to have three key changes. We want a reckless provision so if you go out into the countryside and lay fox based scent you have behaved recklessly as true drag hunts use non animal based scents and the hounds are taught to follow them. Secondly complete prohibition of using dogs below ground, as now terrier work is not completely banned. If you were to put a dog on a fox above ground that is an animal fight and that is not allowed under the Animal Welfare Act. Yet if you put it underground and a fight occurs both animals do suffer terrible injuries. Lastly we believe the sentencing needs to be increased again in line with similar legislation like the Badgers Act. This would be a greater deterrent.

Dr Jeremy Naylor – I am not going to introduce emotive language. I like to inform the debate in a rational reasoned way. The huge amount of animal suffering that goes on that does not receive any of the attention and media circus amazes me. It is strange in our educated society that this debate around hunting goes on as it does. The resources could be helping thousands and thousand of animal suffering from welfare issues.

Graham Cooper - I am a farmer who has thousands of free-range chickens and lambs. We are organised and run our farm properly with the right husbandry and so foxes do not affect us. There is no reason to hunt foxes and we should actually be protecting them. I do not accept culling foxes to protect livestock as a good reason to need to hunt or snare or shoot.

Ian McGill – I am a veterinary surgeon and scientist. It is quite clear that there is criminality involved in many ways in hunting but the point I would like to make is if you are a person being chased by two thugs is its scary but you may have a chance to elude them and the same with the fox and the two dogs. If you are being chased by a pack the stress levels must be far greater and Dr Naylor said himself that 50% more foxes survive with two dogs so did he look at actual stress indicators in his study such as cortisol or was it just based on the time? To ne the stress level of a long chase by two could be far less than a short chase with a large pack and that should be researched.

Dr Daniel Allen - In terms of the Hunting Act to see it as a form of animal welfare legislation is the wrong way to look at it. It was apolitical promise by Tony Blair and the Repeal or amendments were a promise by Cameron. As a promise it has been effective to some extent but as a form of animal welfare protection it was never meant to be that. The thing which has become clear from today's session is that it is becoming an

animal welfare piece of legislation. Both sides of the debate have mentioned this and we need to move away from political legacies and work to ensure animal welfare is protected by the Act and where it can be improved.

Henry Smith MP – Thanks to everyone who has listened to this debate as it has been very respectful. We are going onto any other business.

Angela Smith MP – I want to mention the Beagle breeding facility. We do not have much time to look at this issue so can we consider putting it on the agenda for another meeting. The Secretary of State for Local Government Greg Clark has overturned a planning decision by North Yorkshire Council to refuse permission for a beagle breeding facility in the county designed for animal experimentation. The professional planning advice was to refuse the application and the planning board concurred with that advice so it is wrong that the Secretary of State singularly overturned that. Normally it is only overturned if planning guidance has not been followed correctly so this needs to be discussed. There is an important principle of localism as well as an animal welfare issue which has been breached here.

Christine Wynne (Run Free Alliance) – My organisation has worked on this issue for a past few months. The issue refused via planning for this application was based on noise, however the Home Office then made a decision not to allow outside running space owing to risk of disease for the dogs. That was how how it was then pushed through as it was decided that the noise issue was no longer relevant.

Nick Palmer (Cruelty Free International) The key issue is that the Home Office has said in this specific circumstance they consider there would be an unusual risk of infection in the dogs. Breeding facilities not to mention individual dogs go out regularly without getting an infection so it is not clear why the atmosphere around this area would be dangerous. The location has outside runs at the moment so it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the decision not to allow the dogs to go out was put in place to enable them to get the planning permission.

Christine Wynne \_ I have spoken to the Home Office and it is because of the location being near the coast and so seagulls and pigeons may leave droppings which could be cause infection to the dogs.

Henry Smith MP – I think it is right that APGAW look at this and perhaps Marisa can see what might be the best forum to do so.

Angela Smith MP - Additionally a number of us have written to Marisa expressing our concern that the political balance of this group may be comprised by having two chairs from one political party. I value this group hugely; it is non-partisan and is about animal welfare. The perception given by having two chairs from one party is damaging to the group's reputation so I would like to ask if we could meet to discuss the situation and work out how to correct it.

Henry Smith MP - I share your view that the strength of groups like this is that they are all-party to provide them with legitimacy and we have an anomaly here so we will commit to addressing that and see if we can find a good way of moving forward.

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