

MINUTES



The Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare

An all party group for members of both houses at Westminster formed to promote and further the cause of animal welfare by all means available to the Parliaments at Westminster and in Europe

ANIMAL WELFARE QUESTION TIME

Tuesday 17th March 2014 1700hrs – 1900hrs

Committee Room 19

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Please note: APGAW does not necessarily endorse any of the political views presented at this meeting. The aim of the meeting was merely to provide an opportunity for political parties to set out their views on key animal welfare issues.

Political Members: Neil Parish MP, Angela Smith MP, Baroness Parminter, Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP, Lord Trees

Chairman

Peter Egan

Speakers

Part 1: Neil Parish MP (Con, on behalf of Lord de Mauley), Baroness Parminter (Lib Dem, Spokesperson for Animal Welfare), Angela Smith MP (Lab, Shadow Animal Welfare Minister), Caroline Allen (Green, Spokesperson for Animal Welfare), Stuart Agnew (UKIP, Spokesperson for Animal Welfare).

Part 2: Duncan McNair (Save the Asian Elephant)

Part 1: Animal Welfare Question Time

The Chairman open the session and welcomed all the speakers from the political parties and thanked them for their time for this important session.

Slaughter of farm animals

He started the questions focusing on slaughter and asked the representatives what their views were on compliance with current legislation and non-stun slaughter.

Marisa Heath, Secretariat

Tel: 07736 899 547 E-mail: admin@apgaw.org Website: www.apgaw.org

Labour	Recognise this is an issue of growing concern which has sadly got tied up with ethnic and religious issues which is not helpful. Believe can balance religious beliefs and cultural sensitives with good animal welfare. Need to move the debate away from religious issues and for this reason does not support labelling if it concerns labelling food as 'halal' or 'shechita'. However Labour will look to see what the European Commission's report says on this matter and is interested in labelling about whether an animal is pre-stunned or not.
Conservative	Believe the law is correct at present requiring animals to be pre-stunned but also allowing limited exemptions for religious purposes. Acknowledges that a lot of halal slaughter in the UK is already pre-stunned but sadly none for shechita. This is something the Government does need to look at. Agree that the focus should be about animal welfare and not on religion especially if there is a move to labelling. Believe the voluntary use of CCTV in slaughterhouses is a good step forward and this should be encouraged but not just in slaughterhouses also lairages.
Green	Many people will have seen the recent secret filming in a slaughterhouse and been appalled by it. This shows there is a clear need for CCTV in all slaughterhouses as the monitoring authorities (ie the vet) cannot be in all places at once and see everything that is going on. Green MEPs in Europe are looking at non-discriminatory labelling focussing on 'stunned' vs 'non-stunned' and also how animals are reared.
UKIP	Would be concerned if non-stun slaughter for religious purposes was banned tomorrow as could lead to such slaughter going underground and not being properly monitored. Additionally it is likely to be imported from elsewhere. Problem is with poultry that is non-stunned and much of it does not go into the halal industry. It should be noted that New Zealand pre-stuns everything and there are no exemptions for religious purposes. They export this meat to Saudi Arabia who are happy to accept it so it should be the same in the UK. Believes that animal welfare training in Jewish slaughterhouses is better however there should be more training for slaughter men in general.
Liberal Democrat	

Live exports

The chairman then asked representatives their views on live animal exports and what action they would take on this issue.

Labour	Animals should be slaughtered as close as possible to the farm of origin to minimise the journey times. Unfortunately cannot ban this trade as it falls within EU legislation but feel more can be done to tackle the welfare problems around it. Significant concerns remain about the health and welfare of these animals. Labour MEPs are working in Europe to keep the pressure on the EU with regard to improvements in the law and also enforcement.
--------	--

Conservative	The Government's position is clear in that it does allow for live exports but this must be carried out under the best welfare conditions. Unfortunately this cannot be banned due to trade rules but it does need to be properly monitored and the laws enforced. However to do this properly is very expensive and this may (hopefully) price a lot of transporters out of the market. Believe that those exported for slaughter should be transported in the same standards as those exported for breeding purposes.
Green	Very much support an end to this trade and believes more can be done to tackle it. Although ports cannot individually refuse this trade, we could look at updating the Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847 which could enable them to do so. We also need to look at journey times and secure better enforcement right over the EU. Firmly of the view that animals should be slaughtered as close to the farm where they were reared. This is very much linked to the importance of small slaughterhouses.
UKIP	Would look at banning this trade. However even where the journey length and conditions are OK need to consider the welfare issues at the end, for example how the animal is kept or slaughtered.
Liberal Democrat	

Dog breeding

The chairman then moved on to the issue of dog breeding and asked the representatives their views were on the current dog breeding legislation and in particular what action they would take to tackle backstreet breeding.

Labour	Fortunately there is a really helpful degree of consensus on this issue amongst many of the charities and this helps to decide the best course of action. Labour will review the breeding and sale of puppies and kittens with the aim to bring in new legislation under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Clearly there is also a need to look at the pet shop issue alongside that. There is also a big problem with illegal imports (e.g. 2011-2013 there was a 780% increase in dogs from Lithuania) and this should be reviewed too. However there is an increase in sales over the interest and this is something that needs careful consideration.
Conservative	The Conservatives are working a number of charities to develop an effective approach to tackling this. More needs to be done especially with regard to internet sales and illegal importations, etc. These are serious matters of animal health and welfare and there is a big problem with enforcement. With limited funding for this there is a recognition of the difficulty for local authorities to enforce the law. We all need to work together to tackle this.
Green	As a practising vet not a week goes by without seeing health and welfare problems with puppies. There needs to be a proper licensing system for breeding and this should be brought down to one or more litters. Puppies should only be sold over eight weeks of age and they should always be seen with their mother present. There are also big problems with the international trade in puppies and we need much better enforcement at the entry points to the UK. Some good pieces of work by local authorities, however these are starting to fall back due to reduced funding.

UKIP	While new legislation in the UK may make people 'feel good' it may not solve the problems. UKIP would rather approach this pragmatically. The RSPCA should be focusing on investigating puppy farms and the like. Another problem at present that needs tackling is the breeding of dogs with exaggerated features and this is a real scandal. Believe that the illegal importation of puppies is linked to illegal immigrants.
Liberal Democrat	Believe this is a big and important issue and there is a need to review all the legislation relating to the breeding and sale of pets. This includes the dog breeding legislation, but also the Pet Animals Act, etc.

Secondary legislation under the Animal Welfare Act 2006

The chairman then asked the representatives what measures they would look to bring forward under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to update legislation.

Labour	Labour would review the legislation relating to breeding, sale of dogs and pet shops and this is one of the party's priorities. Angela's personal view would be never to keep exotic pets and Labour believes that primates should not be kept as pets. The whole exotic pets issue is an important but complex one that we are only just at the beginning of. Believes it is important to explore measures to identify what species make suitable pets.
Conservative	Need to ensure good standards are kept in pet shops. If cannot ensure the welfare of exotic pets then need to carefully consider whether they should be kept or not. Believes it is worth considering positive lists but this is a real minefield. There also needs to be education of the public to make them realise keeping exotics is not necessarily a good idea.
Green	Need to address internet sales as well as pet shops and breeding animals with exaggerated features. Much more needs to be done. Believe there should not be any imports of exotic pets and a ban on keeping primates as pets as well as potentially other species. Believe that the welfare needs cannot be met in the majority of cases.
UKIP	Believes that by definition keeping exotic species is cruel. UKIP would look to triple current prison sentences for those convicted of cruelty to animals. There is also a real need for education about animal welfare in schools. Trading standards enforce a lot of the laws and leaflets should be given when pets are sold in pet shops.
Liberal Democrat	Believe that a review of the sale of pets in pet shops is key including identifying what make suitable pets. This needs a lot of careful consideration and thought though.

Animal experiments

The chairman then moved on to the topic of animal experiments and asked the representatives what policies and processes they would put in place to ensure greater transparency of such experiments.

Labour	There should be an increase in transparency of animal experiments and a review of section 24 Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. There should be an increase in inspections of establishments and animal
--------	--

	experiments should only be allowed where they can be justified.
Conservative	The debate around the 3Rs is important and must ensure that where we can reduce, replace or refine we should. Data sharing is key and we do not want different companies claiming intellectual property rights over animal tests. However must be clear about animal experiments for medical purposes. It is better these are carried out in places like the UK where there are higher animal welfare standards.
Green	Section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 has no place in a system where we are trying to encourage opens and transparency. However it is very difficult to have an informed and balanced debate about this. Believe that freedom of information should be applied, where appropriate, and data on experiments should be published. Sadly the recently announced ban on testing of household products does not cover ingredients.
UKIP	Believe there should not be any experiments on animals for things like cosmetics or household products. Should be challenging those who are carrying out the experiments on animals especially where the same work has been done before. However it is very difficult to stop animal experiments, especially for medical reasons.
Liberal Democrat	The Liberal Democrats have been pushing for a review of section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Importantly as part of the coalition government have produced for the first time a strategy document for reducing the use of animals in experiments, refining those experiments and replacing them (3Rs). Should encourage alternatives as a good and exiting new scientific industry.

Wildlife

The chairman moved onto the issue of wildlife and in particular whether the representatives would commit to the continuance of the inter-ministerial group on animal welfare, support a closed season for hares, and ban the use of snares.

Labour	Would like to hear from people why they feel the inter-ministerial group on animal welfare has been so useful. What are the pros and cons? On the issue of a closed season for hares Labour wants to look closely at the evidence on this before making a formal decision. The issue of snaring is a strand of the review on the shooting industry that Labour has committed to if it forms a Government after the general election. Recognise one of the key problems with snares is that non-target species are caught in them.
Conservative	Believe that the inter-ministerial group on animal welfare should be kept post the general election. Conservatives do not support a closed season for hares. Different parts of the country have different populations and so a more regional approach may be needed. The Conservatives do not have a policy to ban the use of snares but recognise that more work needs to be done to improve standards. Personally do not like them.

Green	<p>Believe that the inter-ministerial group on animal welfare is good in principle.</p> <p>On a closed season for hares believe that Scotland did a good thing in introducing one and the Greens would support this. Greens are opposed to shooting. Horrified that snaring is still allowed and believe this should be banned.</p>
UKIP	<p>UKIP would keep the inter-ministerial group on animal welfare. UKIP would probably support a closed season for hares but people should understand that while there is an increase in the number of birds of prey then hare numbers will continue to decline. Do not support a ban on snares as believe properly set snares are good and there needs to be at least one measure left to deal with foxes when protecting chickens and sheep.</p>
Liberal Democrat	<p>Would like to hear from people why they feel the inter-ministerial group on animal welfare has been so valuable. Personally not 100% convinced this is the case.</p> <p>The Liberal Democrats would not support a closed season for hares at present. Scotland introduced a closed season and Westminster introduced a Code of Practice on this subject. Need to review the impact of both of these measures.</p> <p>Believe that with regard to snares need a clear set of guidelines but understand that if these are inappropriately they can cause significant suffering.</p>

Wild animals in circuses

The chairman moved on to the issue of the continued use of wild animals in circuses and asked the representatives their views.

Labour	<p>In 2011 Parliament agreed unanimously to ban the use of wild animals in circuses.</p> <p>May not be the most important issue but it does need to be addressed. Labour will ban the use of wild animals in circuses. We cannot pontificate about whaling, dolphin hunting, elephant poaching whilst the use of wild animals in circuses continues.</p>
Conservative	<p>It has taken a long time to get there but we have a Government Bill on the matter and need to just get on with it. In this day and age it is not necessary.</p>
Green	<p>This is an important issue to the public and they want to see a ban and feel very baffled why this has not been done in this Parliament. Having any animals in circuses performing degrading tricks is sending the wrong message out to children who attend. The Green party supports a ban and would stop any animals from being used in circuses.</p>
UKIP	<p>UKIP does not have any specific position on this at present.</p>
Liberal Democrat	<p>Personally would not see this as a major priority issue as the numbers of animals involved is small and there are greater animal welfare priorities.</p>

Status of horses

The chairman asked the representatives about the welfare issues surrounding horses and their views on the 'dual' status horses appear to have sitting between pet animals and farm animals.

Labour	The purpose horses are kept/used for is irrelevant all horses have the same welfare needs and thus the standards should be the same regardless. Do need to have a single national database for horses and reduce the number of passport issuing authorities.
Conservative	The issue of fly-grazing is important and that is why the Government has supported the Control of Horses Bill which should complete its stages through Parliament tomorrow. Need to do more with industry with regard to a national database and passport issuing authorities. Also need to find an effective way for people to report fly-grazing so that action can be taken. England can learn from Wales on this issue.
Green	The welfare issues of horses have been debated for a number of years now and we need to improve the standards for all animals. Need to improve the passport system and have a national database for horses.
UKIP	It is not unreasonable to have a decent passport system for horses, already have this for farm animals. There is a real difficulty with fly-grazing and the impact on landowners. Horses in a bad condition are very visible to the public and very much support the work of the horse welfare charities who tackle this.
Liberal Democrat	There does not seem to be a need for any change in legal status of horses but do need to tackle the passport issue. Have an opportunity later this year with a review of the Equine Code of Practice and should also look more closely at effective education.

Education

The chairman then moved on to education about animal welfare and asked the representatives their views on the need for such information in the National Curriculum.

Labour	A balance must be struck between telling teachers what to do and empowering them. It is extremely important to have consistent messaging amongst the welfare organisations so as not to confuse the public. This also makes it easier for teachers who can then embed it into every aspect of the curriculum, e.g. science, geography, history, etc.
Conservative	The Conservatives have been working on this but personally feel this is an issue where more can be done. Individual teachers can also do more. This is especially important in households where there are welfare problems.
Green	Good education and starting at a young age is very important. Animals suffer due to ignorance and it is important this is tackled. The PDSA wellbeing report highlights some of these issues. Animal welfare should be in the curriculum but need to get education out there much more widely, for example there are massive welfare problems with rabbits which need tackling.
UKIP	This is the place to start if we are to improve animal welfare. It is important to teach people when they are young and this could help improve the situation significantly.

Liberal Democrat	It is a shame we have missed an opportunity to get animal welfare into the National Curriculum as this is important. However there are still opportunities for teachers to do this regardless of any formal inclusion.
------------------	--

Government approach to animal welfare

The chairman finally asked the representatives to set out their views on Westminster’s approach to animal welfare including whether statistics and monitoring were helpful as well as what the single most important animal welfare challenge faced an incoming Government.

Labour	Believe that targets and strategies are very important as well as producing regular statistics so that trends and issues can be monitored. Believe that illegal wildlife crime is the biggest challenge for an incoming Government.
Conservative	The Republic of Ireland has halved TB by cattle measures and a cull of badgers. It is not only the role of Westminster to tackle the problems as it is important there is work with charities and local authorities. The biggest issue facing an incoming Government is the illegal importation of puppies.
Green	Independent monitoring is important but need to ensure Defra is keeping data itself and not simply out-sourcing everything to other organisations. Money is the biggest challenge facing an incoming Government as departments will not be able to do what we want them to do without it. The question will be where will money come from and will it need to be ring-fenced?
UKIP	Education is important and the UK must be stricter on what animals are imported. The biggest challenge facing an incoming Government is Bovine TB. Should gas badgers.
Liberal Democrat	

The chairman thanked the representatives of the political parties for their time and providing their views on a wide range of issues and wished them well for the General Election.

Part 2: Duncan McNair Save the Asian Elephant

The chairman introduced Duncan McNair, founder of Save the Asian Elephants and asked him to provide a short overview of his organisation and its work.

Duncan McNair thanked the chairman for an interesting evening and said that although he had limited time he hoped that his short presentation would encourage members of the Group to help support his work.

Save the Asian Elephant is an organisation made up of various current and ex- MPs, elephant experts and other key people.

Asian elephants are under significant risk and persecution and many are taken from the wild into captivity. Many die in captivity and as we all know elephants have a great sense of their

circumstances and so suffer immeasurably when kept in some horrific conditions in captivity. It is recorded that female elephants often kill their calves after giving birth they are so traumatised by their situation.

People should understand and not forget the practice of 'pejan'. This describes the horrific treatment of baby elephants where they are taken from the wild and have their 'spirits' broken so they submit to a life in captivity. Many suffer and die as a result.

Save the Asian Elephant's purpose is to raise awareness of this issue and encourage Governments to act on it. It is important that trade dialogue with Asian countries should include elephant welfare.

Save the Asian Elephant asks MPs to sign EDM 436 (if they have not already done so) and asks everyone to engage with the Indian High Commissioner.

ACTION: Agreed that APGAW would formally write to the Indian High Commissioner.

The chairman thanked everyone for attending the meeting which had proved to be extremely interesting and said that he felt it a real honour to serve in this role. He also formally thanked Neil Parish MP, chairman of APGAW, for his work over the last Parliament and commitment to promoting animal welfare. He presented Neil Parish with a thank you card and gifts on behalf of the Group.

The chairman formally closed the meeting as the final APGAW meeting of the 2014/15 Parliament.