



Briefing document

Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Bill

On December 18, the Welsh Government laid a [Legislative Consent Memorandum](#) (LCM) recommending that the Senedd supports proposals for a ban on the exportation of livestock to be applied to Wales. The confirmation of the Welsh Government's support for such a ban is very much welcome, following decades of campaigning for such action by the RSPCA. The [Animal Welfare \(Livestock Exports\) Bill](#) is a UK Government bill that seeks to create a new legal framework, prohibiting the export of relevant livestock for the purpose of slaughter or fattening for slaughter. The bill passed its second reading in the House of Commons in December, with the third reading having taken place on January 15 - it will now be passed to the House of Lords for further scrutiny. Meanwhile, the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee and the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee have both been asked to consider and report to the Senedd on the bill by March 15.

The need for a ban on live exports

Due to the significant animal welfare concerns around live exports, the RSPCA has been calling for a ban on this practice for more than 50 years. A UK-wide ban on live exports was previously unachievable as our membership of the European Union coincided with a requirement for free trade between members. Now that we have left the European Union, the UK Government has brought forward the aforementioned bill to end the future exportation of livestock for fattening and slaughter, with this being among the commitments made in the UK Conservatives' 2019 [manifesto](#).

The UK's current rules on the live exportation of animals date from 2005 and are implemented through devolved legislation such as the Welfare of Farmed Animals (Transport) (Wales) Order 2007. The rules set out the conditions for the commercial transport of animals and state that animals should not be injured or subject to unnecessary suffering while being transported. Specific limits on journey times for animals - on land and at sea - are also set out in legislation, alongside the authorisation process for transporters, vehicles and ships. The maximum journey times permitted vary according to species and the conditions of the transporting vehicle. As it stands, up to 19 hours is allowed for unweaned animals such as calves, 24 hours for horses and pigs and 29 hours for sheep and cattle. However, after these periods, if the animals are provided with a 24 hour rest period, the journey time is reset until the destination is reached.

The number of farm animals exported from the UK to Europe for slaughter or further fattening has slowly declined since 2000 - falling from 752,000 to 44,300 in 2016¹. Previously, the majority of farmed animals exported from the UK were sheep, along with a smaller number of cattle, pigs, goats and equines. However, the exportation of livestock from the UK has not happened since the UK Government first announced a prohibition on this practice in 2020. A lack of required control posts at Calais has effectively blocked the only route that was previously used to export animals directly from the UK to Europe. However, this could change if different routes were chosen or if control posts were introduced at Calais. With no ban on the exportation of livestock for fattening and slaughter purposes in place as it stands, this cruel and unnecessary practice could be legally recommenced at any time. Granting legislative consent to

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6912543/>

a ban on live exports would offer an extra layer of protection to countless farm animals in the years to come while further demonstrating Wales' commitment to animal welfare.

Animal welfare concerns around live exports

Long journey times pose several animal welfare risks such as acute stress, dehydration, exhaustion and injury. Animals can experience a range of problems as a result of being transported for long periods in sub-optimal conditions as a result of the use of inappropriate stocking densities with inadequate ventilation/temperature control systems and unsuitable feeding and watering facilities. Live exports involve complex journeys and can be associated with very long transport times, which is particularly problematic as evidence indicates that animal welfare worsens as journey times increase. According to a recently published research briefing on the [Animal Welfare \(Livestock Exports\) Bill](#), the shortest direct to slaughter export journey from GB to continental Europe in 2018 was a journey time of 18 hours. Most domestic journeys to slaughter in the UK are significantly shorter and therefore pose far less risk to animal welfare. Some journeys involving the export of live animals from the UK to Europe have been known to take up to 96 hours, during which time animals could be suffering both physically and mentally.

Other welfare concerns include the insufficient enforcement of existing rules once the animals leave the UK and the possibility that animals can be exported to countries where animal welfare standards are lower than the UK and exposed to practices that would be illegal here. Because of this, the RSPCA strongly believes that animals should only be transported when necessary and that a ban on live exports is both well-needed and long overdue.

Conclusion

The RSPCA strongly believes that all farm animals should be slaughtered as close to where they are reared as possible, resulting in any export trade being carcass-only. Being subject to long journeys in cramped conditions has the potential to cause animals to become mentally exhausted, physically injured, dehydrated and stressed, directly contradicting the Welsh Government's ambition to ensure that every animal has a good quality of life.

A ban on live exports was previously among the commitments made in the withdrawn Kept Animals Bill - a piece of legislation which had strong cross-party support in the Senedd. A focus on the welfare of farmed animals is among the Welsh Government's relevant commitments with the introduction of mandatory CCTV in abattoirs imminent. The introduction of the Sustainable Farming Scheme in 2025 also has the potential to reward farmers who adhere to high standards of animal health and welfare, with the Welsh Government having committed to restricting the use of cages for farmed animals too. The LCM relevant to a ban on live exports therefore provides an important opportunity for the Welsh Government and Members of the Senedd to further demonstrate their support for improving the lives of farm animals in Wales.

As animal welfare is a devolved matter, specific decisions relating to the enforcement of a ban on live exports - for example, giving powers of entry, inspection, search and seizure in relation to live animal export offences to a particular agency - will be made by the Welsh Government. With the Welsh Government having indicated its support for a ban on live exports and that it is appropriate for all relevant provisions to be made in the UK Government's bill, we strongly encourage the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee and the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee to support the LCM that has been laid before the Senedd.

Recommendation: To prevent the future suffering of farm animals as a result of long journeys in cramped conditions, we strongly recommend that the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee and the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee supports the LCM on live exports.