The UK's Animal Protection Framework:

A review of current legislation, policy and standards



2026

A critical analysis of animal protection and welfare in the UK, analysing compliance and enforcement, and identifying gaps preventing progress.

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Introduction

The United Kingdom is frequently described as a world leader in animal welfare. It has an extensive body of legislation governing the treatment of companion animals, farmed animals, animals used in scientific research, captive wild animals and wildlife. This framework includes broad duties of care, species-specific protections, restrictions on particular actions and, in some cases, the complete prohibition of practices considered inherently incompatible with acceptable welfare standards.

However, the existence of legislation does not in itself guarantee effective protection. Animal welfare law in the UK is divided across multiple Acts, regulations, government departments, enforcement bodies and devolved administrations. This creates a complex and sometimes inconsistent framework in which legal protections vary according to an animal's species, use, ownership status and geographical location. The practical value of these protections also depends heavily on inspection, monitoring, enforcement, prosecution and sentencing.

This report reviews the primary legislation and policy governing animal welfare and animal protection in the UK. It examines the legal framework applying to animals under human control, wild animals, and animals used in scientific procedures. It also considers relevant government strategies, assimilated European Union law, devolved legislation and international agreements.

Particular attention is given to the distinction between welfare-based and abolitionist approaches. Most UK law permits the ownership and use of animals provided that minimum welfare requirements are met and unnecessary suffering is avoided. A smaller number of laws prohibit particular industries or activities entirely. Examining this distinction helps reveal the underlying assumptions of the legal framework and the extent to which it prioritises animal interests when they conflict with economic, commercial or human interests.

The report also evaluates the gap between legislation and practice. It considers whether enforcement bodies have sufficient resources and authority, whether penalties reflect the seriousness of offences, whether regulatory breaches are detected consistently and whether government policy is reflected in action. Case studies and available compliance data are used to illustrate areas in which apparently strong legal protections have been weakened by delayed implementation, limited inspections, fragmented responsibility or inadequate consequences for non-compliance.

The purpose of this review is to assess whether the current system delivers meaningful protection for sentient animals and to identify where reform is required. The report considers the strengths of the present framework, but also examines outdated provisions, legal inconsistencies, enforcement failures and areas in which animals remain excluded from effective protection.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of the UK's legal animal protection framework must be judged by the outcomes it produces. A credible animal protection system requires clear duties, modern and evidence-based standards, independent oversight, properly resourced enforcement and penalties capable of preventing repeated harm. This report seeks to provide a foundation for the development of a more coherent, transparent and effective approach to animal policy and legislation across the United Kingdom.

Current UK Animal Welfare Legislative Framework

The UK Government sets the legal requirements for animal welfare and/or protection within Acts of Parliament. Primary legislation may confer powers on ministers or other specified authorities to make secondary legislation, including regulations, providing more detailed legal requirements. There are numerous legislative Acts which provide protection to animals, at varying degrees, with the Animal Welfare Act 2006 forming the principal general animal welfare legislation in England and Wales. The Government also periodically announces certain strategies which are meant to keep progression of welfare developing and relevant through government policy. Acts and associated regulations may also establish enforcement powers, offences and penalties for non-compliance.

Animals are generally treated as property in English law and therefore do not possess legal personhood. However, since it has long been understood that animals are living beings, and not inanimate objects, they have been afforded further protections through specific legislations related to their welfare needs and protection. Recently, they have been recognised in UK law not just as living beings, but sentient beings, which have the ability to feel physical sensation and emotions. Despite statutory recognition of animal sentience, animals do not possess legal personhood and remain primarily protected through welfare legislation governing human conduct towards them. As discussed throughout this report, this distinction is significant from an animal-rights perspective because animals are protected as the objects of legal duties rather than as independent holders of legal rights.

The UK framework is built around the principle that those responsible for animals have a legal duty to safeguard welfare and prevent unnecessary suffering[1]. The philosophical basis of UK welfare law is that animals are living beings and, as of recently, sentient beings, so therefore we as a civil society have a duty of care and obligation to protect them. The legislative responsibility to fulfil welfare needs primarily falls on the owner for companion animals, the farmer for farmed animals, and the laboratory staff for animals used in experiments. Wild-living animals are generally not subject to the same statutory duty-of-care framework as animals under human control. Instead, their protection is primarily governed through wildlife and conservation legislation, which prohibits or regulates particular activities such as killing, taking, disturbing or trading protected species. Where a wild animal comes under human control, however, animal welfare legislation may also become applicable.

There are two philosophical concepts behind animal legislation: abolitionism and welfareism. Abolitionism opposes the control and ownership of any animal, seeking to end inherently exploitative acts such as killing animals for consumption, using animals in experiments, or keeping wild animals captive for entertainment purposes[2].

[1] APGAW (no date) *Current Legislation* https://apgaw.org/current-legislation/
[2] Wrenn, C. (2012) 'Abolitionist animal rights: critical comparisons and challenges within the animal rights movement', *Interface*, 4(2), 438-458.

Abolitionism is often conflated with welfareism, despite having conflicting views on the rights and purposes of animals. On the other hand, welfareism is the belief that use and control of animals is morally neutral, but good welfare requires measures to be taken in order to minimise mental and physical suffering in relation to its environment as much as possible[3]. For example, welfarism allows for animals to be kept and killed for food, but requires the animals be looked after while they are alive in conditions which meet their needs, and the animals are slaughtered in the least painful and distressing way possible. The welfare framework comprises the Five Welfare Needs, which were developed from the internationally recognised Five Freedoms. The Five Welfare Needs provide the central framework through which the Animal Welfare Act 2006 defines the welfare needs that a person responsible for an animal must take reasonable steps to meet. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 states the needs which need to be met:

1. “its need for a suitable environment
2. its need for a suitable diet
3. its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
4. any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals, and
5. its need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.”[4]

UK legislation primarily embodies welfaristic frameworks, such as the Animal Welfare Act 2006, but also contains some legislation which comes from an abolitionist perspective, such as the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act, which prohibits the farming of animals for fur with no exceptions. Legislation which provides protection for animals against human control or interference, but provides exemptions as to when they are allowed to be harmed or killed, such as the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, is still a welfarist framework as it still permits use and control by humans, reducing the animals’ right to exist independently from humans.

This section analyses the overall legislative structure, the main animal protection legislation, regulations and policy, and examines the effectiveness of each one through enforcement and compliance.

Legislative Structure: Acts, Regulations and Government Policy

The legislative structure for animal protection in the UK is complicated. It consists mostly of primary legislation (main Acts of Parliament and Acts of the devolved legislatures), and secondary legislation (statutory instruments). Primary legislation for animal welfare and protection can be categorised into three main areas: welfare of animals under human control, protection and conservation of wild animals, and welfare of animals used for scientific experiments and regulatory testing. Secondary legislation provides further information on species-specific and activity-specific governance. Secondary legislation is commonly made through statutory instruments, including orders, rules and regulations, the

[3] British Veterinary Association (no date) *Animal Welfare* https://www.bva.co.uk/take-action/our-policies/animal-welfare/
[4] Animal Welfare Act 2006 c.4 Section 9 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/

latter being the most commonly used for animal welfare and protection legislation. These regulations are set out by bodies or people who have been given that authority within the Act, including ministers and Government departments[5]. Defra (Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) makes the secondary legislation for most animal welfare and wildlife protection Acts, whereas the Home Office sets out regulations for Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1989 (ASPA) in England, Wales and Scotland, which covers animals used in scientific experiments and regulatory testing[6].

Animal welfare is substantially a devolved policy area in the UK. Consequently, legislation and policy may differ between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The UK Parliament continues to legislate for England and, where constitutionally appropriate, may enact legislation extending to one or more devolved nations, while the Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru and Northern Ireland Assembly can legislate within their respective devolved competences. As a result, many areas of animal welfare are governed by separate or differing legislation across the four nations. One important exception to much of this territorial divergence is ASPA, which provides a common statutory framework regulating the use of protected animals in scientific procedures across the UK. However, its administration differs territorially: the Home Office regulates ASPA in England, Scotland and Wales, while the Northern Ireland Department of Health is responsible for licensing and compliance in Northern Ireland.

In addition to UK legislation, the UK was a member of the EU until 2020, and some of the existing EU legislation which the UK was subject to was carried over to maintain continuity. The body of EU laws carried over into UK law is called EU assimilated law. A large number of these laws relate to the welfare of farmed animals.

Within the different categories of animals are different areas which are governed. Companion animals are governed through transport, breeding, licensing and ownership standards. Farmed animals are governed through housing, transport, slaughter and husbandry standards. Zoo and captive wild animals are governed through housing, licensing, inspections, and conservation and education obligations. Animals used in labs are governed mainly through licensing of establishments and procedures, and compliance with housing, licence permissions, euthanaisa, procedures, and species-specific rules. Wild-living animals are generally not subject to the duty of care provisions of the Animal Welfare Act because they are not under human control, so they are governed differently by various Government bodies through designating protected species and environmental conservation, and prohibitions on taking and trading wild animals.

Some Acts which are considered by some to be part of the animal welfare framework have been omitted from this section, as their primary purpose is not to protect animals, but public safety and industry and commercial frameworks instead. This includes the Animal Health

[5] UK Government (no date) *Understanding Legislation* https://www.legislation.gov.uk/understanding-legislation

[6] Home Office (2026) *Statutory guidance Code of practice for the care and accommodation of animals bred, supplied or used for scientific purposes (accessible)* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-and-accommodation-of-animals-in-science-2026-code-of-practice/code-of-practice-for-the-care-and-accommodation-of-animals-bred-supplied-or-used-for-scientific-purposes-accessible

and Welfare Act 1984[7], and the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991[8]. The Animal Health and Welfare Act 1984 has a misleading title, because it actually covers foot-and-mouth disease, and sets out the powers of the state to kill any animal which has it, is suspected of having it, or has been in a herd with another who has it or is suspected of having it. The law does not require a positive foot-and-mouth disease test to authorise the killing of an animal[9].

Furthermore, the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991[10] sets out the powers of the state to euthanise any dog considered to be dangerous, and bans five breeds of dogs: XL Bully, Pit Bull Terrier, Japanese Tosa, Dogo Argentino and Fila Brasileiro (unless the dog has an authorised exemption). Consequently, prohibited dogs that cannot lawfully remain with their existing keeper cannot simply be rehomed in the same way as other dogs, creating circumstances in which dogs may be destroyed despite having no individual history of aggressive behaviour. Critics of the Act argue that evidence suggests breed-specific legislation has no benefit on society and helps to protect people from dog bites. In fact, a review conducted in 1996 found no reduction in dog bites compared to before the law was enacted[11], and a more recent study found that the number of reported dog bites tripled between 1998 and 2018[12]. Breed-specific legislation does not directly address the multiple factors associated with aggressive behaviour and dog bites, including breeding, socialisation, training, treatment, environment and responsible ownership. Instead, it generalises the behaviour of a whole breed, and as a result numerous dogs have been killed despite never biting or displaying aggressive behaviour[13].

Overall, the UK has several animal welfare and protection laws for kept animals, wild-living animals and animals used in research. They hold high standards for welfare, placing the UK as one of the world's leaders for animal welfare. However, enforcement is equally important to the animal welfare framework, because without it the legislation is meaningless.

This section will review relevant animal welfare and protection Acts, regulations and government strategies. It will then evaluate the enforcement and compliance of each Act and the regulations.

Animals under human control

[7] Animal Health and Welfare Act 1984 c. 40 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1984/40/contents
[8] Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 c. 65 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1991/65/contents
[9] Animal Health and Welfare Act 1984 c. 40. Schedule 3. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1984/40/contents
[10] Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 c. 65 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1991/65/contents
[11] Klaassen B, Buckley JR, Esmail A (1996) 'Does the dangerous dogs act protect against animal attacks: a prospective study of mammalian bites in the accident and emergency department', *Injury*, 27(2):89-91. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8730379/
[12] Tulloch, J.S.P. et al (2021) 'English hospital episode data analysis (1998–2018) reveal that the rise in dog bite hospital admissions is driven by adult cases'. *Scientific Reports* 11:1767. https://researchportal.ukhsa.gov.uk/en/publications/english-hospital-episode-data-analysis-19982018-reveal-that-the-r/
[13] Shepherd, K. (2021) 'Has breed-specific legislation done what it set out to do?', *British Veterinary Association*, 17 August. [blog post] https://www.bva.co.uk/news-and-blog/blog-article/has-breed-specific-legislation-done-what-it-set-out-to-do/

The Animal Welfare Act 2006

The Animal Welfare Act 2006[14] is the overarching legislation in England and Wales which governs the treatment of animals under human control (except any activity lawfully carried out under ASPA, which this report discusses). It places a duty of care onto owners and caretakers, replacing the Protection of Animals Act 1911[15] which pricipally provided provisions for dealing with perpetrators of cruelty after it had occurred. The 2006 Act combines prevention of harm, promotion of welfare, licensing powers, enforcement powers, prosecution and post-conviction powers for companion animals, farmed animals, animals used in entertainment, and service animals into one overarching legislation, consolidating and modernising several separate older Acts such as the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999[16], The Pet Animals Act 1951[17], Animal Boarding Establishments Act 1963[18], and Riding Establishments Act 1964[19] (although these Acts are still in force and have not been repealed).

The Act applies to England and Wales, with both countries having their own secondary legislation under the Act. Scotland has its own overarching animal welfare legislation titled Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006[20], and Northern Ireland has the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011[21].

Numerous regulations have been made under the Act, as it covers a broad subject with many areas and different categories of animals, including companion animals and farmed animals. England's regulations include (but are not limited to):

- The Mandatory Use of Closed Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses (England) Regulations 2018[22]. These regulations were introduced in 2018 with the aim of providing better protection for farmed animals against non-compliance in slaughterhouses. The CCTV is held for 90 days so incidents can be rewatched and shared with any relevant bodies.
- Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007[23] provides the legal minimum welfare requirements which must be met, specific to farmed animals.
- Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007[24] identifies certain mutilations which are allowed. Mutilations are generally prohibited in the Act, but some exemptions are made for farm animals. Mutilations which are exempt, subject

[14] Animal Welfare Act 2006 c.45 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/
[15] Protection of Animals Act 1911 c. 27 (Regnal. 1 and 2 Geo 5) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/1-2/27
[16] Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999 c. 11 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1999/11/2018-10-01
[17] The Pet Animals Act 1951 c. 35 (Regnal. 14 and 15 Geo 6) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/14-15/35
[18] Animal Boarding Establishments 1963 c. 43 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1963/43
[19] Riding Establishments Act 1964 c. 70 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/70
[20] Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 asp. 11 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/11/
[21] Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 c. 16 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/16/
[22] The Mandatory Use of Closed Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses (England) Regulations 2018 No.556 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/556/contents/made
[23] Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 No. 2078 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/2078/
[24] The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007 No. 1100 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/1100/

to species-specific restrictions, include dehorning, tattooing, freeze branding, hot branding, nose ringing, tail docking, tooth reduction, and beak trimming, dubbing, and de-toeing of birds. Some of these procedures, such as dubbing, are highly controversial because not only is it painful, it interferes with the birds' ability to regulate their body temperature during hot weather[25]. Many of these invasive and painful procedures can be lawfully carried out without anaesthetic or painkillers, and do not have to be carried out by a trained veterinary professional, but rather can be carried out by a farmer. There is minimal oversight on these procedures which would be banned or compulsory to be carried out by a veterinary professional on a companion, service or captive wild animal. The existence of these exemptions demonstrates that the legal treatment of invasive procedures differs substantially according to species and the purpose for which an animal is kept.

In England, Defra also publishes a range of species-specific codes of practice that provide guidance on meeting legal obligations under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and associated regulations. Examples include the Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Cattle, and the Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Sheep. While these codes are not legislation in themselves, they help explain to the practitioner what is required of them to meet legal minimum standards in a less complex way than legislation. Although failure to comply with a code does not in itself necessarily constitute an offence, the codes may be relied upon as evidence in legal proceedings where relevant to determining whether statutory welfare requirements have been met.

Compliance and Enforcement

Different legislation is enforced by different entities. In England, the large majority of animal welfare and protection legislation falls into Defra's remit, including laws and regulations for farmed animals, companion animals and animals used for entertainment. This includes the large number of EU laws covering farmed animals which were assimilated into UK law after Brexit. Responsibility for monitoring compliance with and enforcing the Act is divided between several bodies, including the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), local authorities and the Food Standards Agency (FSA), depending on the activity and setting concerned. APHA is an agency sponsored by Defra, and has operational responsibility for monitoring compliance with welfare legislation, including carrying out on-farm inspections, and works alongside local authorities. Local authorities have significant formal enforcement responsibilities, including investigating offences and, where appropriate, pursuing prosecutions. The FSA is a non-ministerial department which regulates food safety by working with authorities, and employs inspectors in slaughterhouses and meat processing plants to ensure legal standards of compliance (including animal welfare standards) are being met[26]. The FSA is responsible for inspecting slaughterhouses and enforcing animal-welfare compliance on behalf of Defra and the Welsh Government. Furthermore, Trading Standards and Animal Health Office are responsible for dealing with referred reports of non-compliance in slaughterhouses. Farmed animals, despite being covered by the Act, are often treated differently in terms of enforcement and penalties for contravening the Act.

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[25] Hester, P.Y. et al (2015) 'Effect of partial comb and wattle trim on pullet behavior and thermoregulation,1', *Poultry Science,* 94(5), pp. 860-866. https://doi.org/10.3382/ps/pev066

[26] Food Standards Agency (no date) *Who we are* https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/food-standards-agency/about

Significant concern has been raised regarding compliance and enforcement issues with farmed animal protection.

Between 2016-2022, the FSA reported 34,756 Critical and Serious non-compliance reports in English and Welsh slaughterhouses. The number of non-compliance incidents grew by 18% between 2016-2019[27]. Critical non compliance is defined as "welfare practices were observed as failing to comply with legislative requirements, and there was evidence of animals suffering avoidable pain, distress or suffering during their killing and related operations or a contravention poses a serious and imminent risk to animal welfare."[28] Serious non-compliance is defined as “welfare practices were observed as failing to comply with the requirements of legislation and there was no potential risk to animals. There were no animals experiencing any avoidable pain, distress, or suffering.”[29] Between 2016-2022, 93% of non-compliance incidents are resolved through sharing with the relevant authority (primarily either Trading Standards or Animal Health Office), 5% are resolved through written or verbal advice, and only 1% are resolved through a welfare enforcement notice or being referred for investigation[30]. The scale of recorded non-compliance, combined with limited transparency regarding the eventual outcomes of cases referred between enforcement authorities, raises questions regarding the effectiveness and consistency of enforcement. These concerns are consistent with the Animal Sentience Committee's wider findings regarding insufficient detection of offences, inconsistent enforcement and weaknesses in inter-agency coordination.

Between 2016-2022, local authorities secured 667 convictions for animal health and welfare violations in England, Scotland, and Wales. 82% of these convictions were for violations of animal health and welfare legislation on the farm, followed by during transport (16%). In Northern Ireland, 7,326 inspections were carried out on animal farming premises between 2017-2022, 700 of which were as a result of a report; 175 of these inspections confirmed animal welfare violations. In 2022, inspections found 83% compliance on animal farming premises, a large decline compared to 91% in 2021[31].

Pigs are one of the farmed animal species which suffer without proper enforcement of animal cruelty legislation. Around 90% of pigs in England are stunned and killed by CO2 gas. Despite the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 stating that stunning and killing methods must ensure the rapid and effective stunning and killing of an animal[32], gas stunning can take up to a minute for the pig to be rendered unconscious or killed, meaning they struggle and panic while being gassed; the term ‘rapid’

[27] A-LAW (2024) *Animal Welfare in the UK: Part 2*. Shrewsbury, UK: A-LAW https://www.alaw.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Animal-Welfare-in-the-UK-Part-2-Enforcement-and-Oversight-in-Practice-Dec-2024.pdf
[28] FSA (no date) Animal Welfare Non-Compliance Data: Explanatory Note, page 3. Available at https://fsa-catalogue2.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/AW+Non-compliance+Supporting+Final.pdf
[29] FSA (no date) *Animal Welfare Non-Compliance Data: Explanatory Note, page 3*. Available at https://fsa-catalogue2.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/AW+Non-compliance+Supporting+Final.pdf
[30] A-LAW (2024) *Animal Welfare in the UK: Part 2*. Shrewsbury, UK: A-LAW https://www.alaw.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Animal-Welfare-in-the-UK-Part-2-Enforcement-and-Oversight-in-Practice-Dec-2024.pdf
[31] A-LAW (2024) *Animal Welfare in the UK: Part 2*. Shrewsbury, UK: A-LAW https://www.alaw.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Animal-Welfare-in-the-UK-Part-2-Enforcement-and-Oversight-in-Practice-Dec-2024.pdf
[32] The Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015 No. 1782, Schedule 1 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/1782/schedule/1

is not defined by a length of time, meaning this is not unlawful. The Government was first advised to phase out gas stunning by the Farm Animal Welfare Committee in 2003, and in 2025 the Animal Welfare Committee published a report which again urged the phase-out of this method within the next five years[33] as they have evidence that gassing causes pain, distress and fear. 23 years after the first advice was given, the Government has still not banned gas stunning, and instead reopened a CO2 plant in 2026 to 'sustain animal slaughter' amid fears of CO2 gas shortages as a result of the Iran war[34]. CO2 gas stunning is favoured by the industry over higher welfare alternatives, such as argon gas stunning, due to commercial cost; Argon gas stunning with added capacity costs £1.49 per pig, whereas CO2 gas stunning costs 42p per pig[35].

Inspection and monitoring systems also face practical limitations. Animal welfare enforcement is divided between multiple national and local bodies, and concerns have been raised regarding resource constraints, inconsistent enforcement, inter-agency coordination and the detection of offences. Resource constraints often affect the frequency and scope of inspections, while certain sectors rely heavily on risk-based or complaint-led approaches rather than routine oversight. In remote locations or extensive farming systems, monitoring welfare conditions can be particularly challenging. Staffing and funding limitations continue to affect the capacity of enforcement agencies and organisations responsible for animal care. Regulatory bodies may face competing priorities and limited budgets, while organisations themselves can experience difficulties in recruiting and retaining suitably trained personnel. Ensuring that staff possess the necessary knowledge and skills to implement welfare standards consistently requires ongoing investment in training and professional development. The Animal Sentience Committee specifically recommended minimum resource allocation for enforcement authorities and improved APHA capacity; the Government acknowledged enforcement challenges, although it rejected the proposal for a single central body/minimum allocation[36].

In 2025, the Government announced its new Animal Welfare Strategy for England[37]. Legislation alone cannot achieve the desired outcomes, which is why Government policy is important. It helps raise standards and implement change in specific areas by working with relevant stakeholders and providing support to those who need it. The policy focuses around working with government, industry, scientists, charities and civil society organisations to:

- introduce stricter regulations and addressing loopholes around breeding dogs and cats, including puppy farming;

[33] Defra (2025) *Opinion on the welfare impacts on pigs of high concentration CO2 gas stunning and of potential alternative stunning methods.* London: Defra. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/opinion-on-carbon-dioxide-gas-stunning-of-pigs-and-alternative-methods/opinion-on-the-welfare-impacts-on-pigs-of-high-concentration-co2-gas-stunning-and-of-potential-alternative-stunning-methods#recommendations

[34] Montague, B. (2026) 'Pig gas slaughter 'backed by ministers', *The Ecologist.* 15 May https://theecologist.org/2026/may/15/pig-gas-slaughter-backed-ministers

[35] Driver, A. (2026) 'NPA welcomes report highlighting challenges around CO_2 ban in abattoirs', *National Pig Associatiobn* [blog post], 18 May. https://nationalpigassociation.co.uk/npa-welcomes-report-highlighting-challenges-around-co%E2%82%82-ban-in-abattoirs/

[36] Defra (2025) *Government response to Animal Sentience Committee: report on the due regard to animal welfare – legislative compliance and enforcement.* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-animal-sentience-committees-report-on-animal-welfare-legislation-enforcement/government-response-to-animal-sentience-committee-report-on-the-due-regard-to-animal-welfare-legislative-compliance-and-enforcement

[37] Defra (2025) *Animal Welfare Strategy for England* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-welfare-strategy-for-england/animal-welfare-strategy-for-england

- ban snare traps, introduce a close season for hares, and ban trail hunting;
- consult on phasing out the use of cages in farming, phase out the use of carbon dioxide (CO2) to stun pigs, and introduce standards for the killing of fish.

Since the UK Government announced this strategy, it has reopened a CO2 gassing facility to facilitate the high demand for pig meat, despite admitting that it causes fear, distress and pain[38]. Furthermore, the Strategy itself is a non-statutory policy document and does not create a general legally enforceable obligation requiring the Government to implement each commitment within the stated timeframe. Many of its proposed reforms will therefore depend on subsequent legislation, consultation, regulation or administrative action.

A number of further animal-welfare Acts have also been enacted since the Animal Welfare Act 2006, some amending the 2006 Act directly and others establishing separate protections or regulatory frameworks. This report will analyse the following:

- Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019
- Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021
- Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022
- Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Act 2024
- Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Act 2025

These Acts perform different functions within the wider animal-protection framework, including strengthening criminal penalties, modifying the treatment of service animals under cruelty legislation, establishing governmental scrutiny of animal sentience, and regulating the movement of animals into and out of Great Britain or the UK.

Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019

The Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019[39], also known as Finn's Law, amends Section 4 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to protect service animals, including dogs and horses, from cruelty and assault by disallowing claims of self-defense by those who attack them. It is named after Finn, a police dog who was stabbed by a man he was pursuing. Finn's attacker was only charged with criminal damage due to a gap in the law[40]. Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019 applies to England and Wales, and closes this loophole.

Enforcement and Compliance

The Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019 is enforced through criminal investigation by the police and prosecution by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Not only are perpetrators of harm towards service animals not allowed to claim self-defence, but the harming of the service animal may constitute a crime in itself as if it is deemed to have caused unnecessary suffering to an animal, and the perpetrator can be prosecuted under

[38] Montague, B. (2026) 'Pig gas slaughter 'backed by ministers', *The Ecologist,* 15 May https://theecologist.org/2026/may/15/pig-gas-slaughter-backed-ministers
[39] Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019 c.15 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/15
[40] *Defra* (2019) 'Finn's Law' delivered to protect brave service animals' [news article], 8 June. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/finns-law-delivered-to-protect-brave-service-animals

the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Before this law was enacted, offenders of cruelty towards service animals could use self-defense as a defense in court, and therefore was unlikely to be prosecuted under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Not many people have been convicted of harming a service animal, but in August 2019 a man was charged under the Act, alongside assaulting police officers and possession of offensive weapons, and was handed a total of 21 months imprisonment upon conviction[41].

Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021

The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021[42] amends Section 32 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 by increasing the maximum penalty for conviction of specified animal cruelty offences from 6 months to 5 years in England and Wales. The increased maximum penalty only applies to severe animal cruelty, including causing unnecessary suffering, tail docking, non-exempted mutilations, poisoning an animal, and animal fighting. The Bill came after a public consultation showed 70% of Brits supported longer sentences for people convicted of animal cruelty. The purpose is to deter people from committing cruelty offences, and help the UK maintain its position as a leader in animal welfare[43].

This Act applies to England and Wales. In Scotland, the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Act 2020[44] increased the maximum penalty for severe animal cruelty and wildlife crimes to 5 years imprisonment, and an unlimited fine. Northern Ireland increased the maximum penalty to 5 years imprisonment and a maximum fine with the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2016[45].

Enforcement and compliance

The Act operates through the criminal justice system: offences are investigated and prosecuted under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, while courts apply the increased sentencing powers following conviction. However, despite the maximum sentence being increased from 6 months to 5 years under the Act, many animal cruelty cases are handed suspended sentences, fines, and a ban on owning animals for a period of time, despite the law allowing for stronger penalties[46]. In 2024, the RSPCA received 105,250 reports of animal cruelty[47], yet there is only an average of 3,214 prosecutions per year, and an average of 2,024 of those resulting in convictions[48]. Despite the UK priding itself on having one of the most comprehensive animal welfare legal frameworks in the world, the sentencing outcomes for

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[41] *BBC News* (2019) 'Man who stabbed police dog in Stoke-on-Trent jailed under new law', 5 August https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-stoke-staffordshire-49237155

[42] The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021 c. 21 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/21/

[43] *Defra* (2019) 'Gove delivers new bill to punish animal abusers' [news article], 26 June. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/gove-delivers-new-bill-to-punish-animal-abusers

[44] Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Act 2020 asp 14 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2020/14/contents

[45] Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 c. 21 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2016/21/contents

[46] RSPCA (no date) *Animal Cruelty Sentencing* https://politicalanimal.rspca.org.uk/wales/issues/animal-cruelty-sentencing

[47] Hattenstone, A. and Fagg, J. (2025) 'Animal cruelty reports rise by a third in a year', *BBC News,* 1 July https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwyrnlj5632o

[48] A-LAW (2024) *Animal Welfare in the UK: Part 2.* Shrewsbury, UK: A-LAW. https://www.alaw.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Animal-Welfare-in-the-UK-Part-2-Enforcement-and-Oversight-in-Practice-Dec-2024.pdf

animal cruelty crimes is one of the lowest globally[49]. The RSPCA has reported that animal cruelty reports are increasing every year, suggesting that the penalty is not a deterrent (although reporting trends alone cannot establish the effect of sentencing on offending behaviour).

Since the Act has come into force, the maximum penalty for animal cruelty has rarely been handed out. One instance was the case of the Save a Paw dog training and rehoming centre, where 41 dogs were found dead and 21 dogs were found alive but suffering during a police raid. Oaveed Rahman, who ran Save a Paw, was sentenced to a total of five years in prison. The police raid and arrest came after weeks of pressure on Basildon Council to act, as people's dogs were disappearing[50].

On the other hand, large scale cruelty offenders are still not being handed serious custodial sentences. In September 2023, the RSPCA and Nottinghamshire police found over 450 animals being kept in terrible conditions on a farm in Sutton-in-Ashfield while executing a search warrant. This included farmed animals, companion animals and some exotic pet animals. Nearly all of the animals needed veterinary care, and several had to be euthanised to stop their suffering. The defendant only received a 12-month sentence and a lifetime ban on keeping animals, despite ignoring advice to make improvements by the RSPCA and the Donkey Sanctuary[51].

In Northern Ireland, only 28 custodial sentences were handed down between 2016-2020, which may suggest a lack of enforcement and leniency for animal cruelty crimes. For example, in 2022, a man who had previously been handed a lifetime ban on keeping animals was found guilty of severely abusing a dog and only received a 3 month suspended sentence. Although the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 increased the maximum custodial sentence for certain animal-welfare offences to five years, sentencing guidance relating to animal-welfare offences has not been comprehensively updated to reflect these reforms. Animal welfare organisations have argued that this has created a gap between the increased statutory penalties and sentencing practice[52]. This concern remains current: in 2026, the Northern Ireland Department of Justice announced a review of sentencing policy which specifically includes animal-welfare offences and will consider the effectiveness of the existing sentencing-guidelines mechanism[53]. .

Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022

[49] RSPCA (2020) *Increased sentencing for animal cruelty* https://politicalanimal.rspca.org.uk/documents/d/political-animal/rspca-briefing_-increased-sentencing-for-animal-cruelty-1-

[50] Adams, L. and Woodward, S. (2026) 'The animal rescue centre that became a mass graveyard of dogs', *BBC News,* 21 February https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cg5n65l0nv7o

[51] *RSPCA* (2025) 'Farmer who kept over 450 animals in squalor jailed and banned for life' [news article], 23 September https://www.rspca.org.uk/w/whatwedo/press/farmer-who-kept-over-450-animals-in-squalor-jailed-and-banned-for-life

[52] USPCA (no date) *Stronger Sentencing for Animal Welfare Crimes.* https://uspca.co.uk/campaigns/sentencing

[53] Department of Justice (2026) *Long announces sentencing review.* https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/news/long-announces-sentencing-review

The Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022[54] provides legal recognition of all vertebrate animals, and cephalopod molluscs and decapod crustaceans, as sentient (the ability to perceive, feel or experience sensations and emotions such as pain, fear, joy and pleasure). The Act extends throughout the UK, although its policy-scrutiny provisions apply to decisions made by UK Government ministers rather than those of the devolved administrations. Unlike the scope of some welfare duties under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the definition is not limited according to whether an animal is domesticated, under human control or used for scientific purposes; free-living wild animals and animals used in research can therefore fall within the Act's definition. The UK was required to recognise animals as sentient as part of EU legislation, but after Brexit, EU Treaty-level sentience principle and policymaking obligation was no longer applicable to the UK. It also required the appointment of an Animal Sentience Committee (ASC), which scrutinises whether UK Government ministers have had all due regard to the ways in which policy decisions may adversely affect the welfare of animals as sentient beings[55]. This Act requires the ASC to select policies and examine whether all due regard was given to the animals that would be affected by changing or implementing law or regulations due to the fact that they are sentient, which the Secretary of State must respond to; it does not require the Government to automatically reject new legislation or policy which would negatively impact animals, or prohibit or restrict existing cruel or painful practices. It does not provide further direct legal protections of animals; instead, it creates a procedural accountability mechanism intended to ensure that animal welfare is considered within UK Government policymaking.

The Act extends to the whole of the UK, although its application is limited as it does not apply to the policies implemented by Scottish Ministers, Welsh Ministers or the Northern Ireland Executive[56].

The Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 (Commencement) Regulations 2023[57] brought the provisions of the Act into force. It contains no further details on interpretation or enforcement not outlined in the Act.

Enforcement and Compliance

The Animal Sentience Committee provides scrutiny rather than enforcement, as it does not have enforcement powers. This committee was created as part of the Act, and their scrutiny extends across several UK Government departments. Their purpose is to hold the Government to account to ensure that they are considering animal sentience before creating laws or changing regulations which might impact animals. They cannot block legislation, but they can scrutinise the Government over its policy. However, there did not seem to be advice by the ASC before the Government published The Welfare of Animals (Transport)

[54] Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 c. 22 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/22
[55] *Defra* (2021) 'Animals to be formally recognised as sentient beings in domestic law' [news article], 13 May https://www.gov.uk/government/news/animals-to-be-formally-recognised-as-sentient-beings-in-domestic-law
[56] Defra (2022) *The Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 Explanatory Notes* https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/22/pdfs/ukpgaen_20220022_en.pdf
[57] The Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 (Commencement) Regulations 2023 No. 563 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2023/563/

(Amendment) Regulations 2025, which legalised picking chickens up by their legs – a practice highly criticised due to the risk of injury or distress[58].

The ASC have given advice on glue traps, restriction of lead in ammunition, the XL bully ban under the Dangerous Dogs Act, Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill (now Act), Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Bill (now Act), animal welfare – legislative compliance and enforcement, Renters (Reform) Bill (now Act), Animals (Low Welfare Activities Abroad) Act report, Veterinary Medicines Regulations (2013) revisions, and the Online Safety Act[59].

The ASC advised the Government on animal welfare enforcement and compliance in February 2025. The ASC found that enforcement and compliance is lacking due to 'inconsistencies in detection of offences, complexity of the legislative environment, resources, lack of coordinated inter-agency response, variable enforcer training and expertise, and transparency over the effectiveness of adequate reporting and enforcement'[60].

The report laid out the features of what they believe would be a successful compliance monitoring system, which would include:

1. "is based on a clear compliance requirement/specification that is visible and understandable to all
2. is seen to be fair within and across sectors
3. is broadly accepted and supported by stakeholders
4. provides strong incentives to comply
5. has appropriately trained and qualified staff, and effective data recording and management systems
6. is amenable to relatively rapid and low-cost compliance assessment, with clear and measurable indicators of compliance and non-compliance
7. has a high chance, sensitivity, and specificity of breach detection
8. imposes penalties that reflect breach severity
9. has outcomes that prevent individuals and bodies from repeat non-compliance, and which provide a clear deterrent for others[61]"

The ASC also reported that self-reporting of non-compliance has increased by some agencies, such as the Food Standards Agency. However, self-reporting is not enough – a

[58] UK Government (no date) *Animal Sentience Committee* https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/animal-sentience-committee
[59] UK Government (no date) *Animal Sentience Committee* https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/animal-sentience-committee
[60] Defra (2025) *Animal Sentience Committee report on the due regard to animal welfare – legislative compliance and enforcement* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-sentience-committee-report-on-the-due-regard-to-animal-welfare-legislative-compliance-and-enforcement/animal-sentience-committee-report-on-the-due-regard-to-animal-welfare-legislative-compliance-and-enforcement
[61] Defra (2025) *Animal Sentience Committee report on the due regard to animal welfare – legislative compliance and enforcement* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-sentience-committee-report-on-the-due-regard-to-animal-welfare-legislative-compliance-and-enforcement/animal-sentience-committee-report-on-the-due-regard-to-animal-welfare-legislative-compliance-and-enforcement

successful compliance monitoring system, such as the one described, needs to be implemented to fully enforce the law.

Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Act 2024

The Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Act 2024 prohibits the export of certain live animals (sheep, goats, equines, cows and pigs) for the purpose of fattening or slaughter. Unlike legislation that seeks to regulate the welfare conditions under which an activity takes place, the Act adopts a prohibition-based approach by abolishing the live export of specified livestock from Great Britain for slaughter or fattening for subsequent slaughter. Before this Act came into force, it was permissible for farmed animals to be exported out of Great Britain to be fattened or slaughtered, mainly by sea, which caused a number of animal welfare issues – from animals suffering and dying on long, uncomfortable journeys, to losing the animal welfare protection provided by national legislation once they left Great Britain. Before the Act, up to 2.5 million sheep and calves were exported a year[62].

The Act applies to exports beginning in, or transitioning through, England, Wales and Scotland, but live exports from Northern Ireland are still legal despite welfare concerns. Furthermore, the Act also does not establish an equivalent prohibition on the import of live livestock into Great Britain, despite them potentially having travelled long distances, showing a gap in this animal protection concept. The Act is accompanied by The Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Enforcement Regulations 2024[63], which lays out specific enforcement rules.

Enforcement and Compliance

If an inspector suspects that there has been a violation of the Act, they have the right to issue a hold notice, prohibiting the export of the animals temporarily or indefinitely. The notice must be withdrawn where subsequent evidence satisfies the inspector that the proposed export complies with the Act. An inspector may also enter a premise if they suspect an offence has, is being, or is about to be committed under Section 1 of the Act or the regulations[64]. APHA has not publicly released any data on whether there have been penalties, seizures or hold notices issued.

Contravening the live-export prohibition is a criminal offence. In England and Wales it is punishable by imprisonment, a fine, or both; in Scotland, the Act provides for up to six months' imprisonment, a level 5 fine, or both.

From an animal protection perspective, the Act represents a significant shift from regulating the conditions of a harmful activity to prohibiting it altogether. However, the prohibition is determined by the purpose of the export rather than solely by the welfare impact of the

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[62] *Defra* (2024) 'Export of live animals banned' [news article], 20 May https://www.gov.uk/government/news/export-of-live-animals-banned

[63] The Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Enforcement Regulations 2024 No. 1146 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2024/1146/

[64] Defra and Daera (2026) *Get an export health certificate* https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-an-export-health-certificate

journey: long distance live exports may continue for purposes such as breeding or competition, subject to existing transport requirements, meaning that some animals will still be subjected to the conditions during transport that the Act aimed to eradicate. This is an example of an inequality in what protections are granted to animals based on their purpose to humans.

Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Act 2025

The Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Act 2025[65], which extends to the whole of the UK, establishes powers to prohibit (or restrict in cases of exemptions) the import of dogs and cats into Great Britain which are below 6 months of age, are more than 42 days pregnant, or have been mutilated. This Act has not yet been brought into force, as it requires secondary legislation before becoming operational which have not yet been published.

Commercial imports of these animals are more heavily regulated than non-commercial imports, meaning that animals are being illegally smuggled into the UK by traders falsely declaring them as non-commercial imports, circumventing the stricter requirements applying to commercial imports. This Act aims to level the regulation disparity between commercial and non-commercial imports by restricting the number of dogs, cats or ferrets from being able to enter the country to five per vehicle[66].

Mutilating animals, including the tail docking and ear cropping of dogs, and the declawing of cats, is generally illegal under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, and stricter punishment for performing these mutilations unlawfully was introduced under the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021, increasing the maximum available penalty from 6 months to 5 years. Because of its illegality, people are paying for dogs to be imported from countries where these mutilations could be performed lawfully. This legal loophole allows people to own dogs in the UK with these mutilations which had been performed abroad without the consequence of facing animal cruelty charges.

Enforcement and Compliance

Although the Act received Royal Assent on 2 December 2025, its principal new animal welfare restrictions depend upon secondary legislation for their implementation. As of September 2026, the Government is continuing to develop this secondary legislation, including appropriate exemptions and enforcement processes. Consequently, it is not yet possible to assess compliance with, or the practical effectiveness of, the Act's principal new restrictions[67].

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[65] Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Act 2025 c. 30 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/30

[66] *Defra* (2025) 'Pet smuggling crackdown with new law' [news article], 2 December https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pet-smuggling-crackdown-with-new-law

[67] Defra (2025) *Animal welfare strategy for England.* London: Defra. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-welfare-strategy-for-england/animal-welfare-strategy-for-england

Existing commercial and non-commercial pet movement rules are principally enforced by APHA and local authorities, and these bodies are expected to play a central role in enforcing the Act. The Act also enables secondary legislation to provide for enforcement measures including seizure and detention of non-compliant animals, recovery of detention costs and monetary penalties.

The ASC also identified a potential unintended welfare consequence of enforcement: dogs and cats seized following suspected non-compliance may experience poor welfare if detained in kennels for prolonged periods. The Government has stated that secondary legislation can address this issue by establishing processes intended to minimise detention periods. Effective implementation will therefore require enforcement measures that both deter illegal imports and protect the welfare of animals after seizure[68].

Animals under human control continued

There are several other Acts not connected to the Animal Welfare Acts which also provide protection to animals under human control, including:

- Animals (Low-Welfare Activities Abroad) Act 2023
- Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000
- Wild Animals in Circuses Act 2019
- Ivory Act 2018
- Online Safety Act 2023
- Zoo Licensing Act 1981
- Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023

These Acts, minus the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 and the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023, are specialised laws prohibiting specific animal-related activities, rather than providing welfare standards.

Animals (Low-Welfare Activities Abroad) Act 2023

The Animals (Low-Welfare Activities Abroad) Act 2023[69] provides power to regulations to prohibit the advertisement or sale of specific animal-related activities outside of the UK which whereby the act would be considered an animal welfare offence if it took place within the UK. This should potentially include activities whereby an animal involved is being kept in conditions which do not meet their needs, is being subjected to cruel or painful methods used to train or punish, or is being subjected to environments which cause pain, stress or fear. Generally, this involves captive wild animals, but could also include wild-living animals

[68] Defra (2026) *Government response to the Animal Sentience Committee report on the Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill.* London: Defra. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-animal-sentience-committee-report-on-the-animal-welfare-import-of-dogs-cats-and-ferrets-bill/government-response-to-the-animal-sentience-committee-report-on-the-animal-welfare-import-of-dogs-cats-and-ferrets-bill

[69] Animals (Low-Welfare Activities Abroad) Act 2023 c. 45 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/45

and domesticated animals, depending on the activity. The Act itself does not define every prohibited activity, rather it enables regulations to specify which activities are prohibited.

If the regulations of this Act do come into force, it will apply to England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Enforcement and compliance

Despite the Act receiving Royal Assent in 2023, the Government has still not published the regulations three years later, meaning the prohibition of the advertisement and sale of low welfare activities has still not come into force, due to the Government not publishing the regulations for this Act. The regulations should identify which activities are to be banned by this Act, along with details of enforcement, but because this has not yet been published, travel agents and ticket vendors operating in the UK are still legally able to advertise and sell these low-welfare activities.

Born Free, alongside several other animal advocacy organisations, provided the Government with a complete list of all activities they have evidence for being low-welfare, which they recommended should be included in the ban. The list contains 28 activity categories, including (but not limited to) equid and camel riding, elephant riding, rodeos, crocodile wrestling, captive and wild shark and ray swim-withs that feed the animals or disturb their natural behaviours, dolphinaria, animal circuses, bullfighting, wild and companion animal consumption, animal slaughter festivals (pigs), canned hunting, civet coffee farms, and turtle hatcheries that retain hatchlings as a tourist attraction[70]. Despite the research and evidence list being handed to the Government, they have still failed as of yet to publish the official regulations that would bring this prohibition into force.

The Government has not officially stated why they have not published the regulations yet. It announced in its 2025 Animal Welfare Strategy that it is the responsibility of tourists to not partake in low-welfare activities, which contradicts the purpose of the Act, and does not consider those who take part in low welfare activities but do not know they are harming animals by doing so. It also states it will “explore with industry and NGOs legislative and non-legislative options” to stop advertising low-welfare activities abroad, rather than implementing the powers granted by the Act[71].

Animals (Low-Welfare Activities Abroad) Act 2023 hasn’t had its regulations published yet, but it would likely be enforced by Trading Standards in England, and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland.

Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000

[70] Born Free (2023) *The Animals (Low-Welfare Activities Abroad) Act 2023* https://www.bornfree.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Evidence-for-low-welfare-activities-for-inclusion-in-the-Animals-Low-Welfare-Activities-Abroad-Act-2023_Final_26Apr.pdf
[71] Defra (2025) *Animal welfare strategy for England* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-welfare-strategy-for-england/animal-welfare-strategy-for-england#international-1

The Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000[72] represents one of the UK's first abolitionist approaches to animal protection legislation, whereby instead of setting out welfare standards for animals in fur farms, farming animals solely or primarily for their fur was banned entirely. The legislative ban applied to England and Wales, making them the first countries in the world to ban fur farming[73], although the prohibition did not come into effect until 2003 to give the last remaining fur farms time to transition. Scotland and Northern Ireland followed with national bans in 2002 under the Fur Farming (Prohibition) (Scotland) Act 2002[74] and The Fur Farming (Prohibition) (Northern Ireland) Order 2002[75] respectively. The reason for the ban was that the Government believes fur farming is 'not consistent with a proper value and respect for animal life[76]', and is at odds with public morality[77], as the practice involves keeping wild animals in small, barren cages, unable to exercise or display natural behaviours.

While fur farming has been banned in the UK for over 20 years, it remains a controversial topic as up to £74 million worth of fur is still imported from abroad and traded in the UK annually, from countries with poor or nonexistent animal welfare laws, such as China[78]. Certain fur products, such as fur from cats and dogs, are prohibited from being imported, and other fur products, such as seal fur and fur from endangered species, are subject to restrictions. This shows an inequality of legal protection between species, as the fur of some species is banned entirely and other species are permitted under regulation.

The prohibition on domestic fur farming does not align with the continued permission to import and trade fur, as imported fur may be produced using farming practices that would be unlawful in the UK and may originate from countries with weaker animal welfare protections. Closing fur farms in countries with comparatively higher welfare standards has therefore displaced production to jurisdictions where equivalent standards do not apply. China, for example, is now the world's largest fur producer (producing 3.5 million pelts in 2023)[79] and lacks any comprehensive national animal welfare legislation, while Poland, another major producer, voted in 2025 to phase out fur farming by 2033[80]. Consequently, legislation that protects animals domestically may inadvertently contribute to the displacement of animal welfare harms overseas.

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[72] Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000 c. 33 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/33/contents
[73] Fur Free Alliance (2025) *Fur bans*. https://www.furfreealliance.com/fur-bans/
[74] Fur Farming (Prohibition) (Scotland) Act 2002 asp 10 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2002/10
[75] The Fur Farming (Prohibition) (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 No. 3151 (N.I. 5) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2002/3151
[76] Elliot Morley, Hansard (15 May 2000) (London: HMSO, 2000) Vol. 350, No. 99, p. 76
[77] Humane Society International UK (no date) *The Case for a Ban on the UK Fur Trade.* London: Humane Society International UK. https://www.furfreebritain.uk/resources/HSI-Political-Briefing-One-The-case-for-a-ban-on-the-UK-fur-trade.pdf
[78] Defra (2026) *Summary of responses and government response* https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/fur-market-in-great-britain/outcome/summary-of-responses-and-government-response
[79] Buchholz, K. (2025) 'As Industry Struggles, Who Are The World's Biggest Fur Producers?', *Forbes.* 17 January. https://www.forbes.com/sites/katharinabuchholz/2025/01/17/as-industry-struggles-who-are-the-worlds-biggest-fur-producers/
[80] *Fur Free Alliance* (2025) 'Breaking: Poland Bans Fur Farming' [news article]. 2 December. https://www.furfreealliance.com/breaking-poland-bans-fur-farming/

Enforcement and compliance

The Act provides authorised officers with powers to enter and inspect premises, other than private dwellings, where there are reasonable grounds for believing that animals are being kept for prohibited fur farming purposes. Officers may inspect animals and relevant records, and intentionally obstructing or delaying an authorised officer constitutes a separate offence. The penalty for contravening this Act is an unlimited fine, increased from £20,000 in 2015. Imprisonment is not an available penalty for committing a crime under this Act. Following conviction, the court may also make a forfeiture order for the animals involved in the crime.

Fur farms were phased out in the three years after the Act was passed, giving fur farmers the time to adjust and adapt to a new livelihood, and compensation was given by the Government to farmers for loss of earnings; 11 former fur farmers submitted requests for compensation under this scheme[81]. Since the prohibition came into force, there have been no commercial fur farms operating in Britain, so no one has been issued a penalty fine. There is no published data on whether anyone has been fined under the Act for non-commercial or informal fur farming, but this does not mean that no one has been charged or prosecuted under the Act.

This Act is significant because it does not attempt to reconcile fur production with minimum welfare standards, but instead prohibits the activity altogether. However, the continued legality of importing and selling many fur products creates a regulatory inconsistency: animal welfare and ethical concerns considered sufficient to prohibit domestic production do not currently result in an equivalent general prohibition on products produced through the same activity overseas.

Wild Animals in Circuses Act 2019

The Wild Animals in Circuses Act 2019[82] is another legislation which represents an abolitionist approach, as it bans circus operators from using any wild animals as part of their travelling circus show or as exhibits, with no exemptions. For the purposes of the Act, a ‘wild animal’ is an animal of a kind that is not commonly domesticated in Great Britain. Prior to the prohibition, the welfare of wild animals in travelling circuses in England was regulated through a licensing and inspection regime under the Welfare of Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (England) Regulations 2012[83]. The subsequent prohibition represented a shift away from regulating the conditions in which wild animals could be used in circuses towards prohibiting their use on ethical grounds. Animal advocacy organisations provided the Government with evidence that travelling circuses were unable to meet minimum physical and psychological welfare needs of circus animals, and ethical concerns by the Government of using wild animals as entertainment. They spend a large part of their life in small travel crates where they are unable to exercise or express natural behaviours, and solitary animals are often kept in groups (such as tigers) and social animals may be kept isolated.

[81] UK Parliament Hansard (2007) *Fur Farming.* Volume 692. https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2007-06-04/debates/07060415000025/FurFarming
[82] Wild Animals in Circuses Act 2019 c. 24 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/24
[83] Welfare of Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (England) Regulations 2012 No. 2939. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/2932

Furthermore, circus animals are often trained through cruel and painful methods, which are not conducive to the strong animal welfare legislation in place in the UK[84].

This legislation applies to England. Scotland had banned wild animals in circuses with their own legislation the year prior with the Wild Animals in Travelling Circuses (Scotland) Act 2018[85]. Wales later banned it a year later than England, in the Wild Animals and Circuses (Wales) Act 2020[86]. Unfortunately, Northern Ireland has no legislation prohibiting the use of wild animals in circuses, despite promising to follow the Republic of Ireland's ban in 2018. Northern Ireland currently has no wild animal circuses, but the lack of a legislative ban permits travelling animal circuses to perform in Northern Ireland, or for new animal circuses to form, although the bans in England, Wales, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland means travelling circuses cannot enter Northern Ireland from these countries[87].

This legislation is controversial as commonly domesticated animals (dogs, cats, horses, rabbits, etc.) are still permitted by law in circus acts and exhibits in Great Britain, despite often being trained using the same cruel methods and not being kept in suitable housing conditions which give them enough space and allow them to express their natural behaviour. Even so, only four circuses in England and Wales still use commonly domesticated animals, as circuses have become more focused on human acts, and the public have shown a declining interest in animal circuses[88].

Enforcement and compliance

The Act is enforced through inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State, who have statutory powers of entry, inspection, search and seizure where there are reasonable grounds to suspect an offence or that evidence of an offence may be present. A circus operator who uses a wild animal in contravention of the Act commits a criminal offence and may face an unlimited fine if convicted. Furthermore, intentionally obstructing an inspector or failing without reasonable excuse to provide required assistance is itself an offence, which is also punishable by a fine. There is no custodial penalty under this Act.

There is no published data on whether anyone has been charged or convicted under the Act, although there is no published evidence that any new animal circuses have been created. This suggests a high level of compliance, although the absence of published enforcement data makes it difficult to assess how frequently inspection or other enforcement powers have been required.

Ivory Act 2018

[84] Animal Defenders International (2019) *Wild animal circus ban PASSED in UK Parliament* https://www.ad-international.org/farm_animals/go.php?id=4724&ssi=0
[85] Travelling Circuses (Scotland) Act 2018 asp 3 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2018/3/
[86] Wild Animals and Circuses (Wales) Act 2020 asc 2 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asc/2020/2
[87] Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (2020) *Wild animals banned from circuses* https://www.cieh.org/ehn/environmental-protection/2020/january/wild-animals-banned-from-circuses/
[88] Freedom for Animals (2024) *Take Action Against Animal Circuses in the UK* https://www.freedomforanimals.org.uk/take-action-circuses

The Ivory Act 2018[89] bans the dealing of ivory products (with some exemptions), meaning the ivory from the tooth or tusk of an animal. 'Dealing' includes buying, selling, hiring, offering or arranging to buy, sell or hire, keeping for sale or hire, exporting it from the United Kingdom for sale or hire, or importing it into the United Kingdom for sale or hire. The Act provides exemptions to the ivory ban, including pre-1918 items of outstanding value or importance, pre-1918 portrait miniatures, pre-1947 items with low ivory content, pre-1975 musical instruments, and items being acquired by qualifying museums. Under this Act, the exempted items must apply for an exemption certificate before attempting to import, export, or trade.

The initial ivory ban only included ivory from elephants, but in 2025, the Government extended the Act to include ivory from four more species: common hippopotami, orcas, narwhals, or sperm whales[90]. Walruses were also considered to be added to the list, but walrus ivory is already largely prohibited under different legislation, The Seal Products Regulations 2010[91] (as amended by The Seal Products (Amendment) Regulations 2022[92]), which heavily regulates the import of seal, sea lion and walrus products (subject to exemption)[93]. The Ivory Act 2018 (Meaning of "Ivory" and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2025[94] set out the updated definition of Ivory for the Act, thereby including the four additional species.

Although the Ivory Act does not directly affect the welfare or wellbeing of animals, it was brought in to try and reduce demand for ivory products, and therefore reducing the number of animals poached for their ivory. While orcas and sperm whales can be found in UK waters, elephants, hippopotami and narwhals are not endemic to the UK, so this Act impacts not only the UK's own animals, but animals which do not live here.

This Act is controversial because the counter-argument to the ban (often provided by art dealers and collectors) is that banning a product forces the trade underground, and therefore increases the value as it makes it more difficult to obtain. This increase in value actually incentivises poachers to kill more animals for ivory as they will make more money per animal[95]. Furthermore, as ivory poaching is an international issue, not just a UK issue, it is important to address the supply chain issue as a whole, not just the trade in the UK. It has been argued that banning ivory does not help save animals if the consumer demand is not addressed, and one study found that stockpile burns of ivory correlated with an 18% increase in poaching, as poachers killed more animals to replace the ivory which had been seized and destroyed[96].

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[89] Ivory Act 2018 c. 30 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/30/
[90] The Ivory Act 2018 (Meaning of "Ivory" and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2025 No. 9 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2025/9/pdfs/uksi_20250009_en.pdf
[91] The Seal Products Regulations 2010 No. 2068 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/2068/
[92] The Seal Products (Amendment) Regulations 2022 No. 771 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2022/771/
[93] Defra (2024) *Bringing seal products into Great Britain* https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bringing-seal-products-into-great-britain
[94] The Ivory Act 2018 (Meaning of "Ivory" and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2025 No. 9 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2025/9/pdfs/uksi_20250009_en.pdf
[95] Sosnowski, M. et al (2019) 'Global ivory market prices since the 1989 CITES ban', *Biological Conservation,* 237, pp. 392–399. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320719302769
[96] Gjerdseth, E. (2025) 'Crush and Burn: How the destruction of ivory fails to save elephants', *World Development,* 185. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X24002365

Enforcement and compliance

The Act is enforced by APHA and border control, including police and customs officers. APHA is the principal body administering the civil-sanctions regime on behalf of the Secretary of State, while criminal cases can involve the police, customs or the relevant prosecution authority. Under the Act, border control has the right to stop and search people, premises, aircraft, vessels, or vehicles if they suspect there is an attempt to import or trade ivory, and seize items they presume to be ivory. For small scale violations, the police are advised to issue a civil sanction, which could be a fine of up to £25,000, a stop notice, or an enforcement undertaking. A minor accidental breach may be rectified by issue of advice. Serious violations may lead to criminal prosecutions, which may be an unlimited fine or a custodial sentence with a maximum of five years.

The Ivory Act 2018 operates alongside the UK's existing obligations under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)[97] and its domestic enforcement framework, including the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 2018 (COTES)[98], both of which are examined later in this report. CITES regulates international trade in listed species and their specimens, including ivory, while the Ivory Act goes further by imposing additional restrictions on commercial dealing within, to or from the UK. Compliance with an exemption under the Ivory Act does not remove any separate CITES requirements; an ivory item may therefore require both an exemption or registration under the Act and the relevant CITES documentation. APHA administers both regimes, helping ensure that the domestic ivory prohibition operates alongside the UK's international wildlife trade controls.

APHA and Defra have published civil sanction data of breaches under the new 2025 regulations. Two shops, Almasy Antiques and The Sheffield Cutlery Shop, were caught contravening the Act by dealing in unregistered ivory. Both were issued an enforcement undertaking as a penalty[99]. Furthermore, some people have already been imprisoned under the Act. In 2019, two people were sentenced to 28 months imprisonment for selling ivory items on eBay, earning over £145,000. The scheme was uncovered when customs officials intercepted ivory products being exported to China without re-export permits. Border control escalated the incident to the National Wildlife Crime Unit, which matched the seized items to items being sold on eBay to find the perpetrators[100].

Another issue with the Act is that rhinoceri are not included under the Act, as their horns are technically not made of ivory, but the import, export and trade in rhinoceros horns is prohibited under CITES, which provides exemptions for antique ivory. An investigation by Save the Rhino found 1,571 rhino horn products for sale in the UK in 2017–2019, with many items without proof of being antique. Loopholes in the system may be facilitating the trade of

[97] CITES (1973) Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora https://cites.org/eng/disc/text.php
[98] The Control of Trade in Endangered Species Regulations 2018 No. 703 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/703/contents
[99] APHA and Defra (2026) *Ivory Act 2018: civil sanctions July 2025 to June 2026.* London: APHA and Defra. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ivory-act-2018-enforcement-and-civil-sanctions/ivory-act-2018-civil-sanctions-july-2025-to-june-2026
[100] Simpson, J. (2019) 'Pair made £145,000 selling ivory on eBay (UK)', *The Times, 27* September https://www.thetimes.com/world/asia/article/pair-made-145-000-selling-ivory-on-ebay-vk69vr2ld

new ivory as antique, and gangs are capitalising on these loopholes to launder money and sell to customers in Asia[101]. The Government should extend the Ivory Act to include rhino, or create separate legislation which restricts and regulates the import, export and trade of rhino horn with the same strictness as ivory from elephants, orcas, narwhals, sperm whales and common hippopotami.

Online Safety Act 2023

The Online Safety Act 2023[102] covers a wide variety of topics, all related to online safety. The UK Government introduced this Act in order to try and make the internet a safer place, especially for children, by imposing certain duties on platforms to assess and mitigate risks from harmful content shared on their platform, and to take responsibility for not enforcing their Terms of Service and policies by not removing prohibited content. The Online Safety Act 2023 applies to the whole of the U.K.

Chapter 7, section 62 (7), states that content which 'depicts the real or realistic serious injury of an animal in graphic detail[103]' is identified as priority content which is harmful to children. Section 59 states that any offence specified in Schedule 7 is a priority offence; section 38 of Schedule 7 specifies 'An offence under section 4(1) of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (unnecessary suffering of an animal)'[104] is designated as a priority offence for the purposes of the Online Safety Act.

Before the Act was passed, online platforms including Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, have repeatedly made poor attempts at removing animal cruelty content, despite it being against their Terms of Service. The lack of enforcement of their own policies has resulted in a new, growing space online where individuals create, trade and share animal cruelty content. Even with the Act coming into force, the demand for these videos is increasing. In 2024, SMACC (Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition) received over 80,000 reports of cruelty content from the public, most of which platforms had failed to remove[105].

Enforcement and Compliance

Ofcom is the UK's communications regulator, and is responsible for regulating and enforcing the online safety regime, and publishes codes of practice and guidance to assist regulated services in complying with their statutory duties. There are a number of different codes of practice for different parts of the Act. Ofcom has published codes of practice and statutory guidance explaining how regulated services should assess illegal-content risks, make

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[101] Save the Rhino (2021) *Rhino horn could be laundered in UK antique trade* https://www.savetherhino.org/our-work/stopping-illegal-trade/rhino-horn-could-be-laundered-in-uk-antique-trade/
[102] Online Safety Act 2023 c. 50 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/50
[103] Online Safety Act 2023 c. 50 Chapter 7 Interpretation of Part 3, section 62 (7) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/50/section/62
[104] Online Safety Act 2023 c. 50 Schedule 7, 38 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/50/schedule/7
[105] *SMACC* (2024) 'Facebook leads in hosting animal cruelty content, new report reveals' [news article], 23 May https://www.worldanimalprotection.org/latest/news/facebook-leads-in-hosting-animal-cruelty-content/

judgements about potentially illegal content, and comply with their duties under the Act. Under the Act, regulated online services are required to assess the risk of illegal content appearing on their platforms[106], implement proportionate measures to prevent users from encountering it, and remove illegal content when they become aware of it[107]. Animal cruelty is included within the Act's priority illegal content regime through the inclusion of the offence of causing unnecessary suffering under section 4(1) of the Animal Welfare Act 2006, or potentially face a fine of up to £18 million, or 10% of the provider's qualifying worldwide revenue (whichever is greater), for non-compliance. No platforms have yet to be penalised for failing to remove animal cruelty content, despite platforms still not removing content, or putting strong enough provisions in place to prevent this content from being shared or viewed.

The inclusion of section 4(1) of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 as a priority offence under the Online Safety Act does not mean that all online content depicting animal cruelty constitutes an offence under the Animal Welfare Act itself. Section 4(1) criminalises the act of causing unnecessary suffering to a protected animal; it does not create a separate offence of recording, possessing, publishing or distributing footage showing that suffering. Consequently, where an individual shares pre-recorded footage of animal cruelty but cannot be shown to have caused, participated in, encouraged or assisted the underlying cruelty, the 2006 Act may not provide an appropriate basis for prosecution[108]. The Animal Sentience Committee has similarly noted that recording or publishing content depicting unnecessary suffering is not, in itself, an offence under the Animal Welfare Act[109].

Other criminal legislation may therefore be relevant to the dissemination of particularly extreme animal cruelty material. The Obscene Publications Act 1959[110] and Communications Act 2003[111] have both been used to prosecute individuals involved in distributing obscene animal torture material. This distinction is important in the context of the Online Safety Act: the underlying act of causing unnecessary suffering may constitute the priority Animal Welfare Act offence, while the subsequent creation or dissemination of footage may need to be considered separately under other offences where the person sharing the material was not responsible for the original cruelty.

A continuing limitation of the framework is that not all harmful animal related content falls within the scheduled offences or harmful content categories addressed by the Act. Content involving obvious physical cruelty may be captured, while other material associated with poor animal welfare, such as staged 'fake rescue' videos, exotic pet content, or selfies

[106] Ofcom (2026) *Illegal content duties under the Online Safety Act.* https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/illegal-and-harmful-content/illegal-content-duties-under-the-online-safety-act?
[107] Ofcom (2024) *Protecting people from animal cruelty and human torture content online.* https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/illegal-and-harmful-content/protecting-people-from-animal-cruelty-and-human-torture-content-online?
[108] Ofcom (2024) *Illegal harms further consultation: Torture and animal cruelty.* https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/illegal-and-harmful-content/illegal-harms-further-consultation-torture-and-animal-cruelty
[109] Defra (2024) *Animal Sentience Committee: Online Safety Act report.* London: Defra. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-sentience-committee-online-safety-act-report/animal-sentience-committee-online-safety-act-report
[110] Obscene Publications Act 1959 c. 66 (Regnal. 7 and 8 Eliz 2) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/7-8/66/
[111] Communications Act 2003 c. 21 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/21/

captive wildlife, may not necessarily meet the relevant legal thresholds despite causing harm to the animals involved and potentially encouraging harmful practices. Another issue is that the regulatory duties relating to illegal and harmful content principally apply to regulated service providers rather than creating a general criminal offence of producing or sharing animal cruelty content.

In November 2024, two English women were sentenced under the Obscene Publications Act for distributing and financing animal cruelty videos. This was a landmark case as it was the first time British citizens had been charged and convicted for offences related to animal cruelty occurring abroad when the offenders were in the UK. It marked the beginning of this particular offence, which is relatively new, being taken seriously by the authorities[112].

Zoo Licensing Act 1981

The Zoo Licensing Act 1981[113] regulates the operation of zoos, and mandates zoos apply for, and adhere to, local authority licenses, which require them to adhere to national animal welfare, public safety, education and conservation standards. While animals captive in zoos are protected by the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 provides licensing rules and enforcement powers specific to zoos. The most recent regulations for this Act, Standards of Modern Zoo Practice for Great Britain[114], have been published by Defra and will come into force in 2027. They set out the minimum standard zoos are required to meet in terms of animal welfare, public safety, conservation and education.

Enforcement and Compliance

This Act is enforced by the local authorities, who are responsible for processing and issuing zoo licenses, and carrying out formal inspections regularly to ensure the zoo's compliance. Formal inspections generally involve inspectors nominated from the Secretary of State's list of zoo inspectors, alongside other appropriately qualified inspectors where required. Where non-compliance is identified, local authorities have powers to impose or amend licence conditions and issue directions requiring specified failures to be remedied within a defined period. Continued failure to comply can ultimately result in closure of part or all of a zoo. However, historically non-compliance has not been dealt with appropriately by the relevant authorities.

Several animal advocacy organisations investigated South Lakes Safari Zoo following extensive reports of poor animal welfare. Almost 500 animals were reported to have died at the zoo between 2013 and 2016, during a period in which serious animal welfare and management failures were identified, including staff negligence, neglect and cruelty[115]. The

[112] Goodwin, N, Gupta. T (2024) 'Women jailed over sadistic monkey torture videos', *BBC News,* 13 November https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4gve7xqd7qo
[113] Zoo Licensing Act 1981 c. 37 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/37
[114] Defra (2026) *Standards of Modern Zoo Practice for Great Britain.* Defra: London https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/secretary-of-state-s-standards-of-modern-zoo-practice
[115] Patel-Carstairs, S. (2017) 'South Lakes Safari Zoo loses licence after almost 500 animal deaths' *Sky News,* 7 March. https://news.sky.com/story/cumbria-zoo-where-almost-500-animals-died-has-lost-its-licence-10792552

zoo was issued a corrective order in 2022 by their local licensing authority for not meeting minimum welfare requirements. In 2023, Barrow-In-Furness Council conducted a special investigation and imposed conditions on the zoo's license after reports that the zoo had not improved the conditions for the animals. The zoo was issued a notice to correct the living conditions for the rhinos within a 1-year period, which was not met; the rhinos were kept in indoor, cramped pens all day. Born Free conducted their own undercover investigation and reported on the animal welfare and license violations they found at the zoo:

- The zoo offered carrot feeding to the giraffes throughout the day, which is an inappropriate food source for an animal which needs a high-fibre browse diet, with no leafy browse provided at all.
- The visitors were allowed to feed the animals, unsupervised by trained staff, which resulted in people throwing food at the animals or cornering them trying to feed them.
- Stereotypic behaviour was observed in a number of animals, due to the animals rocking their heads and pacing backwards and forwards.
- The sloth was housed in a tortoise enclosure, which was inappropriate for a rainforest-dwelling species[116].

This investigation was conducted after the zoo changed owners, after reports of license breaches between 2013 and 2016, where two snow leopards were found half-eaten, the owner had shot 16 sacred Ibis after receiving a prosecution threat for letting them fly, and numerous animals were found emaciated, without water and suffering from serious illnesses and injuries which hadn't been treated[117]. The findings of the investigation strongly suggested that despite a change of owner, the conditions of the zoo had not improved and the animals being housed there were still suffering.

Despite the continuous large-scale neglect towards the animals with no evidence that the zoo was trying to improve, it was not until 2024 that it was finally shut down by the council due to ongoing animal welfare concerns, amplified by advocacy campaigns and complaints from the public. Between 2017 and 2024, 33 independent government inspectors had visited the zoo and said that it met the required welfare standards[118]. The reason the council gave for not closing down the zoo after the 2024 inspection found major cause for concern was that they did not have the resources to find new homes for all of the animals. The case raises significant questions regarding the effectiveness of regulatory oversight and the consistency with which welfare concerns and licence non-compliance were addressed by the responsible authorities. Concerns have been raised regarding whether identified non-compliance and corrective requirements were followed up effectively.

The zoo owners applied for a planning application in 2024, before the closure of South Lakes, to open a new zoo, which was denied by the council. This was based on the negative

[116] Born Free (2024) *Investigation: Safari Zoo, Cumbia (2024)* https://www.bornfree.org.uk/raise-the-red-flag/investigation-safari-zoo-cumbria-2024/
[117] Patel-Carstairs, S. (2017) 'South Lakes Safari Zoo loses licence after almost 500 animal deaths' *Sky News,* 7 March. https://news.sky.com/story/cumbria-zoo-where-almost-500-animals-died-has-lost-its-licence-10792552
[118] *BBC News* (2024) 'Zoo at centre of welfare concerns to close', 16 December. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy9qxrvp7evo

environmental impact of building a new zoo on green space, not due to the zoo's history of animal welfare issues[119].

The South Lakes case demonstrates the potential consequences of weaknesses or inconsistencies in the implementation and enforcement of zoo licensing requirements at local-authority level, leaving animals to suffer in poor conditions, with little consequences for the owners. Although South Lakes Zoo was an extraordinary situation, most animals in zoos are unable to completely display their natural behaviours due to space restrictions, even if they are following legal guidelines.

Wild Animals

Wild-living animals are not covered under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, as they are not under human control. Wild-living animals are only covered under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 if they are being kept captive temporarily, so if they are being treated in a hospital or rehabilitation centre. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is one of the principal pieces of legislation protecting wild species and habitats in Great Britain, with additional species-specific legislation being made under the Deer Act 1991, the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, and the Hunting Act 2004.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981[120] was created to combine existing wildlife legislation, the Protection of Birds Acts 1954[121] to 1967[122] and the Conservation of Wild Creatures and Wild Plants Act 1975[123], while adding further protections for certain wild-living animals, including prohibiting taking specified wild animals from the wild. It outlines restrictions on taking wild birds and bird eggs, the sale of live wild animals, and their parts and products, the use of snares, enforcement powers and licensing. It also identifies specific protections for certain wild animal species.

Despite its increasing protections for most wild animals, it also relaxes the prohibition of shooting hares and rabbits at night, previously made illegal by Night Poaching Act 1828[124]. The Act also contains exceptions to its general protections, including provisions concerning the sale and trade of certain bird species under Schedule 3, which is detrimental to the wellbeing of these wild animals, showing that not all species of wild bird are afforded the same legal protections.

One of the subjects of the Act is the use of snares. Snare legality differs in England and the other devolved nations:

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[119] *Born Free* (2025) 'Planning Application for New Zoo in Cumbia Denied' [news article], 21 May. https://www.bornfree.org.uk/news/planning-application-for-new-zoo-in-cumbria-denied/
[120] Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 c.69 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69
[121] Protection of Birds Acts 1954 c. 30 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/2-3/30/contents/enacted
[122] Protection of Birds Acts 1967 c. 46 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/46/enacted
[123] Conservation of Wild Creatures and Wild Plants Act 1975 c. 48 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1975/48/enacted
[124] 1828 c. 69 (Regnal 9 Geo 4) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo4/9/69/

- In England, snares are only permitted to catch certain animals, including foxes, brown hares and rabbits. Free-running snares are legal but regulated, and must be checked at least once a day, whereas self-locking snares are illegal. Despite these requirements, significant welfare concerns remain because snares can cause injury, distress and death, including to non-target species[125]. These welfare risks may occur even where snares are used within the existing regulatory framework. This in itself shows that compliance with the law doesn't automatically mean good welfare or protection for animals.
- The Government promised to end the use of snares entirely in England in their 2024 manifesto, but have since failed to deliver on their promise. They have since changed their position, and stated in the 2025 animal welfare strategy that they are committed to ending the use of snares[126], but this still has not been delivered.
- The restricted use of snares in Scotland under the Act was repealed by the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Act 2024. Snares are now completely banned in Scotland[127].
- Wales banned the use of snares (and glue traps) in their first Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023[128].
- Snares are legal but regulated in Northern Ireland. The Snares Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 sets out the regulations and requirements for use, such as prohibiting snares to be set in a way which may suspend or drown an animal caught in it[129].

Compliance and Enforcement

Compliance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is enforced through Defra, Natural England and the police. NGOs such as the RSPCA and RSPB also contribute by identifying suspected wildlife crime, gathering evidence, reporting offences and supporting investigations. Responsibility for enforcement primarily rests with the police, and agencies such as Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, NatureScot, and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, who are provided with intelligence, analysis and specialist support by the specialist National Wildlife Crime Unit. The Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW) is a multi-agency body which encourages both statutory and NGO organisations to work together in the combat of wildlife crime[130]. This coalition meets twice a year to co-ordinate activities and assess priorities, aiming to tackle wildlife crime.

The Act creates a range of offences relating to the protection of wild birds, animals, plants, and designated habitats, with penalties including fines, imprisonment, confiscation of equipment, and the revocation of licences. Despite its comprehensive scope, effective

[125] League Against Cruel Sports (no date) *Working to Ban Snares*. https://www.league.org.uk/what-we-do/shooting/snares/#legal
[126] Defra (2025) *Animal welfare strategy for England.* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-welfare-strategy-for-england/animal-welfare-strategy-for-england
[127] Scottish Government (2026) *Wildlife Crime in Scotland 2024.* Scotland: Scottish Government. https://www.gov.scot/publications/wildlife-crime-in-scotland-2024/pages/trapping/
[128] *Welsh Government* (2023) 'Wales leads way on snares and glue traps total ban' [news article], 26 September https://www.gov.wales/wales-leads-way-snares-and-glue-traps-total-ban
[129] The Snares Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 No. 352 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2015/352/made
[130] National Wildlife Crime Unit (no date) *PAW UK* https://www.nwcu.police.uk/about/the-structure-of-paw-uk/

enforcement can be challenging due to resource limitations, the complexity of wildlife crime investigations, and the often remote locations in which offences occur. Collaboration between regulatory authorities, non-governmental organisations, and local communities therefore remains essential to ensuring compliance and protecting biodiversity.

Unfortunately, wildlife protection legislation can be difficult to enforce in practice, as offences may be hard to detect and the evidence required to establish that a wildlife crime has occurred can be difficult to obtain. For example, in 2023, a man cut down 131 protected trees in a privately owned park in London. When police were first alerted to his activity, he was simply told to go home; his chainsaw was not confiscated and the police did not issue any warning[131]. He then proceeded to cut all the trees down, disturbing numerous animals living in the trees; birds had abandoned nests with eggs to escape the destruction. He was arrested after the fact, and Bromley Council ordered him to replace the trees under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Despite disturbing nesting birds and damaging bird's eggs, he was released from police custody without charge. The incident raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of intervention where potentially unlawful disturbance of nesting birds occurs.

Another instance of wildlife harm remaining unchecked is the catapulting of wildlife in parks in London. Reports have raised concerns about repeated incidents of wildlife being injured or killed with catapults in London, and difficulties securing enforcement action against those responsible. Local councillors, Safer Neighbourhood Teams and police forces have all taken an interest, but not enough to tackle or resolve the issue, and wildlife is still being killed on an almost a daily basis. In 2024, the Metropolitan Police's wildlife unit was closed, which has placed even more strain on responding to wildlife crime, which is seen as a lesser issue and often not dealt with. Petitions for the Government to ban the use of catapults have also not resulted in legislation change[132].

Deer Act 1991

The Deer Act 1991[133] is a species-specific piece of wildlife management legislation which provides specific legal protections to deer. The Act prohibits the poaching or injury of any deer by anyone aside from the landowner of the land the deer is occupying, or a legally authorised person, when the harm occurs, and prohibits anyone from killing any deer during the proscribed close season (aside from commercially farmed deer, and muntjac deer), or at night. The Act provides exemptions for when the killing of deer during the closed season would not constitute an offence, including if the person believed the deer was causing damage to their farmland or property and they have been authorised to take action. The Act

[131] Collis, L. (2024) 'Locals outraged after man commits 'tree massacre' and illegally cuts down protected forest: 'Utterly barbaric'', *The Cool Down,* 22 June. https://www.thecooldown.com/outdoors/cator-park-tree-felling-bromley-london/
[132] Gellel, R. (2025) 'I can't believe young Londoners are killing and maiming our wildlife with catapults but facing no consequences', *The Standards,* 25 March. https://www.standard.co.uk/comment/young-people-killing-london-wildlife-b1218708.html
[133] Deer Act 1991 c. 54 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1991/54/contents

also permits Natural England (in England) or relevant Welsh authorities (in Wales) to issue licenses to cull deer in order to protect the natural environment[134].

Deer culling is controversial because the UK is largely depleted of biodiversity, so mass killing of large fauna is seen as wasteful and cruel. However, the issue is that the UK no longer has the large predators which contributed to natural deer population regulation, such as the Eurasian lynx or European wolf, as these animals were hunted to extinction. Without the presence of large predators to manage the deer population, alongside human-influenced habitat and land use change, the numbers in herds grow beyond what the land is capable of providing. Although deer culling may seem like a necessity in order to preserve the natural environment, the deer population imbalance is a human-made issue. Many conservation organisations advocate for lynx or wolves to be reintroduced in the UK, in order to restore the natural food chain and remove the need for mass killing of deer each year[135], but proposals to reintroduce native predators such as the Eurasian lynx have faced significant opposition from some livestock farmers, including statements that reintroduced animals would be shot due to concerns about predation of farmed animals. This opposition presents a significant practical barrier to reintroduction: conservation organisations cannot responsibly release animals into landscapes where there is a substantial risk of deliberate killing. Consequently, although predator reintroduction could contribute to restoring natural ecological processes and regulating deer populations, its feasibility depends partly on securing sufficient coexistence and tolerance among affected land users.

Compliance and Enforcement

The Act is enforced by police, who investigate deer offences, and the deer culling licenses are issued by Natural England. The maximum penalty under the Act is three months imprisonment for the most serious offences. Although uncommon, some individuals have been charged under this Act. In 2018, two men were charged under the Act for allegedly killing 18 deer in a field in Worcestershire, although they were not convicted, providing an example of this Act being potentially poorly enforced[136]. Even though deer are perceived to have stronger legal protections than most other animals because they have their own species-specific legislation, prosecutions and convictions under the Deer Act appear to be relatively uncommon, raising questions about the extent to which offences are detected and effectively enforced.

Protection of Badgers Act 1992

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992[137] is species-specific legislation which provides special protections to badgers in the wild. The Act makes it an offence to take, kill or injure badgers,

[134] Natural England and Defra (2026) *Deer Licences.* https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/deer-licences
[135] Barkham, P. (2026) 'Lynx could return to Scotland – but can rewilders win over wary Highlanders?', *The Guardian,* 27 February https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2026/feb/27/lynx-could-return-to-scotlands-forests-but-can-rewilders-win-over-wary-highlanders
[136] *BBC News* (2018) 'Arrests after 18 deer shot dead in Wyre Forest field', 13 September. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hereford-worcester-45500517
[137] Protection of Badgers Act 1992 c. 51 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/51/contents

mark or ring badgers, possess and sell live badgers, inflict cruelty onto badgers, interfere with badger setts, but these activities may be legal if performed under certain licences granted by Natural England or Natural Resources Wales[138].

Exemptions are provided for taking or killing badgers, such as taking the badger to help it if the badger is injured, killing an injured badger as an act of mercy, or unavoidably killing badgers while committing a lawful act. All prohibitions of cruelty, interference, and trade are exempted if the actions are licensed under the Animals in Scientific Procedures Act 1986. Specific exemptions are provided for each offence also.

Compliance and Enforcement

This Act is enforced by the police, with support from environmental and animal welfare organisations, such as RSPCA, who can investigate suspected crimes, gather evidence and file reports with the police. Certain offences under the Act, including wilful killing, injuring, or taking of a badger, or being in possession of a dead badger, inflicting cruelty onto a badger, or interfering with a badger sett, carry maximum penalties of six imprisonment and an unlimited fine in England and Wales, (or 12 months and an unlimited fine in Scotland). However, other offences including unlicensed ringing or marking of a badger, being in possession of, or attempting to sell, a live badger, and failing to comply with license conditions do not carry imprisonment as a penalty, and only a fine can be issued if convicted of these offences[139]. With the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021 increasing the maximum prison sentence from six months to five years for the most serious offences, it is understandable why some wildlife organisations feel there is an inequality in punishments between animals under human control and wild-living animals.

A 1995 study estimated 50,000 badgers were killed on the roads each year; more than 30 years later, the numbers could be much higher than this[140]. The Act's exemption concerns killing or injury that is the incidental result of a lawful action and could not reasonably have been avoided, and therefore aren't considered a crime. Furthermore, badger baiting has seen an increase (especially in Wales), but conviction rates remain low[141]. Considering the badger has the strongest legal protections of any wild mammal in the UK, the species does not seem very well protected in a practical sense.

Generally, the Act makes killing badgers an offence, however it becomes legal if one has been issued a badger culling license by Natural England, which is a public body sponsored by Defra, the purpose of which is ‘is to help conserve, enhance and manage the natural environment for the benefit of present and future generations, thereby contributing to

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[138] RSPCA (no date) *Badgers and the Law.* https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/wildlife/badgers/law

[139] Darnell, H. (2022) ‘The Protection of Badgers – Where are we now?’, *UK Journal of Animal Law,* 6(2). https://www.alaw.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/The-Protection-of-Badgers-Where-are-we-now-by-Hannah-Darnell.pdf

[140] Harris et al (1995) *A Review of British Mammals: Population Estimates and Conservation Status of British Mammals Other Than Cetaceans.* Peterborough: The Joint Nature Conservation Committee. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242583185_A_Review_of_British_Mammals_Population_Estimates_and_Conservation_Status_of_British_Mammals_Other_Than_Cetaceans

[141] Badger Trust (2026) ‘Badger digging and baiting in Wales becoming more prolific’ [blog post], 20 July. https://www.badgertrust.org.uk/post/badger-digging-and-baiting-in-wales-becoming-more-prolific

sustainable development[142]'. Licenses to kill or interfere with badgers may be granted for the purposes of construction and development, preservation of a monument, or for scientific or educational purposes, or in the interest of public safety (in England only). The Act grants Natural England the power to issue licenses to kill badgers to prevent the spread of disease or damage to farmland. This granted permission for mass culling of badgers each year by farmers is on the basis that badgers spread bTB to farmed cows.

The effectiveness, necessity and proportionality of badger culling remain disputed, particularly given the availability of non-lethal approaches including badger vaccination, cattle-focused disease controls and enhanced surveillance. Most deliberate killing of badgers under the Government's bovine TB control programme has occurred through licensed culling operations, so the Act does not prevent the killing of many badgers. Since 2013, 247,000 badgers have been killed by licensed farmers in England, whether they carried bTB or not.

No new badger culling licenses were issued this year (2026) in England, as part of a new TB Eradication Strategy implemented by Defra[143]. The policy focuses on implementing badger surveys, a wildlife surveillance program, badger vaccination and a study of the vaccination impact. No new culling licenses have been issued by Natural England since 2022, and all licenses are valid for four years, meaning culling is now prohibited as there are no active licenses. However, this is a Government policy, and not an amendment to the law, so badger culling could potentially be reintroduced in the future as culling is still a lawful licensed activity under the Act. The change therefore represents a shift in government disease-control policy rather than a statutory prohibition on badger culling.

In the other devolved nations, badger culling differs. Wales stopped culling badgers in 2012, and instead have policy focussed on bTB vaccination, and cow farming methods to stop the spread of bTB, which Wales has found effective. However, badger culling is not prohibited by law in Wales, and the Welsh Government have not ruled it out from ever being reintroduced. The Senedd approved a motion in July 2026 to change its approach to bTB[144], and culling is a potential option being pushed by Reform despite there being little scientific consensus that culling works in eradicating bTB rates in farmed cows[145]. In Northern Ireland, badger culling was ruled unlawful in 2023 by the High Court, after a legal challenge by charities Wild Justice and NI Badger Group against the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Daera)[146]. The decision was based on the lack of a proper public consultation, not animal welfare issues, but the decision will save 4,000 badgers from being killed. This decision would not prevent Daera proceeding with another badger cull in the future. Scotland

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[142] UK Government (no date) *About Us.* https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england/about

[143] *UK Government* (2025) 'Government to end badger cull with new TB eradication strategy' [news article], 30 August https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-end-badger-cull-with-new-tb-eradication-strategy

[144] Bean, D. (2026) 'Badger culling back on Welsh bovine TB agenda', *Countryside Alliance,* 16 July. https://www.countryside-alliance.org/news-content-type/badger-culling-back-on-welsh-bovine-tb-agenda

[145] Palmer, M. (2026) 'Reform calls for badger cull in fight against bovine TB', *BBC News,* 15 July. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crmrww978yvo

[146] Cullen, L. (2023) 'Badger cull: Belfast High Court judge quashes Northern Ireland plan', *BBC News*, 25 October. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-67215060

has not adopted the widespread badger-culling approach used in England and has held Officially Tuberculosis Free status since 2009[147].

Though uncommon, people are occasionally prosecuted under this Act. In 2021, a man was found guilty of using a dog to interfere with a badger sett, during an illegal hunt. He was handed a £2000 fine, and avoided imprisonment[148]. Although imprisonment was available for the offence, the offender received a £2,000 fine. From an animal-protection perspective, relatively modest penalties of this kind raise questions about whether sentencing provides a sufficient deterrent to deliberate wildlife crime. During 2018 in England and Wales, there were 13 prosecutions and 8 convictions under the Act. However, in 2019, there were only 3 prosecutions and 3 convictions[149]. The conviction rate appears high, but the number of prosecutions are generally low which raises questions regarding the detection, investigation and enforcement of offences under the Act.

Hunting Act 2004

The Hunting Act 2004[150] prohibits the hunting of any wild-living mammals with dogs, with statutory exemptions. These exemptions include preventing damage to farmland or farmed animals which the hunted mammal would otherwise cause, if the hunted animal is to be used for human consumption, or if participating in a field trial. Stalking and flushing remain legal when using 2 dogs or less (and the other statutory conditions are also satisfied). This Act covers England and Wales.

The hunting of rats and rabbits is exempt if the hunting occurs on the hunter's own land or the hunter has permission from the landowner. Hare coursing is prohibited under the Act, but a separate exemption permits dogs to be used to retrieve a hare that has already been shot.

The hunting of pheasants and other gamebirds is not prohibited under this law, as this law is specific to wild-living mammals, and is instead governed by the other legislation, including the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981[151] and the Game Act 1891[152]. The Game Act 1981 established the need of game licenses to hunt and shoot gamebirds, and designating a close season in which they could not be taken. 40-60 million pheasants and partridges are reared in factory farms, and then are released for the purpose of hunting each year[153].

Compliance and Enforcement

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[147] Scottish Badgers (no date) *Badgers and Farming*. *https://www.scottishbadgers.org.uk/information-hub/badgers-and-farming/*
[148] Egret, E. (2023) 'GUILTY: Terrierman convicted under Protection of Badgers Act', *Protect the Wild,* 30 January. https://protectthewild.org.uk/news/guilty-terrierman-convicted-under-protection-of-badgers-act/
[149] UK Parliament (2020) *Protection of Badgers Act: Prosecutions*. https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-11-04/111554/
[150] Hunting Act 2004 c. 37 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/37/contents
[151]Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 c.69 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69
[152] Game Act 1891 c. 32 (Regnal. 1 and 2 Will 4) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Will4/1-2/32/contents
[153] Animal Aid (no date) *The Shooting Industry.* https://www.animalaid.org.uk/issues/wildlife-and-our-shared-planet/shooting/

The Hunting Act 2004 is enforced by police, with prosecution decisions being made by the CPS. Defra also are involved with this Act through setting policy, and Natural England issuing licenses for certain otherwise restricted wildlife-management activities. Between 2004 and 2021, there were 572 convictions under the Act[154]. The hunting of wild mammals is not an imprisonable offence under the Act, instead only offering an unlimited fine upon conviction. For example, in 2019, two men plead guilty to hunting a wild mammal with dogs. They received a £350 fine and £185 court fee each[155]. The absence of custodial penalties has attracted criticism regarding deterrence, particularly in cases involving organised hunts where financial penalties may represent a relatively limited sanction.

Animal welfare and advocacy organisations, such as RSPCA, IFAW and the League Against Cruel Sports, monitor hunts they believe to be illegal. Hunt saboteur groups deliberately sabotage hunt scent trails to prevent foxes from being hunted and killed on supposed 'trail hunts'; trail hunting has been criticised for being used as a 'smokescreen' for unlawful fox hunting as it remains legal in the UK[156]. And despite the 2024 Labour Government manifesto commitment to phase out trail hunting completely, they are still yet to deliver on their promise (although licenses to trail hunt on Ministry of Defence land have been suspended after pressure from advocacy groups). In March 2026, Defra launched a consultation on proposals to prohibit trail hunting in England and Wales; however, at the time of writing, trail hunting remains legal while the Government considers how the proposed ban should be implemented. Unfortunately, every year there are reports of people who have hunted and killed foxes while using trail hunting as a cover for their criminal activities. For example, in 2025, Somerset Hunt Saboteurs released video evidence of people hunting a fox[157]. Despite the police launching an investigation as a result, there were no convictions. Additionally, Melbreak and Blencathra Hunts received Community Protection Warnings (CPW) after video evidence emerged of them hunting foxes, but no one was arrested, and it is disputed on whether CPW's prevent reoffending or deter others from committing the same crime[158].

Fox hunting is more prolific than expected; in 2024, the League Against Cruel Sports released findings that between 1 August and 31 October 2024, 106 foxes were seen being chased (83% increase), there were 127 incidents of suspected illegal cub hunting (43% increase), and there were 315 incidents of hunts causing issues in the local community (165% increase)[159]. The findings indicate a substantial increase in recorded incidents of suspected illegal hunting and hunt-related disruption compared with the previous year, suggesting that illegal hunting remains a significant enforcement concern.

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[154] The Hunting Act (2024) *Prosecutions.* https://www.huntingact.org/the-hunting-act/prosecutions/
[155] The Hunting Act (2024) *Prosecutions.* https://www.huntingact.org/the-hunting-act/prosecutions/
[156] Nicholas, M. (2026) 'Channel 4 News expose a sickening fox hunt kill', *League Against Cruel Sports* [news article], 29 January. https://www.league.org.uk/news-and-resources/news/channel-4-news-expose-a-sickening-fox-hunt-kill
[157] Barltrop, P. (2025) 'Police probe as footage appears to show illegal hunt', *BBC News,* 16 December. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwywg05rx1go
[158] Anderson, T. (2025) 'Lake District hunts served with Community Protection Warnings', *Protect the Wild* [news article], 22 January. https://protectthewild.org.uk/fox-hunting/lake-district-hunts-served-with-community-protection-warnings/
[159] Nicholas, M. (2024) 'New figures reveal the scale of fox cub hunting by English and Welsh hunts', *League Against Cruel Sports* [news article], 14 November. https://www.league.org.uk/news-and-resources/news/new-figures-reveal-the-scale-of-fox-cub-hunting-by-english-and-welsh-hunts/

There is an inequality between protections for wild living animals and animals under human control. It is essential that the Government amends the Act to bring it up to date and adds imprisonment as a penalty for violating this Act. The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Act 2021 increased the maximum penalty for animal cruelty to animals under human control from six months to five years, so the same should be applied to cruelty towards wild living animals.

The law governing hunting wild mammals with dogs differs across the devolved nations. Scotland operates under the separate Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023[160], which introduced a more restrictive regime, generally limiting the use of dogs to search for, stalk or flush wild mammals to two unless a licence is obtained, and specifically prohibiting trail hunting. Northern Ireland is not covered by either Act and does not have an equivalent general statutory prohibition on hunting wild mammals with dogs; instead, particular species and hunting practices are regulated through legislation including the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985[161]. Consequently, activities such as fox hunting with packs of hounds remain lawful in Northern Ireland where other relevant legal requirements are complied with, and this has remained a contentious issue, with animal advocacy and wildlife organisations campaigning for a hunting ban.

Glue Traps (Offences) Act 2022

This Act makes the setting of glue traps with the intention of catching rodents, the setting, or causing of setting, of a glue trap which risks catching a rodent, or failing to remove a set glue trap which risks catching a rodent, illegal. The use of rodent glue traps has been prohibited in England since 31 July 2024 except where used under licence. This Act applies to England only.

The Act was reviewed by the ASC in March 2026[162]. The ASC states that despite only licenced pest controllers being permitted to use glue traps in specific licenced conditions, the sale of glue traps 'could not be banned at the time of the act, without coordination across the UK'. It considers that the continued sale of glue traps may mean the use is continuing inadvertently. There is also evidence that rodent glue traps are being rebranded as insect traps. For a better animal welfare outcome from the Act, the ASC recommends a ban of glue traps across the UK, and that the sale of glue traps places people at risk of breaking the law under the Act.

The sale, use and possession of glue traps are banned in Scotland as of 2026 via its Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Act 2024[163]. This required an exemption under UK Internal Markets Act, which the Government initially refused in 2024, but later amended the act via United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 (Exclusions from Market Access Principles:

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[160] Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023 $a_{sp\ 1}$ https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2023/1/contents

[161] Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 No. 171 (NI.2) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1985/171/contents

[162] Defra (2026) *Animal Sentience Committee: views on animals as sentient beings in relation to the Glue Traps (Offences) Act 2022.* London: Defra. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-sentience-committee-glue-traps-offences-act-2022/animal-sentience-committee-views-on-animals-as-sentient-beings-in-relation-to-the-glue-traps-offences-act-2022

[163] Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Act 2024 asp 4 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2024/4

Glue Traps) Regulations 2025 to allow Scotland to enforce their own ban on the sale of glue traps countrywide.

The penalty for committing most prohibited actions under this Act is imprisonment not exceeding six months, a fine, or both, apart from the offence of failing to deal with a trap found to present a risk, which is fine only.

Compliance and Enforcement

Even though the Hunting Act 2004 banned hunting wild living mammals with dogs, it is still legal to kill animals which are considered ‘pests’, such as rats and mice, with poison, mouse traps, and other lethal methods subject to the legislation governing the particular method, all of which are inhumane and cause severe suffering. Glue traps are illegal to use to catch rodents by the public under the Act, however, it does not prohibit the sale or possession of glue traps, meaning that traps capable of being used to catch rodents remain legally available for purchase in shops and online without restrictions, despite their use for rodent control being prohibited without a licence.

However, the offences are framed specifically around traps set for the purpose of catching rodents or in circumstances presenting a risk of catching rodents. The Act therefore does not create an equivalent general prohibition on setting adhesive traps where the relevant risk concerns only non-rodent animals despite evidence that species including birds, snakes, squirrels, hedgehogs, or juvenile foxes can become caught in them. Many non-target species are technically protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and the harm caused to wildlife from glue traps was a driving factor for the enactment of this Act, but not including them in the Act could potentially open a legal loophole leaving them with weakened protections.

Furthermore, the Act provides exemptions for people with a license to use them under The Glue Traps (Licensing) Regulations 2024[164], despite them being proven to be inhumane and prolong suffering. Only professional pest controllers can hold a licence. Licences can only be used in exceptional circumstances for public health or safety where other methods have failed or aren't practicable. There are two types of license: class licence and individual licence. Class licences are issued for very specific urgent indoor circumstances, such as aircraft, hospital operating rooms and critical infrastructure at imminent risk. Individual licences are issued for exceptional public-health and safety situations at a particular site where alternatives have been tried and failed. Furthermore, licensed traps also have stringent monitoring requirements. Under the class licence, for example, the controller must remain on site or remotely monitor the traps, respond to a triggered trap within two hours, and check traps every six hours. Unfortunately, despite the stringent licensing regulations imposed by the Act, glue traps still being freely available to purchase at shops and online mean that while licensed pest controllers are bound by these rules and regulations, members of the public are able to purchase and use glue traps with a very low risk of being caught doing so. The continued legal sale and possession of glue traps therefore presents an enforcement challenge, as possession alone does not constitute an offence and unlawful use may be difficult to detect unless it is witnessed or subsequently reported. Since the

[164] The Glue Traps (Licensing) Regulations 2024 No. 702 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2024/702/made

enforcement of the Act in 2024, there have not been any recorded convictions, or even charges, under the Act.

Animals used in scientific research and regulatory testing

The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986

The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986[165] (ASPA) is a UK-wide legislation which regulates the use of animals used in research and regulatory testing. It also regulates the breeding and supply of certain animals for scientific purposes and methods used to kill animals. Animals used for research and regulatory testing are not protected by the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (or the animal welfare legislation which was in force when ASPA was passed, which was the Protection of Animals Act 1911), as the conditions they are kept in and the level of pain and suffering caused by the procedures they are used in would constitute offences under the 2006 Act; the treatment of a dog being used for regulatory testing would be illegal if that same treatment was given to a dog that was someone's pet, despite being the same species and having the same ability to experience pain, stress and fear. So, the Government passed a separate Act which allows such pain and suffering to be inflicted upon them, which is justified by law as it is for the purpose of scientific research and regulatory testing. However, animals used in scientific research are not entirely excluded from the Animal Welfare Act; section 58(1) provides that the Act does not apply to anything lawfully done to an animal under the ASPA, but they are still technically covered under the 2006 Act for unlawful treatment under ASPA. Furthermore, the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 recognises that all vertebrate animals, decapod crustaceans, and cephalopods are sentient, so this includes most animals covered by ASPA that are used for experiments and regulatory testing. However, recognition of the ability these animals have to feel pain, fear and distress has not caused procedures which cause severe pain and suffering to be prohibited, or any changes to be made to scientific experimentation or regulatory testing in general.

The Act is accompanied by statutory guidance titled 'Code of practice for the care and accommodation of animals bred, supplied or used for scientific purposes'[166], which are updated regularly and dictate the minimum welfare standards which must be met by breeding facilities and laboratories, procedural rules, and requirements for experiments to be evaluated before given authorisation. Laboratories must obtain licenses from the Home Office before they can conduct experiments on animals, which is supposed to act as a way of regulating which experiments are conducted and how much suffering animals are subjected to. The Home Office has a three-tier licensing system; an establishment licence, a personal licence, and a project licence, all of which must be active before an experiment can be conducted lawfully. Furthermore, dogs, cats, primates and horses are specially protected

[165] Animals in Scientific Procedures Act 1986 c. 14
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/14/contents
[166] Home Office (2026) *Care and accommodation of animals in science: 2026 code of practice.* London: Home Office.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-and-accommodation-of-animals-in-science-2026-code-of-practice

species, and are only allowed to be used if there are no other animals which can be used instead.

The Act lays out the 3 Rs principles (Replacement, Reduction, Refinement), restrictions and controls on actions within the establishment, restrictions on rehoming animals at the end of the experiment, controls on killing, licensing regulations, and enforcement powers. National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) was created separately to the Act to reduce, refine and replace the use of animals, and while they have committed to prioritising replacement, there is still a large amount of opposition from scientists to change the way they have always worked, and many scientists are reluctant to embrace the changes[167]. To push the obligation to use alternative methods, animal testing should be prohibited in all cases, forcing the development of replacement methods.

Furthermore, Section 24 of ASPA prohibits the Home Office from sharing of 'confidential information' received from animal testing facilities. It prevents the public from accessing information such as licensing applications and assessments, reports from inspector visits or review papers. The secrecy of Section 24 is a protective mechanism for the animal testing industry, protecting it from public scrutiny. Furthermore, the lack of compulsory result sharing means experiments are repeated by different laboratories, despite previous experiments being unsuccessful, because they have not shared the findings. This results in numerous animals suffering in experiments which have already been conducted. Many animal advocacy organisations are campaigning for Section 24 to be repealed or updated in line with the Freedom of Information Act 2000[168].

The Act itself has only had two significant amendments since 1986; in 2013 The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 Amendment Regulations 2012[169] incorporated the 3Rs into the framework in line with EU law, and in 2026 The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (Amendment) Regulations 2026[170] was enacted to refine project licenses, update procedures and consolidate assimilated EU law. However, the overall licensing and regulatory framework has remained the same for 40 years, despite science progressing rapidly since then. But in spite of the outdated legislation holding back scientific developments and animal rights, there have been recent developments by the Government which acknowledge the necessity to move away from animal testing in favour of cruelty-free, human-relevant science.

Recently, animal testing has become a more frequent topic of discussion in Parliament. The Animals in Medical Research (Prohibition) Bill[171] was a private members bill brought forward by Steve Race MP which would have legally enforced a phase-out of animal experiments for

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[167] Kelly, E. (2015) 'Campaigners and scientists clash over animal testing at European Parliament', *Science Business,* 13 May. https://sciencebusiness.net/news/77027/Campaigners-and-scientists-clash-over-animal-testing-at-European-Parliament-

[168] Freedom of Information Act 2000 c. 36 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents

[169] The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 Amendment Regulations 2012 No. 3039 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/3039/contents/made

[170] The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (Amendment) Regulations 2026 No. 663 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2026/663/made

[171] Animals in Medical Research (Prohibition) Bill. Bill 50 2024-2025 https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/59-01/0050/240050.pdf

medical research by 2035. Its first reading was in October 2024, but unfortunately it failed to progress through Parliament. In addition to this, animal welfare has been debated several times recently in the Houses of Parliament, but no legislation has been passed which will force the phase out of animal testing. Nevertheless, in 2025, the UK Government announced their strategy 'Replacing Animals in Science'[172]. The aim of the new policy is to phase out animal experiments 'in all but exceptional circumstances', promising £75 million funding to the development of alternative methods and the creation of a new committee. However, the wording 'in all but exceptional circumstances' is questionable; the law already states that animals should only be used if there are no other alternatives, and yet Great Britain conducted 2.64 million procedures on animals in 2024[173].

Animal testing is holding the UK back from advancing science. Approximately 89% of pharmaceuticals which pass toxicity testing in animals will fail in humans, because animals are not reliable models for humans[174]. On the other side, some drugs which have seemed safe in animal trials have injured and killed people during clinical trials. The unreliability of using animal models is not only a welfare issue, but it has been holding back scientific development. One animal experiment which has caused controversy is the forced swim test. It is used to test the efficacy of antidepressant drugs – mice are given the drugs and placed in a body of water from which they are unable to escape. The hypothesis is that the longer they swim and struggle to get out, the better the antidepressant works. However, new science has shown that this isn't the case, as mice will stop swimming to try and preserve their energy so they don't die of exhaustion, or they have learned that they will be rescued by someone once they stop swimming[175]. Despite this revelation rendering the forced swim test unreliable. The Home Office is still able to issue licenses for this test, although the remaining universities in the UK still conducting this test in 2023 have all claimed to have stopped as of 2026.

Compliance and Enforcement

There are two bodies involved in the enforcement and oversight of ASPA. The Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) is a Home Office department which issues licenses and audit compliance, and is the body authorised to enforce ASPA. The Animals in Science Committee (ASC) is an independent advisory body funded by the Home Office, which provides strategic oversight and advises the Government on scientific and ethical issues.

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[172] Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (2025) *Replacing Animals in Science.* London: Department of Science, Innovation and Technology. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/690e073c896fad804b050fa6/replacing_animals_in_science_strategy-web-version.pdf

[173] UK Government (2025) *Annual statistics of scientific procedures on living animals, Great Britain 2024* https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/scientific-procedures-on-living-animals-great-britain-2024/annual-statistics-of-scientific-procedures-on-living-animals-great-britain-2024

[174] Norman, G.A.V. 'Limitations of Animal Studies for Predicting Toxicity in Clinical Trials: Is it Time to Rethink Our Current Approach?', *JACC Basic Transl Sci.,* 25(4), pp. 845-854. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31998852/

[175] Reardon, S. (2024) 'Pressure grows to ditch controversial forced swim test in rodent studies of depression, *Science,* 20 March. https://www.science.org/content/article/pressure-grows-to-ditch-controversial-rodent-test-in-depression-studies

The Home Office faces barriers to airtight enforcement, which includes having limited resources, as it is funded by taxpayer money, and as of 2024 only employs 8.2 FTE licensing inspectors and 4 FTE compliance inspectors to oversee animal testing facilities and experiments[176]. In 2024, ASRU reported four FTE compliance inspectors responsible for compliance oversight across the regulated sector. Given the scale of licensed animal research, this limited regulatory capacity raises questions about the extent to which the regulator can independently detect non-compliance rather than relying on establishments to identify and report breaches. ASRU relies heavily on self-reporting from the facilities themselves, and despite thousands of animals being involved in compliance breaches every year, ASRU usually only provides inspector advice, and almost never revokes licenses, demand employment termination or issue prosecution notices, regardless of whether serious animal welfare violations have taken place. This demonstrates a lack of enforcement and consequence for animal welfare violations.

In 2024, 22,204 animals were involved in 146 reported cases of non-compliance, including animals being left without food and water for up to 5 days, thrown in the bin while still alive, and drowning in their enclosure from water leaked from malfunctioned equipment. Other cases of non-compliance involved procedures being undertaken without the correct licences. Despite this, only 2 compliance notices and 36 letters of reprimand were handed out, while 139 cases were addressed with inspector advice (some issues were remedied with more than one method)[177]. So, establishments can violate the law and their licensing agreements, and animals can die from cruelty and neglect, but very few consequences are received – zero license revocation or prosecution notices were handed out in 2024 despite serious licence and welfare breaches. This raises questions about whether the current enforcement framework provides sufficient accountability and deterrence, particularly where breaches result in significant animal suffering.

EU Law

Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023

A large amount of animal welfare legislation came from the EU, particularly directives for farmed animals and the environment (which directly impacts wild living animals). After the UK left the EU, the UK Government created the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023[178] which revoked specified pieces of retained EU law and, from 1 January 2024, renamed the remaining body of law ‘assimilated law’. The Act also removed certain EU-derived interpretive principles and created powers enabling assimilated law to be amended, restated, replaced or revoked.

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[176] Home Office (2026) *Animals in Science Regulation Unit annual report 2024 (accessible)*. London: Home Office. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animals-in-science-regulation-unit-annual-report-2024/animals-in-science-regulation-unit-annual-report-2024-accessible

[177] Home Office (2025) *Animals in Science Regulation Unit: Annual report 2024*. London: Home Office.https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69383d70e447374889cd8f8c/35.159_HO_Scientific_Procedures_ARA_2024.pdf

[178] Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 c. 28 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/28

A substantial body of UK animal-welfare and environmental legislation originated in EU directives and regulations. Following Brexit, many domestic measures implementing EU directives remained in force, while certain directly applicable EU instruments were retained and later became assimilated law. The post-Brexit animal-welfare framework therefore comprises both domestic legislation originally enacted to implement EU directives and directly applicable EU legislation that was retained after Brexit and is now classified as assimilated law.

For example, the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007[179] contain domestic standards derived in part from EU animal-welfare legislation. Requirements concerning chickens kept for meat production[180], originally linked to Directive 2007/43/EC, are now expressed through domestic provisions including Schedule 2A.

In addition, the Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC)[181] and Wild Birds Directive Wild Birds Directive (2009/147/EC)[182] were implemented in Great Britain through domestic legislation, including the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Those Regulations pre-dated Brexit and were subsequently amended to ensure that the conservation regime could continue to operate following the UK's withdrawal from the EU. These regulations provide protections to certain UK wildlife species, including dormice, otters, great crested newts and bats. The 2017 Regulations principally apply in England and Wales, while Scotland and Northern Ireland operate corresponding regimes under separate legislation. While the change did not directly weaken legal protections for wild animals, individuals and conservation organisations can now no longer rely on the European Commission's infringement procedure or the UK's obligations as an EU member state, and future governments have gained greater domestic control over the protected-species schedule, which could cause positive or negative impacts; changes are subject to statutory procedures, consultation and, for important schedules, affirmative parliamentary scrutiny.

The post-Brexit framework has also allowed domestic governments to amend EU-derived animal-welfare rules, and some changes have attracted criticism on the basis that they weaken particular protections. The Welfare of Animals (Transport) (Amendment) Regulations 2025[183], is an amendment made to the retained EU law Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations[184]. The amendment legalises picking chickens, and turkeys weighing less than 5kg, up by their legs, which was prohibited under Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005. This was a widely criticized move of the UK Government, who proceeded despite organisations and people advocating against this amendment, as picking these birds up by their legs can cause dislocation, distress and pain, hence why it was prohibited under EU law. The Government justified the amendment partly on the basis of bringing the legislation into line with existing Great Britain statutory

179 The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 No. 2078 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/2078/contents

180 Council Directive 2007/43/EC of 28 June 2007 laying down minimum rules for the protection of chickens kept for meat production https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eudr/2007/43/data.xht?view=snippet&wrap=true

181 Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 On the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:31992L0043

182 Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2010:020:0007:0025:en:PDF

183 The Welfare of Animals (Transport) (Amendment) Regulations 2025 No. 776 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2025/776/made

184 Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 of 22 December 2004 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations and amending Directives 64/432/EEC and 93/119/EC and Regulation (EC) No 1255/97 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32005R0001

guidance and addressing practical difficulties associated with commercial poultry catching. The impact assessment also found uncertainty in the scientific evidence regarding the relative welfare effects of different catching methods, but the decision was explicitly influenced by commercial considerations as requiring upright catching would have "significant logistical and cost impact" on the poultry industry.[185]. Animal-protection organisations nevertheless criticised the change because lifting birds in an inverted position by the legs can cause distress and create risks of injury, arguing that commercial practicality should not justify weakening an existing legal restriction.

Other Legislation in Devolved Nations

Animal welfare is a devolved issue. Some devolved nations have their own animal welfare and protection legislation not in force in other devolved nations and England. This has resulted in divergence between the four nations, with some devolved administrations introducing additional protections or prohibitions.

For example, the Prohibition of Greyhound Racing (Wales) Act 2026[186] is a Welsh legislation, and their most recent animal protection law as of June 2026. The Act represents an abolitionist approach to greyhound welfare, prohibiting the activity itself rather than attempting to regulate welfare standards within the industry. The Act prohibits greyhound racing, without exemption, across Wales. This ban comes after a long campaign by many animal advocacy organisations, due to the cruel nature of dog racing, including inadequate housing and neglect, abuse, lack of socialisation and mental enrichment, and abandonment after they are no longer profitable. Despite receiving Royal Assent in June 2026, the prohibition does not come into force no sooner than 1 April 2027, but must be no later than 1 April 2030, to allow the industry time to transition[187].

Another example is legislation in Northern Ireland which requires anyone who owns a dog to obtain a licence and have their dog microchipped at eight weeks old. This is mandatory under the Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011[188]. There are some exceptions for dogs which do not need a licence: a puppy under six months old kept by the person who also keeps its mother; an assistance dog; a dog kept, and for sale, in a licensed pet shop; a police dog; a dog kept under a block licence, on the premises to which the block licence relates. Mandatory microchipping was introduced principally to make individual dogs permanently identifiable and traceable to their owners. This was particularly connected to Northern Ireland's problem with stray and unidentified dogs. During scrutiny of the Bill, the Department reported that more than 2,000 of the 3,500 dogs destroyed in Northern Ireland in 2008 were strays whose owners could not be identified. The Government argued that voluntary microchipping could never ensure that all dogs were identifiable, whereas compulsory microchipping would make it easier to reunite lost or stolen dogs with their

185 Defra (2025) *Poultry catching and handling: proposed changes to permitted methods.* https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/poultry-catching-and-handling-proposed-changes-to-permitted-methods

186 Prohibition of Greyhound Racing (Wales) Act 2026 asc 11 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asc/2026/11/2026-04-28

187 Welsh Government (2026) *Prohibition of Greyhound Racing (Wales) Act 2026* https://www.gov.wales/prohibition-greyhound-racing-wales-act-2026

188 Dogs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 c.9 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/9/contents

owners and reduce the number of unidentified dogs being kept in pounds and potentially euthanised[189].

An example of where Scotland has introduced legislation independently of England and Wales is through the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023[190]. The Act replaced Scotland's previous hunting legislation Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002[191] and introduced stricter controls on the use of dogs to hunt wild mammals, including generally limiting the number of dogs that may be used to search for, stalk or flush wild mammals to two unless a licence is obtained. The Act also prohibits trail hunting, an activity which remains legal in England and Wales as of 2026, although the UK Government has committed to introducing a ban. The legislation therefore demonstrates how devolution has enabled Scotland to adopt a more restrictive approach to hunting with dogs than England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

International agreements

CITES

CITES stands for Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora[192] and is an international agreement which aims to protect certain wild animals and plants by placing restrictions, regulations and prohibitions on their movement and trade of the species, or their parts and products. It regulates the trade and movement of approximately 41,000 species which are split up into three categories:

- Appendix I: International commercial trade of these species, and their parts and products, is prohibited.
- Appendix II: Regulate commercial trade of species which may become threatened if trade is uncontrolled.
- Appendix III: Species of which countries need cooperation from other countries to prevent exploitation[193].

While different governments have their own legislation on possession, use and trade of endangered species which apply within their sovereign territory, CITES covers the jurisdiction gap faced by governments trying to control illegal movement of species across borders through an international framework through which Parties cooperate. Regulating and prohibiting the trade of vulnerable species helps authorities crack down on illegal wildlife trafficking, which is one of the most lucrative criminal activities.

Compliance and Enforcement

189 Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development (2010) *Dogs (Amendment) Bill.* Northern Ireland: Northern Ireland Assembly. https://archive.niassembly.gov.uk/record/committees2010/Agriculture/101102_Dogs%28Amendment%29Bill.htm .

190 Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023 asp 1 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2023/1/section/1

191 Protection of Wild Mammals (Scotland) Act 2002 asp 6 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2002/6/2020-11-30

192 CITES (1973) Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora https://cites.org/eng/disc/text.php

193 IFAW (2025) *What is CITES?* https://www.ifaw.org/uk/journal/what-cites

In the UK, CITES is enforced by The Control of Trade in Endangered Species (COTES) Regulations 2018 (COTES)[194]. Under COTES, individuals must apply to APHA for licenses to purchase, sell or display CITES-regulated Annex A species. Border Force is responsible for controls at the UK border, and depending on the species, its classification and the proposed activity, permits or certificates may be required for the import, export, re-export or commercial use of CITES-listed specimens. Anyone attempting to commercially profit from any species found in Annex A must apply for an Article 10 exemption certificate[195]. Movement and trade of these species are generally prohibited but exemptions may be provided for scientific and research purposes by biopharma and biomedical companies. For example, the long-tailed macaque is classified as 'endangered' by the IUCN[196], but is one of the most commonly used species of monkey in scientific research[197].

Many believe that CITES has been a success, preventing the extinction of highly traded species such as the tiger. However, serious concerns have arisen regarding the ability of the CITES permitting system to prevent illegally captured animals from entering legal international supply chains, due to CITES trade data containing unexplained anomalies and irregular breeding and export patterns. In Cambodia, US authorities alleged that wild-caught long-tailed macaques were laundered through breeding facilities and falsely labelled as captive-bred for export using CITES documentation, with Cambodian government officials alleged to have participated in the scheme[198]. Monkeys used for scientific research are required to have been bred for such purpose, and not taken from the wild to prevent diseases from interfering with research data, but the evidence strongly suggests that breeding facilities have been laundering wild-caught monkeys, which is affecting the wild population numbers. The use of wild-caught primates in research and testing has the potential to introduce diseases and pathogens which would interfere with procedures and results, providing more evidence that animal testing is unscientific and unreliable. Long-tailed macaques are also imported into the UK for use in scientific research, subject to the applicable CITES and animal-research regulatory requirements. The documented problems within international macaque supply chains raise broader questions regarding the ability of importing countries, including the UK, to verify reliably that animals recorded as captive-bred have not originated from wild populations.

Additionally, CITES permits and regulates international trade in products derived from listed species, including exotic skins (such as crocodile, lizard or alligator) used by luxury fashion companies, such as Hermes[199]. CITES documentation provides information concerning the legality, source and movement of specimens, but does not constitute a certification that the animals involved were kept or killed according to high welfare standards. Depending on the species and applicable restrictions, legally traded specimens may originate from captive-bred or wild populations.

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194 The Control of Trade in Endangered Species Regulations 2018 No. 703 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/703/contents

195 APHA and Defra (2019) *Commercial use of endangered species: check if you need a CITES certificate.* https://www.gov.uk/guidance/endangered-species-certificates-for-commercial-use

196 IUCN Red List (2024) *Long-tailed Macaque* https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/12551/273015436

197 Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (2026) 'From the Forest to the Lab: The Life Cycle of a Macaque Used in Medical Research', *Good Science Digest.* 1 May. https://www.pcrm.org/news/good-science-digest/forest-lab-life-cycle-macaque-used-medical-research

198 *Mongabay* (2025) 'CITES secretariat urges suspension of Cambodian long-tailed macaque trade', 3 February. https://news.mongabay.com/2025/02/cites-secretariat-urges-suspension-of-cambodian-long-tailed-macaque-trade/

199 Hermès (no date) *Manufacture*. https://www.hermes.com/uk/en/faq/maison-hermes/manufacture/#4236

Crocodiles farmed for their skin live in low-welfare conditions – overcrowded concrete boxes with no natural daylight or space to move around[200]. These two examples of poor animal protection show that while CITES may protect wild-living animals from poaching and trafficking, it does not cover protecting captive-born wild animals farmed for commercial purposes.

Furthermore, there are arguments that CITES is ineffective, as it hasn't been successful at deterring illegal and unsustainable exploitation of listed species due to implementation and compliance issues, alongside the focus of deterrence by state law enforcement, and the implications of turning what once was a simple agreement into a complex, forever changing framework that covers everything from species, to livelihoods to gender to the global youth has made the convention so complicated that it is preventing it from functioning as it should[201].

Despite its important role in regulating international wildlife trade, CITES continues to face significant implementation and enforcement challenges. Its effectiveness ultimately depends upon individual Parties accurately identifying the origin of specimens, issuing permits lawfully, detecting fraudulent documentation and enforcing restrictions at national borders. Cases involving the alleged laundering of wild-caught animals through supposedly legitimate captive-breeding operations demonstrate how weaknesses or corruption within national permitting systems can undermine the wider international framework. Furthermore, CITES is principally concerned with ensuring that international trade does not threaten the survival of species, rather than protecting the welfare or rights of individual animals involved in that trade. Because CITES is primarily a species conservation and trade agreement rather than an animal welfare framework, legal trade under CITES may continue even where the capture, breeding, confinement, transport or killing of individual animals raises serious welfare or animal-rights concerns.

Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Act 2026

The Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Act 2026[202] allows the UK to implement the international Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction, which is a global treaty designed to conserve and sustainably use marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction[203]. It allows for the extension of legal powers beyond the countries' own waters.

Two thirds of the ocean lies outside of national jurisdiction for any country. While other legal regimes already governed activities in these areas, the lack of a comprehensive cross-sectoral framework specifically addressing marine biodiversity has largely contributed

[200] Viva! (no date) *How Crocodiles Are Farmed and Killed*. https://viva.org.uk/animals/other-animals/crocodiles/

[201] Vorhies, F. (2025) 'Has CITES become too complicated to be effective?', *African Wildlife Economy Institute* [blog], 11 February. https://wildlifeeconomy.info/articles/has-cites-become-too-complicated-be-effective

[202] Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Act 2026 c. 6 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2026/6

[203] *Marine Biological Association* (2026) 'MBA welcomes passing of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Bill and its entry into UK Law', 18 February. https://www.mba.ac.uk/mba-welcomes-passing-of-the-biodiversity-beyond-national-jurisdiction-bill-and-its-entry-into-uk-law/

to the ocean's biodiversity loss. Population decline of keystone species such as the great white shark have been caused by overfishing, shark fishing and getting trapped in fishing nets. Turtle populations have been impacted by plastic pollution, overfishing and warming sea temperatures due to climate change. Countless other species have been negatively impacted by human behaviour in the ocean. The agreement will allow for marine protection on international waters, legally require environmental impact assessments for activities occurring beyond national jurisdiction which may disrupt or damage the marine ecosystem, share the benefits from research into and use of marine genetic material, and encourage the sharing of knowledge and technologies with developing nations[204].

While the Agreement is likely to benefit marine life by addressing significant gaps in the international conservation framework, its approach remains primarily conservation-based rather than rights-based. Marine biodiversity is protected at the level of species, ecosystems and sustainable use, such as through fisheries or rising sea levels, rather than through recognition of individual marine animals as beings possessing interests independent of their usefulness to humans. For example, sharing research into and use of marine genetic material raises questions from an animal-rights perspective. Marine genetic resources expressly include genetic material of animals, as well as plant, microbial and other origin. The Agreement therefore simultaneously seeks to conserve marine biodiversity while establishing a framework through which genetic material derived from marine organisms can be researched, utilised and the resulting benefits shared[205]. Although this may encourage scientific cooperation and equitable distribution of benefits, animals being seen as resources, and not as individuals who are entitled to freedom from human control or interference, continues to conceptualise marine animals partly as biological resources capable of generating value for humans.

Compliance and Enforcement

The UK ratified the BBNJ Agreement in July 2026 and the Act entered into force for the UK on 9 August 2026. The Act, together with secondary legislation and other domestic measures, provides the framework through which the UK implements its obligations under the Agreement[206]. Government guidance has subsequently been published explaining the requirements applying to UK individuals and organisations undertaking activities including marine scientific research, the collection and use of marine genetic resources, and activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction. However, as the regime has only recently entered into force, there is currently insufficient evidence to assess levels of compliance, the effectiveness of UK enforcement or the extent to which the legislation will achieve its intended conservation outcomes in practice.

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[204] Environment blog team (2026) 'From commitment to action: BBNJ Act receives Royal Assent', *Defra* [blog], 12 February https://defraenvironment.blog.gov.uk/2026/02/12/from-commitment-to-action-bbnj-act-receives-royal-assent/

[205] United Nations General Assembly (2022) *Further refreshed draft text of an agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (track changes).* https://www.un.org/bbnj/sites/default/files/crp-13-add1_further_refreshed_text_260822_tracks.pdf

[206] Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and Defra (2026) *Biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction: guidance for UK stakeholders.* https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/biodiversity-beyond-national-jurisdiction-guidance-for-uk-stakeholders

Wider Frameworks

Animal welfare governance in the United Kingdom extends beyond statutory legislation and is supported by a diverse network of guidance documents, voluntary standards, professional codes, and industry assurance schemes. These frameworks play a critical role in realising legal requirements as practical measures and promoting continuous improvement in welfare outcomes across different sectors. This section of the report will discuss other stakeholders and actors aside from the Government who influence and shape the animal protection framework:

- NGOs
- Assurance schemes
- Professional bodies

NGOs

NGOs play an influential role in shaping welfare expectations and promoting best practice and transitional guidance. They publish guidance documents, position statements, and welfare resources that are widely referenced by practitioners and policymakers. A notable example of non-governmental organisations influencing UK animal welfare policy is the contribution of the RSPCA to the development of statutory Codes of Practice[207] under the Animal Welfare Act 2006[208]. Through its scientific and technical expertise, the RSPCA has provided evidence to the Defra consultations relating to secondary legislation under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 on the welfare of dogs, cats, racing greyhounds, and other companion animals[209]. These contributions have helped shape government guidance by incorporating current animal welfare science and practical experience into statutory codes that support the implementation of animal welfare legislation. This demonstrates the important role NGOs can play in informing public policy and using scientific evidence to form practical guidance for animal keepers and enforcement authorities. Furthermore, NGOs provide input during policy development; Defra explicitly states that it developed the 2025 Animal Welfare Strategy for England through stakeholder roundtables involving NGOs, charities, experts, and enforcement bodies[210], illustrating how NGOs continue to influence national animal welfare policy.

Assurance schemes and certification labels

There is an increasing focus on ethical sourcing and supply chain transparency, particularly within sectors such as food production, fashion, cosmetics, and retail. Consumers, investors,

[207] The Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Cats, Dogs, and Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their Hybrids (Appointed Day and Revocations) (England) Order 2018 No. 310 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/310/made
[208] Animal Welfare Act c. 45 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/contents
[209] RSPCA (no date) *What we do* https://science.rspca.org.uk/sciencegroup/companionanimals/whoweare/whatwedo
[210] Defra (2025) *Animal welfare strategy for England.* Defra: London. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-welfare-strategy-for-england/animal-welfare-strategy-for-england

and advocacy groups are placing greater pressure on organisations to demonstrate how animal-derived products are sourced and to provide assurances regarding welfare standards throughout the supply chain. This has led to growing demand for welfare certifications, supplier codes of conduct, and traceability systems.

Farming

Farms can opt to be monitored and assured by private assurance schemes; where the relevant certification and supply-chain requirements are met, qualifying products may carry the scheme's certification label. Government-recognised qualifying farm assurance schemes include Red Tractor, RSPCA Assured, Quality Meat Scotland, Lion Quality (British Egg Industry Council), Laid in Britain, and Farm Assured Welsh Livestock Beef and Lamb Scheme (FAWL) Welsh Lamb and Beef Producers Ltd (WLBP)[211]. The purpose of these schemes are to provide the consumer an assurance that the animal product they are buying came from an animal kept in certain conditions laid out by the scheme. Some international NGOs also run certification schemes which are used by companies which trade in the UK.

Many people believe that farm assurance schemes guarantee high welfare standards, but they actually state compliance with specified standards relating to areas such as animal health and welfare, food safety, traceability and environmental protection, depending on the scope of the individual scheme. This suggests a disconnect between consumer knowledge of labels and label meaning, due to lack of clear insight provided by these schemes. Red Tractor and RSPCA Assured, and Marine Stewardship Council and Aquaculture Stewardship Council are assurance and certification schemes which are meant to prove to the consumer that the stamped products have reached certain standards, but they all have issues with producers maintaining compliance.

Red Tractor and RSPCA Assured are both farmed animal assurance schemes. Red Tractor is the most widely used assurance scheme in the UK. Red Tractor standards allow the breeding and growing of Frankenchickens (fast-growing chickens), chicken stocking density of 38kg/m², and the use of farrowing crates for pigs for up to five weeks at a time[212]. In 2025, the Advertising Standards Authority upheld a complaint against a Red Tractor advertisement, finding that its use of ‘farmed with care’ alongside ‘all our standards are met’ failed to make sufficiently clear which standards were being referred to and the degree to which those standards were met, suggesting that their claims were misleading to the public [213]. Furthermore, the Environment Agency found that Red Tractor assured farms were responsible for 62% of the most serious pollution incidents between 2014 and 2019[214].

RSPCA Assured is a branch of the largest animal welfare charity in the UK, the RSPCA. Despite attributing their with ‘higher animal welfare’, the RSPCA Assured scheme certifies

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[211] Defra (2024) *Qualifying farm assurance schemes.* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farm-assurance-schemes-evidence-of-vet-visits/qualifying-farm-assurance-schemes

[212] Project Slingshot (2026) *Red Tractor*. https://projectslingshot.com/labels-lie/red-tractor/

[213] Advertising Standards Agency (2025) *ASA Ruling on Assured Food Standards t/a Red Tractor.* https://www.asa.org.uk/rulings/assured-food-standards-a23-1199608-assured-food-standards.html

[214] Laville, S. (2025) ‘Watchdog rules Red Tractor exaggerated its environmental standards’, *The Guardian,* 15 October. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/oct/15/watchdog-rules-red-tractor-exaggerated-environmental-standards

factory farms that confine animals to crowded pens and conduct painful mutilations on animals such as beak trimming and tail docking, and slaughterhouses that use gas chambers, all of which are known to cause animals pain, fear and distress[215]. Furthermore, repeated investigations by animal advocates have documented abuse and neglect inside farms that have been certified for high welfare, demonstrating that assurance labels do not guarantee continuous compliance with scheme standards or the absence of poor welfare. Undercover investigations by Animal Rising[216] and Animal Justice Project[217] on farms assured by RSPCA Assured and Red Tractor respectively show consistent breaches of not only their own set standards for 'higher welfare', but animal cruelty legislation; animals being kicked, hit, and left to die from disease, starvation or hunger in excrement filled pens without adequate space or light were seen on 'high welfare' farms. RSPCA Assured claim to monitor each of their 4,000 assured farms once a year, but these visits are always pre-planned and are unlikely to document cases of abuse due to the farm workers knowing they are being evaluated[218]. So, not only are the standards not as 'high welfare' as they claim, but the enforcement of these standards is very weak due to lack of monitoring.

The Marine Stewardship Council and the Aquaculture Stewardship Council both run certification schemes, with products which meet their standards displaying their certification stamp. Both are international but used by products sold in the UK. Marine Stewardship Council is a global certification scheme for marine animals used for food. The scheme was originally set up to try and prevent overfishing, but it has many issues. The main problem with this scheme is that the MSC does not regulate fisheries itself, the fisheries pay for third party auditors to assess them against MSC's practice standards, which presents a conflict of interest[219]. Furthermore, certified fisheries can still use fishing equipment responsible for catching non-target species as by-catch, including large marine animals such as dolphins, whales, sharks and turtles, often killing the animals[220]. In addition to this, certified large-scale industrial krill fisheries are removing priority food sources for threatened species such as penguins and whales[221].

Aquaculture Stewardship Council is a NGO which provides a certification stamp to farmed fish which meet its standards. The ASC claim that their stamp certifies 'responsible farming', but fish farmed on ASC certified farms have repeatedly been found to be infested with lice,

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[215] Project Slingshot (2026) *RSPCA Assured.* https://projectslingshot.com/labels-lie/rspca-assured/
[216] Animal Rising (2024) *The UK's Largest Farm Investigation.* https://www.animalrising.org/rspcaassuredcampaign
[217] Cooper, A. (2023) 'A Red Tractor Assured Nightmare - A UK Pig Farm Investigation', *Animal Justice Project* [news article], 12 March. https://www.animaljusticeproject.com/post/a-red-tractor-assured-nightmare-a-uk-pig-farm-investigation
[218] Project Slingshot (2026) *RSPCA Assured.* https://projectslingshot.com/labels-lie/rspca-assured/
[219] McVeigh, K. (2021) 'Blue ticked off: the controversy over the MSC fish 'ecolabel'', *The Guardian,* 26 July. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jul/26/blue-ticked-off-the-controversy-over-the-msc-fish-ecolabel
[220] Project Slingshot (2026) *Marine Stewardship Council.* https://projectslingshot.com/labels-lie/marine-stewardship-council/
[221] McVeigh, K. (2026) 'World's largest krill harvester at centre of row over 'blue tick' sustainability label', *The Guardian.* 4 March. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/mar/04/worlds-largest-krill-harvester-row-blue-tick-sustainability-label

and then treating the fish with chemical treatments to try and control the lice[222]. They have also been found not to be enforcing their own standards; one Scottish salmon farm was found to have had lice infestations for over 11 weeks, which is nearly four times the limit allowed by ASC, but the ASC certification label was not revoked[223]. Furthermore, ASC certified fish farms are permitted to kill wild fish for use in fish feed, raising questions about how sustainable this process is for wild populations[224].

The 2024 UK-wide Fairer Food Labelling consultation demonstrated substantial support among respondents for greater transparency around the production and welfare standards of animal products. Of the 30,385 respondents answering the question on mandatory method-of-production labelling, over 99% of individual respondents and 69% of organisations supported making such labelling mandatory. Supporters argued that existing voluntary labels can provide insufficient or potentially misleading information, particularly because lower-welfare products are unlikely to be voluntarily identified as such, while clearer mandatory labels could enable consumers to distinguish between production systems and reward farmers operating to higher standards. The consultation also highlighted an important distinction between production methods and actual welfare outcomes: some respondents warned that production systems do not necessarily determine an animal's welfare, while others supported combining information on farming conditions with welfare outcome assessments. Notably, 98% of individual respondents preferred labels describing the method of production rather than terminology assigning a particular 'level of welfare', with concerns raised that welfare classifications can be subjective and potentially misleading. There was also strong support for reform to cover imported as well as domestically produced products, supported by over 99% of individuals and 86% of organisations[225]. The findings therefore indicate considerable demand among consultation respondents for clearer and more standardised information about how animal products are produced, while also demonstrating the difficulty of reducing animal welfare to a single certification label or production category.

Animal Testing

Animal testing is a topic of popular discourse brought into focus by brands such as The Body Shop, which was the first cosmetics brand to advocate against the use of animals for cosmetics testing in 1989[226]. Since the UK's ban on cosmetics testing for consumer safety in 1998, many cosmetics, personal care and household brands have committed to not testing their products or ingredients on animals, but some brands still sell their products where animal testing is required by law. The UK's cosmetics statutory guidance, Regulation 1223/2009 and the Cosmetic Products Enforcement Regulations 2013: Great Britain, states: "Cosmetic products are not permitted on the GB market if the product's ingredients, combination of ingredients or final formulation have been the subject of animal testing used

[222] Project Slingshot (2026) *Aquaculture Stewardship Council Certification.* https://projectslingshot.com/labels-lie/aquaculture-stewardship-certification/
[223] Project Slingshot (2026) *Aquaculture Stewardship Council Certification.* https://projectslingshot.com/labels-lie/aquaculture-stewardship-certification/
[224] *Wild Fish* (2025) 'New ASC Farm Standard serves salmon industry, not oceans. 15 May. https://wildfish.org/latest-news/new-asc-farm-standard-serves-salmon-industry-not-oceans/
[225] Defra (2025) *Summary of responses and government response.* London: Defra. https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/fairer-food-labelling/outcome/summary-of-responses-and-government-response#summary-of-consultation-responses-method-of-production-labelling
[226] The Body Shop (no date) *Forever Against Animal Testing.* https://www.thebodyshop.com/blogs/about-us/forever-against-animal-testing

to prove their safety for the purposes of this Regulation. However, historic animal testing data from animal testing that took place before such testing was banned at EU level may still be used in order to meet the requirements of the Regulation."[227] This means that compliance with the GB cosmetics testing prohibition does not necessarily mean that the ingredients in a cosmetic product have never historically been tested on animals, as data from tests conducted before the relevant EU prohibitions may still be used.

In 2015, the UK banned the testing of finished household products on animals, and chemicals where more than half is expected to be used as an ingredient in household products; there are exemptions for legal requirements or exceptional justification made in advance[228]. As the household products policy has its own rules concerning ingredients and circumstances in which testing may occur, statements about what "cruelty-free" means across all cosmetics, personal care and household products should not automatically be treated as equivalent. Household products may be labelled as 'cruelty-free' if the finished product was not tested on animals, even if ingredients within the product were under legal requirements, such as the EU's REACH directive, which required the testing of some chemicals for environmental and worker safety. After Brexit, the UK adopted its own similar regulations, UK REACH, allowing the testing to continue.

Many consumers actively try to avoid purchasing cosmetic, household and personal care products which have been tested on animals, which is becoming easier to do as more brands stop selling where animal testing is required by law and eliminate ingredients which have been tested on animals. Cruelty Free International's Leaping Bunny Program[229] licenses their leaping bunny logo to brands which meet its strict cruelty-free standards, so consumers can easily see which products and their ingredients have not been tested on animals by looking at the packaging. For the brand to be awarded the logo, they undergo rigorous supply chain audits, independent reviews and ongoing audits and checks to ensure the standard is being maintained.

A lack of a single, legally defined standard for 'cruelty-free' claims can create inconsistency in what the term communicates to consumers. Brands may make their own animal-testing claims and use generic rabbit imagery without obtaining independent cruelty-free certification. Although such claims remain subject to rules prohibiting misleading claims and must be capable of substantiation where required, this does not provide the same level of independent assurance as third-party certification. Cruelty Free International has itself identified a proliferation of rabbit symbols and cruelty-free claims that are not backed by independent third-party assurance as a source of consumer confusion[230]. Under its approval

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[227] Office for Product Safety and Standards (2026) *Regulation 1223/2009 and the Cosmetic Products Enforcement Regulations 2013: Great Britain.* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cosmetic-products-enforcement-regulations-2013/regulation-20091223-and-the-cosmetic-products-enforcement-regulations-2013-great-britain

[228] *Home Office & The Rt Hon Lynne Featherstone* (2015) 'Ban will end testing of household products on animals' [news article], 12 March. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ban-will-end-testing-of-household-products-on-animals

[229] Cruelty Free International (no date) *Our Approved Brands.* https://www.crueltyfreeinternational.org/approved-brands/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=21243714400&gbraid=0AAAABOj8_3zGxV_SFBWIPSFh50AcZa0V&gclid=CjwKCAjwyabTBhBFEiwAM3mNUBdxhmrHF5YeMhZdcie17Zbug6EnzT4f9jGdmlJ2FojKXM-WMH4eUhoCJKYQAvD_BwE

[230] The Cruelty Free International (no date) *The Cruelty Free International Approval Programme – A New Chapter Begins.*

programme, brands must meet defined criteria including supply-chain monitoring, a fixed cut-off date for animal testing and independent auditing[231]. Consumers may therefore encounter visually similar cruelty-free claims on products despite significant differences in how those claims have been verified.

Professional bodies

Zoos

Professional bodies establish standards for high levels of animal welfare. Facilities that keep animals as part of their business can receive accreditation from these organisations by meeting standards set by these bodies which exceed the legal minimum. One example is the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA). BIAZA represents more than 100 zoos and aquariums and operates an accreditation programme under which Full Members are required to undertake and pass accreditation screening to retain membership, and are expected to continue following its sector-specific welfare guidance[232]. However, accreditation by non-statutory bodies remains controversial. As these organisations are self-regulating, accreditation does not necessarily mean that members are legally required to comply with their standards. For example, SEA LIFE London Aquarium is accredited by BIAZA and is therefore presumed to maintain high standards of animal welfare[233]. Despite this, it has recently become the focus of a campaign by Freedom for Animals calling for the release of the 15 Gentoo penguins housed in its basement[234]. The penguins have no access to daylight or fresh air and are kept in a cramped glass enclosure that allows visitors to approach closely. The exhibit also differs significantly from their natural environment: the snow is artificial, and an image of their natural habitat is printed on the wall. Despite the penguins being kept in a low-welfare environment, BIAZA have not condemned the enclosure during the campaign.

Farming

Veterinary guidance provides an additional layer of oversight and expertise. Professional bodies, including the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and the British Veterinary Association (BVA), produce ethical guidance and position statements relating to animal welfare, disease management, euthanasia, transport, and husbandry practices. RCVS is a statutory regulator which holds regulatory enforcement powers, whereas BVA is a non-profit professional organisation. Veterinary professionals play a key role in monitoring welfare standards and advising organisations on evidence-based approaches to animal care. However, there is a reported gap between BVA guidance and practice, especially in farm settings. For example, between 71% and 85% of pigs have their tails docked to stop

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https://www.crueltyfreeinternational.org/the-cruelty-free-international-approval-programme-a-new-chapter-begins

[231] Cruelty Free International (no date) *Our Approval Programme.* https://www.crueltyfreeinternational.org/for-brands/our-approval-programme/

[232] BIAZA (no date) *Our Association.* https://biaza.org.uk/our-association

[233] BIAZA (no date) *SEA LIFE London Aquarium.* https://biaza.org.uk/members/detail/london-aquarium

[234] Freedom for Animals (2024) *SEA LIFE Penguin Campaign*. https://www.freedomforanimals.org.uk/sealife-penguin-campaign

them from tail biting[235]. But, routine tail docking is not legally permitted, and should only be carried out in cases where other options are non-viable[236]. The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board states that farmers must identify the cause of the tail biting, whether it be health, living conditions, diet, pen cleanliness, competition or lack of enrichment, and improve the conditions to prevent tail biting before docking[237]. Written veterinary approval is required confirming, on the basis of a veterinary risk assessment and relevant evidence, that docking is necessary and unavoidable. The RCVS is responsible for overseeing that vets are abiding by the law and not authorising tail docking unless necessary, but the number of pigs with docked tails suggests that the RCVS is not adhering to its supervisory duty[238].

Collectively, these legislative and non-legislative frameworks create a multi-layered system of animal welfare governance. While statutory legislation establishes minimum requirements, guidance documents, professional standards, and voluntary assurance schemes support organisations in achieving higher standards of welfare and adapting to evolving scientific understanding and societal expectations. The issues with welfare standards and governance are the lack of enforcement, consistency and consequence for non-compliance. In theory the standards are strong, but the lack of enforcement and accountability weakens it to the point where a lot of the schemes and projects are not achieving the outcomes they are intended for.

Recent Developments & Emerging Trends

Animal welfare governance in the United Kingdom slowly evolves in response to advances in scientific understanding, changing societal expectations, and increasing scrutiny of animal use across multiple sectors. Several recent developments in government policy, such as the 2025 Animal Welfare Strategy for England[239], and Standards of Modern Zoo Practice for Great Britain[240], indicate a growing emphasis on recognising animal sentience, improving transparency, and acknowledging species-specific needs.

The UK often sets precedents for the rest of the world with its animal welfare and protection legislation and policy. Great Britain was the first to implement national animal cruelty

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[235] The Animal Law Foundation (2026) The role of vets in illegal tail docking. https://animallawfoundation.org/insights/the-role-of-vets-in-illegal-tail-docking
[236] Defra (2023) *Code of practice for the welfare of pigs.* London: Defra. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pigs-on-farm-welfare/caring-for-pigs
[237] AHDB (no date) *Tail docking and tail biting in pigs.* https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/tail-docking-and-tail-biting-in-pigs
[238] The Animal Law Foundation (2026) *The role of vets in illegal tail docking.* https://animallawfoundation.org/insights/the-role-of-vets-in-illegal-tail-docking
[239] UK Government (2025) *Animal welfare strategy for England.* London: Defra. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/694560bd3022cdf03a0eb81c/E03517059_-_CP_1474_Animal_Welfare_Strategy_Accessible.pdf
[240] UK Government (2025) *Standards of modern zoo practice for Great Britain.* London: Defra. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/697393b8d345446f8ce71ea5/Standards_of_modern_zoo_practice.pdf

legislation – in 1822, the Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act 1822[241] was passed to prevent cruel treatment of cows, which paved the way for global legal protections of animals today. The RSPCA was founded in 1824, and the first anti-vivisection organisation, the Victoria Street Society for the Protection of Animals from Vivisection (later to become the National Anti-Vivisection Society), was founded in England in 1875. The Cruelty to Animals Act 1876[242] was the first piece of legislation to regulate animal experimentation[243], and the Protection of Animals Act 1911[244] was the first piece of general animal protection legislation, with other pieces of specific animal cruelty legislation passed between this time.

In the modern era, the UK has continued to pass landmark animal protection legislation. It was the first to ban the testing of cosmetics on animals in 1998[245], and England and Wales were the first to implement a nationwide ban on farming any species of animal for fur in 2000[246]. More recently, the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022[247] formally incorporated consideration of animal sentience into UK Government policymaking by establishing the Animal Sentience Committee to scrutinise whether ministers have had all due regard to the ways in which government policy may adversely affect the welfare of animals as sentient beings. Furthermore, England was one of the first countries to legally require CCTV in slaughterhouses in 2018 under the Mandatory Use of Closed Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses (England) Regulations[248], making it a legal requirement for all areas where live animals are present to be recorded and the footage kept for 90 days.

Recent Developments

Despite the UK having some of the strongest animal welfare and protection legislation and policies in the world, it does not mean that the UK is free from animal cruelty on individual and systemic levels. However, the existence of extensive legislation, policy, regulations and standards does not guarantee compliance, and weaknesses in monitoring and enforcement can allow breaches of animal protection requirements to go undetected or inadequately addressed. Concerns have also been raised regarding exemptions and inconsistencies within farm animal welfare legislation. While companion animals often receive significant public attention and legal protection, farmed animals may be subject to intensive production practices that would be considered unacceptable in other contexts. Issues such as high

[241] An Act to prevent the cruel and improper Treatment of Cattle. C.71, (Regnal. 3 Geo 4) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo4/3/71/contents/enacted
[242] The Cruelty to Animals Act 1876 c. 77 (Regnal. 39 and 40 Vict) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/39-40/77/enacted
[243] McConnell-Hellier, J. (2026) '150 years of animal research legislation', *Replacing Animal Research* [news article], 7 September. https://replacinganimalresearch.org.uk/150-years-of-animal-research-legislation/
[244] Protection of Animals Act 1911 c. 27 (Regnal. 1 and 2 Geo 5) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/1-2/27
[245] McConnell-Helier, J. (2022) 'Replacing Animal Research supports Cruelty Free International's petition calling for the government to rule out all cosmetic animal testing', *Replacing Animal Research* [news article], 7 April. https://replacinganimalresearch.org.uk/frame-supports-ban-cosmetic-animal-testing/
[246] Humane Society International (no date) *A Case for a Ban on the UK Fur Trade.* London, United Kingdom: Humane Society International. https://www.furfreebritain.uk/resources/HSI-Political-Briefing-One-The-case-for-a-ban-on-the-UK-fur-trade.pdf
[247] Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 c. 22 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/22
[248] The Mandatory Use of Closed Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses (England) Regulations 2018 No.556 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/556/contents/made

stocking densities, selective breeding for productivity, confinement systems, and routine management procedures continue to generate and push ethical debate.

Public scrutiny of animal use has intensified due to the widespread availability of information through social media, investigative journalism, and non-governmental organisation campaigns. High-profile cases involving intensive farming practices, wildlife attractions, animal transport, and captive animal management have contributed to increased public awareness and expectations for higher welfare standards. One example is the transport of live animals, which remains a prominent area of policy debate. Following the UK's departure from the European Union, the Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Act 2024[249] introduced a ban on the export of cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and equines for slaughter and fattening from Great Britain. The legislation reflects longstanding concerns regarding the welfare impacts of long-distance transport and demonstrates a shift towards stronger protections for farmed animals.

While this was a win, there are still many challenges around the welfare of animals during transport. Other animals, such as chickens, were not included in the list of banned animals, so this protection does not extend to them. Furthermore, animals still suffer on long journeys to the slaughterhouse by road. The Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2006[250] is supposed to provide protections, but it is widely understood is very poorly enforced and regulated due to lack of checks by enforcement officers. In addition to this, the regulations are very basic, and organisations such as BVA and RSPCA have called on the Government to strengthen welfare regulations for animals during transport, and to improve the enforcement of the current regulations[251].

Current regulations permit animals to travel for up to 8 hours in basic trucks in basic transport trucks which do not have adequate ventilation or temperature control, but animals are still transported during extreme weather, such as heatwaves[252]. Animals which become distressed during loading and unloading are at risk of injury, and those not given water, food or rest on their journey at at high risk of fatigue, psychological distress, pain, thermal stress and physical injury; many animals arrive at the slaughterhouse injured or dead from transport[253]. Between 2024 and 2025, the FSA reported 4,464 breaches of farm and transport compliance, an increase of 25.5% from the previous year. Additionally, 4,404 of the 4,464 breaches were Level 4, which the FSA categorises as an “imminent welfare risk/impact.” These breaches affected 1,073,102 animals, a 48.4% increase from the previous year[254]. While this number may seem low compared to the one billion animals

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[249] Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Act 2024 c. 11
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2024/11/contents
[250] The Welfare of Animals (Transport) (England) Order 2006 No. 3260
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/3260/contents
[251] BVA (no date) *Welfare of livestock during transport.*
https://www.bva.co.uk/take-action/our-policies/welfare-of-livestock-during-transport/
[252] RSPCA (no date) *Live transport of farm animals.*
https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/farm/livetransport
[253] Cooper, A. (2024) ‘The Horrors of Animal Transportation’, *Animal Justice Project* [blog], 20 February. https://www.animaljusticeproject.com/post/the-horrors-of-animal-transportation
[254] FSA (2026) *FSA 25/09/06 - Animal Welfare Report 2024/25.* London: FSA.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-welfare-report-202425/fsa-250906-animal-welfare-report-202425#summary-of-animal-welfare-compliance-data-in-slaughterhouses-on-farm-and-in-transport

slaughtered for food each year, these are the breaches which have been reported - the number could be a lot higher if breaches are unreported by the farm or slaughterhouse and not caught by an inspector. A reason for the increase could be a greater demand for animal products is putting strain on the system. With the added pressure of a skills shortage and high staff turnover[255], more regulations may be being breached as workers try and process more animals at a faster rate to keep up with demand. Furthermore, financial pressures may mean more investment in fuel and feed leads to less investment in the proper equipment for transport and handling, resulting in injury and death of animals.

Emerging Trends

Uncovering the truth about slaughter

Concerns regarding intensive farming systems continue to influence public discourse and policy development. Criticism has focused on issues including high stocking densities, selective breeding for productivity, confinement systems, routine antibiotic use, and the welfare implications of large-scale production. As scientific evidence and consumer awareness increase, there are growing calls for more transparent reporting, higher welfare standards, and greater consideration of alternative production systems. The secrecy of what happens in slaughterhouses is one topic which is gaining traction. In 2018, new secondary legislation made CCTV in slaughterhouses mandatory: The Mandatory Use of Closed Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses (England) Regulations 2018[256]. Research into whether CCTV in slaughterhouses does in fact reduce animal welfare breaches was conducted by Defra in 2023, which concluded that while CCTV is useful as an enforcement tool, it is difficult to quantify its direct effect on welfare outcomes. The legislation itself requires a review every 5 years, but only 10 stakeholders responded to Defra's letter and were included in the review, which presents a large limitation on how reliable the data is and how well it can be used to represent slaughterhouses across England[257]. Anecdotally, there is a general consensus that the presence of the CCTV cameras does deter non-compliance, but there is no official data to support this claim[258]. The FSA recorded 47 CCTV-system failures between 2025/6, up from 35 in 2024/5, describing this as the second consecutive annual increase and

[255] WTD (2025) *UK Abattoir Worker Shortage: How Apprenticeships Can Save the Meat Industry* https://www.wtd.org.uk/post/uk-abattoir-worker-shortage-how-apprenticeships-can-save-the-meat-industry
[256] The Mandatory Use of Closed Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses (England) Regulations 2018 No. 556 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/556/contents/made
[257] Defra (2023) *The Mandatory Use of Closed Circuit Television in Slaughterhouses (England) Regulations 2018 Post Implementation Review.* London: Defra. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/556/pdfs/uksiod_20180556_en_001.pdf
[258] Ryba, R. (2022) 'CCTV cameras in slaughterhouses: Modest benefits for animal welfare', *Effective Altruism Forum* [blog], 27 September. https://forum.effectivealtruism.org/posts/xTNrsFLvaMBu3rFZZ/cctv-cameras-in-slaughterhouses-modest-benefits-for-animal

suggesting that systems were becoming more prone to failure[259]. Furthermore, during FSA audits between 2025/6, inspectors found several cases of limited CCTV retention[260].

Between 2024 and 2025, the FSA found 509 cases of non-compliance in slaughterhouses affected 33,920 animals, an increase of 40.6% from the previous year, and over 1 million animals were impacted by 4,464 cases of non-compliance on farms and during transport affected 1,073,102 animals, an increase of 25.5% than the year before[261]. This rose again between 2025 and 2026, with 542 breaches in slaughterhouses and 4,769 breaches on farms and during transport. These are only the breaches that were reported or identified by inspectors, and due to over 1 billion animals being slaughtered annually in the UK being overseen by 890 FSA employees (596 inspectors, 282 veterinarians and 12 trainees), the number of breaches could be higher[262]. 51 slaughterhouses were found to have repeated breaches, but 38 were only given written advice. Only one slaughterhouse had its license revoked for non-compliance which the operator failed to rectify[263]. Between 2025/6, the FSA issued 159 written advice and warning letters, 19 enforcement notices, and referred 14 cases to FSA investigators for potential prosecution, suspended 37 slaughterers' Certificates of Competence and revoked eight[264]. Between 2024/5, three fines were handed out for breaches of animal welfare law; two to slaughterhouse operators and one to a slaughterman. Between 2025/6, three slaughterhouse operatives were issued unpaid work, with one also receiving a suspended six week sentence and a 10-day Rehabilitation Activity Requirement, and four fines were issued in total, two of which were issued to slaughterhouse partners for failure to comply with CCTV regulations[265]. While the penalties imposed for serious breaches remain arguably lenient, the increased use of formal enforcement measures demonstrates greater use of the FSA's available enforcement mechanisms.

Slaughterhouses are specifically complex places to effectively enforce regulations and standards. They often operate at high throughput, processing large numbers of animals within relatively short periods to keep up with the demand of animal products. It would be difficult for the FSA to inspect and monitor every single animal from when it arrives to the end of killing because of the number of animals being processed. The meat-processing sector has historically relied heavily on migrant labour, and research has documented cases

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[259] FSA (2026) *Annual Animal Welfare Report 2025/26*. London: FSA. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fsa-260608-annual-animal-welfare-report/annual-animal-welfare-report-202526

[260] FSA (2026) *Annual Animal Welfare Report 2025/26.* London: FSA. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fsa-260608-annual-animal-welfare-report/annual-animal-welfare-report-202526

[261] FSA (2026) *FSA 25/09/06 - Animal Welfare Report 2024/25*. London: FSA. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-welfare-report-202425/fsa-250906-animal-welfare-report-202425#progress-of-in-year-activities

[262] UK Parliament (2025) *Farms and Slaughterhouses: Animal Welfare.* https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2025-01-03/21555/

[263] FSA (2026) *FSA 25/09/06 - Animal Welfare Report 2024/25*. London, UK: Food Standards Agency. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-welfare-report-202425/fsa-250906-animal-welfare-report-202425#progress-of-in-year-activities

[264] FSA (2026) *Annual Animal Welfare Report 2025/26.* London: FSA. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fsa-260608-annual-animal-welfare-report/annual-animal-welfare-report-202526

[265] FSA (2026) *FSA 25/09/06 - Animal Welfare Report 2024/25.* London: FSA. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/animal-welfare-report-202425/fsa-250906-animal-welfare-report-202425#progress-of-in-year-activities

of migrant and agency workers being exploited through through low wages, long working hours, poor working conditions and poor living conditions (if housed on-site)[266]. The nature of the job is inherently stressful; they are killing animals while being forced to keep up with the speed expected of them, which is dangerous, as they are operating heavy machinery which can cause serious injury if misused - an average of 2 slaughterhouse workers are injured every week in the UK, and death is not unheard of[267]. Additionally, there have been reports of some slaughterhouse workers taking drugs as a way to cope with the trauma of what they are doing, which impairs their ability to function properly[268]. The combination of dangerous machinery, high processing speeds, demanding working conditions and documented worker exploitation creates conditions which may increase the risk of mistakes and animal-welfare non-compliance.

Animal advocacy groups are focusing on bringing public awareness to the secrecy of animal agriculture, through undercover investigations, social media campaigns, and advertising campaigns, such as Project Slingshot's London Underground campaign, where one campaign explained to the public that 90% of pigs reared in England and Wales are stunned and killed by CO2 gas exposure[269], and another campaign exposed routine antibiotic use in chickens[270]. Contemporary animal advocacy campaigns are reaching audiences well beyond established animal-rights networks and bring intensive farming practices into wider public discourse. In 3 months, Project Slingshot attracted 206K website visits, 108K social media followers, and 43M content views as a result of 14,500 London Underground adverts[271]. This provides strong evidence that animal advocacy is changing, and that it is having a wider reach than ever before as it becomes part of the mainstream public discourse.

Product labelling and greenwashing

Another developing trend within private business is buzzword labelling and greenwashing. While consumers are showing an increased interest in purchasing ethical and sustainable products, transparency within animal supply chains and production systems remains limited due to the global scale of product manufacturing and fewer regulations in countries where items are made. Consumers often have insufficient information regarding the welfare conditions under which animal-derived products are produced, creating challenges for

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[266] McSweeney, E. and Young, H. (2021) 'Revealed: exploitation of meat plant workers rife across UK and Europe', *The Guardian,* 28 September. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/sep/28/revealed-exploitation-of-meat-plant-workers-rife-across-uk-and-europe

[267] Collective Fashion Justice (no date) *Slaughterhouse workers' suffering in fashion supply chains.* *https://www.collectivefashionjustice.org/slaughterhouse-workers*

[268] Lastrucci, G. (2023) 'What Is It Like To Work In A Slaughterhouse?', *Animal Equality* [blog], 28 April.https://animalequality.org.uk/blog/working-in-a-slaughterhouse/

[269] Project Slingshot (2026) *The truth about CO2 gas chambers.* https://projectslingshot.com/campaign/gas-chambers/

[270] Project Slingshot (2026) *The truth about CO2 Frankenchickens.* https://projectslingshot.com/campaign/frankenchickens/

[271] Hallum, N.A. (2026) 'We're bringing Project Slingshot to the U.S. 🇺🇸 and I'm hiring the person who'll lead it.', [Linkedin], 22 July. https://www.linkedin.com/posts/naomialiciahallum_were-bringing-project-slingshot-to-the-us-share-7485410899260907520-bPHt/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAC-YR48BFw1-ic6kK3BzijFhBr2ZP0gs6c4

informed decision-making and accountability. In addition to confusing assurance scheme logos, greenwashing on labelling is a big issue with animal-derived products, and although misleading environmental claims are prohibited under consumer protection law, many commonly used terms do not have standardised statutory definitions, creating scope for differences in how ethical, environmental and animal welfare claims are communicated to consumers.

Cosmetics

Alongside the unregulated use of logos similar to accredited cruelty-free schemes, as discussed in the section above, brands are allowed to label their cosmetic, personal care and household cleaning products as 'vegan' on the basis that they do not contain any animal ingredients or derivatives. But this is misleading, as the product may still be tested on animals, meaning it is not technically 'vegan'. The misuse of the term 'vegan' is common in popular culture, as it is often used to describe ingredients, whereas veganism is an ethical principle of non-violence and exploitation of all animals for any reason – including using them to test products on.

Terms such as 'natural', 'clean' and 'sustainable' do not have universally applicable statutory definitions for cosmetics. However, their use remains subject to consumer protection and advertising rules, meaning brands must not use these terms in a way that creates a misleading impression and must be able to substantiate relevant objective claims[272]. They also may lead customers into thinking they are not tested on animals and do not contain animal derivatives as these words are often associated with plant-based ingredients. Furthermore, even regulated terms like 'organic' have been used in the past by cosmetics brands to mislead the public into thinking they are purchasing more ethical products, as this term is only legally regulated when applied to consumables, not cosmetics or personal care items, and brands do not have to be certified by the Soil Association to support their claim[273]. However, in 2021 the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) published guidance for labelling non-consumables as organic: "If a claim uses terms which have specific or widely assumed meanings, the product, service, process, brand or business should justify their use. Claiming a product is organic, for instance, is liable to fall short of consumers' expectations unless it consists almost entirely of organic components."[274] This guidance should help reduce consumer confusion, although a lack of clear understanding of labels and their meaning may still mean that consumers equate 'organic' to 'vegan' and 'cruelty-free' when that is not the case.

Animals used for human consumption

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[272] CMA (2021) *The Green Claims Code checklist.* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-claims-code-making-environmental-claims/green-claims-and-your-business

[273] Smithers, R. (2017) 'Consumers being misled by labelling on 'organic' beauty products, report shows', *The Guardian,* 24 April. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/apr/24/consumers-being-misled-by-labelling-on-organic-beauty-products-report-shows

[274] CMA (2021) *Making environmental claims on goods and services.* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-claims-code-making-environmental-claims/environmental-claims-on-goods-and-services

There is a gap in legislation around food labelling, which needs to be addressed. The EU have been moving towards tightening their labelling standards, but the UK is showing no sign of following. Although advertising legislation prohibits brands from misleading customers, certain labelling used on consumables is questionable; vague terms like ‘happier cows’, ‘responsibly sourced’, ‘farm fresh’, and ‘humanely raised’ are undefined by any legal body and therefore do not have a legal meaning or standardised statutory animal welfare definitions. Although their use remains subject to general consumer protection and advertising law, these terms can create positive impressions about animal welfare without communicating measurable information about the conditions in which animals were kept. For example, ‘happier cows’ does not specify the welfare indicators used to assess happiness or identify the conditions against which the animals are supposedly ‘happier’, while ‘farm fresh’ provides no information about the farming system or welfare conditions at all. Consequently, such terminology may give consumers an impression of higher welfare without enabling them to determine what, if any, higher welfare standards were actually applied.

More specific terms such as ‘free-range’, ‘cage-free’, and ‘outdoor bred’ are still used to create an image of where the animals came from which does not match up with reality; for example, ‘free-range’ is legally defined, but may still create an impression of production conditions which differs from consumers' expectations. For chicken meat to be labelled ‘free range’, birds must meet legal requirements including indoor stocking densities and continuous daytime access to open-air runs for at least half of their lifetime, with a minimum of 1m² of space per chicken. Guinea fowl do not need to have outside access to be labelled as ‘free-range’, they can be housed in a barn which satisfies certain requirements with free movement[275]. However, the label establishes that birds have access to outdoor space rather than demonstrating how frequently each individual bird actually uses it, and many ‘free-range’ birds are never able to use the outdoor space, due to more dominant birds blocking the exits[276], or becoming incapacitated by their own body weight if they are a fast-growing breed[277].

Supermarkets are also allowed to show images on their food, adverts and in supermarkets of animals which do not come from the same farms as the animal products they stock. For example, supermarkets display photographs of pigs outside in the grass in-store, but up to 93.6% of pigs in the UK are factory farmed, so it is not possible that every pork product on their shelves comes from free-range pigs due to the large amount of pork that is consumed in the UK[278]. And, even though the supermarkets may not be claiming that it is, they rely on the consumer to correlate the photographs and the food on the shelves. For instance, a board with an image of a pig outside in a field with the title ‘outdoor-bred’ may lead the consumer into believing the pig lives outdoors, when legal labelling requirements mean the pig must have only been born outside, but then may have been moved indoors shortly after

[275] Defra (2024) *Poultry meat marketing standards.* https://www.gov.uk/guidance/poultry-meat-marketing-standards
[276] Veganuary (no date) *The Free-Range Myth.* https://veganuary.com/the-free-range-myth/
[277] Kitty Block (2021) ‘Bred for unnaturally fast growth, broiler chickens suffer greatly—but change is on the way’, *Humane World for Animals,* 13 December [blog]. https://www.humaneworld.org/en/blog/bred-unnaturally-fast-growth-broiler
[278] Manandhar-Richardson, T. and Bryant, C. (2024) *The Hidden Harms of Factory Farms*. [Online]: Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation. https://www.conservativeanimalwelfarefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/The-Hidden-Harms-of-Factory-Farms-CAWF-research-.pdf

weaning[279]. Terminology and images should be more tightly regulated, and the meaning behind labels clearly explained, so consumers are able to base their spending habits on facts rather than fiction.

While animal-based food producers are allowed to use the misleading terms and images as mentioned above, Oatly recently lost a Supreme Court case against Dairy UK for use of the word ‘milk’. Dairy UK filed a declaration that Oatly’s use of the word was invalid in their slogan ‘Post Milk Generation’. The court ruled that ‘milk’ is a legally protected term and can only be used as a designation in relation to oat-based food and drink, because the use of the word ‘milk’ by plant-based milk producers was already prohibited by EU assimilated law[280]. This was shortly followed by the EU’s decision on further restricting plant-based food labelling. 32 words have since been banned for use in the EU for plant-based food, including meat, wings, drumstick and ribs[281]. The decision was made to protect EU consumers from alleged confusion[282].

In comparison, Switzerland is widely regarded as having some of the highest animal welfare standards globally. Swiss legislation adopts a dignity-based approach to animal protection, recognising the intrinsic value of animals beyond their capacity to suffer. The country has implemented stringent requirements relating to housing conditions, social grouping, transport times, and husbandry practices. Switzerland is not an EU member, and does not have to comply with EU laws around labelling. For example, it is now mandatory to label on consumables packaging specified painful practices an animal endured while alive[283], including products produced by force-feeding, eggs which have come from hens who had their beaks trimmed, and pigs who were castrated without anesthesia (pigs)[284]. They are the first country to do this, and the impact is yet to be measured.

Fashion

Supply chain issues also appear in fashion. Due to complex, global supply chains, it can be difficult for brands to fully understand where their animal materials are coming from, and what the welfare standards are. Many brands which use animal-derived materials do not have comprehensive animal welfare policies. Since the fur farming ban in 2000, it has remained legal to import fur which has been farmed abroad. While fur from most animals, including fox, mink, and rabbits is legal to import, fur from dogs and cats is prohibited, fur

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[279] Compassion in World Farming (2026) *Buying pork and bacon.* https://www.ciwf.org.uk/your-food/meat-poultry/pork-and-bacon/

[280] *Osborne Clarke* (2026) ‘UK Supreme Court confirms that 'milk' cannot be used for plant-based products in trade mark dispute’ [blog], 16 February. https://www.osborneclarke.com/insights/uk-supreme-court-confirms-milk-cannot-be-used-plant-based-products-trade-mark-dispute

[281] Regulation (EU) 2026/1739 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 July 2026 amending Regulations (EU) No 1308/2013, (EU) 2021/2115 and (EU) 2021/2116 as regards the strengthening of the position of farmers in the food supply chain https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32026R1739

[282] Elliman, C. (2026) ‘EU to ban use of meat words on plant-based packaging’, *The Grocer,* 6 March, https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/news/eu-to-ban-use-of-meat-words-on-plant-based-packaging/716153.article

[283] Pritchett, L. (2025) ‘Switzerland Rolls Out Labels Flagging Animal Suffering In Food Products’, *Plant Based News,* 3 July, https://plantbasednews.org/lifestyle/food/switzerland-food-animals-labeled/

[284] Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (2026) *Information on food labels.* https://www.blv.admin.ch/en/food-labelling

from CITES listed endangered species is strictly regulated under and seal fur is strictly regulated under The Seal Products (Amendment) Regulations 2022[285]. Fur must also be labelled as fur, and cannot be labelled as faux fur. There have been instances of retailers being caught out for selling real fur as faux fur. For example, TK Maxx has been caught selling real fur as faux several times despite having a no-fur policy since 2003[286]. In 2017 they were found to be stocking a Lot 78 bomber jacket with a fox fur hood; in 2020, a Dolce and Gabbana handbag with rabbit fur and a Colamar jacket made with fox fur[287]. Other retailers such as House of Fraser, Boohoo, Not on the Highstreet, Missguided, Groupon, Miss Bardo, Etsy and Amazon have been accused of also selling real fur labelled as fake, with some items containing prohibited dog and cat fur[288].

There was no repercussion reported for misleading the customer, importing prohibited items, or for violating their own fur-free policy from Trading Standards. In 2018, a parliamentary inquiry was launched over the issue as it spread across multiple large retailers[289]. Trading Standards and local authorities were criticised for being complacent[290].

When the UK was an EU Member State, there were more relaxed rules around textile labelling as the EU does not enforce strict labelling requirements for fur products. Since Brexit, the UK has enforced its own rules regarding real fur labelling meaning fur fibres must be declared on an item's composition label[291]. These stricter regulations are welcome as they help consumers make informed choices about their fashion purchases, but these rules are pointless if they are not enforced, and the penalties are not enforced when brands violate them.

Greenwashing is also an issue, with brands using buzzwords such as 'sustainable', 'eco-friendly', 'slow-fashion', 'reclaimed' and 'recycled' without specifying what these words actually mean in the context of their production, which could potentially confuse consumers who may conflate sustainability with cruelty-free practices. Changing Markets Foundation's 2021 report examined 4,028 products from 12 brands trading in the UK and found that 39% carried some form of sustainability claim, 59% of of which trading in the UK were considered

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[285] The Seal Products (Amendment) Regulations 2022 No. 771. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2022/771/pdfs/uksiem_20220771_en.pdf

[286] Fur Free Alliance (2015) *Exposed: Real Fur Sold as Fake on British High-Street* https://www.furfreealliance.com/exposed-real-fur-sold-as-fake-on-british-high-street/

[287] Whitehead, J. (2020) 'TK Maxx apologises for selling rabbit fur handbags despite ban', *The i Paper,* 1 February. https://inews.co.uk/inews-lifestyle/shopping/tk-maax-real-fur-fake-animal-rights-animal-welfare-393051

[288] Gill, R. (2017) 'Retailers Including Boohoo & TK Maxx Have Been Selling Real Fur As "Fake"', *Refinery29,* 20 December. https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/2017/12/185846/real-fur-labelled-fake-tk-maxx-boohoo-amazon

[289] Hajibagheri, S. (2018) 'Inquiry launched into real fur being sold as fake after Sky News investigation', *Sky News*, 31 January https://news.sky.com/story/inquiry-launched-into-real-fur-being-sold-as-fake-after-sky-news-investigation-11230862

[290] UK Parliament Committees (2018) *Committee finds Trading Standards and retailers 'complacent'* 'https://committees.parliament.uk/work/2579/fur-trade-in-the-uk-inquiry/news/102367/committee-finds-trading-standards-and-retailers-complacent/

[291] Department for Business and Trade & Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2020) *Textile labelling* https://www.gov.uk/guidance/textile-labelling

to contravene the CMA's green-claims guidance in some way[292]. For example, the CMA opened an investigation into ASOS, as it was concerned that it was greenwashing by promoting a collection called the “Responsible Edit,” a name which suggested that the included products were environmentally responsible. However, the Competition and Markets Authority investigated the company over concerns that this broad label could make products appear more sustainable than they actually were. Furthermore, ASOS received independent criticism that it did not provide enough evidence to fully trace the animal-derived materials or verify their claims of responsible sourcing[293]. Even though ASOS was not found to have broken the law, it agreed to make changes to how it presents its environmental claims. Although the reasoning behind the CMA’s investigation was not due to the collection using leather and wool, the inclusion of these materials raises questions on how responsible the use of animal fibres can be. This illustrates how vague terms such as “responsible” can create a positive ethical and environmental impression without proving that every material, including animal-derived materials, was sustainably sourced. The Government’s response to greenwashing by fashion brands was to publish guidance on making sustainability claims, and has since investigated ASOS, Boohoo and ASDA[294].

Furthermore, mislabelling animal materials as byproducts may lead consumers to think they are not contributing to harm by buying it if it was going to waste anyway. Leather, feathers and wool are often thought of as by-products. Many animals are farmed or caught for their ‘by-products’, such as their hair or skin (even though most by-products are not genuine by-products, as the animals are farmed and/or killed for that specific feature of their body), such as angora, which is harvested from angora rabbits who are bred specifically for their fur. In addition, leather is often referred to as a by-product of beef, but it is more accurate to refer to it as a co-product, as farmers generate consistent revenue from selling the skins of the cows they kill for consumption. Ostrich production demonstrates how animal-derived materials can have substantial independent economic value. South African industry data have estimated that leather historically accounts for approximately 50–70% of ostrich-industry income, compared with around 30–45% from meat, although the relative value of each product varies according to market conditions and product quality[295].

Positive developments

While animals still face significant barriers and challenges to securing real protection and having their rights recognised in the UK, there have been several non-governmental developments in recent years which will help contribute to moving away from exploiting animals for food, fashion, science, or entertainment:

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[292] Changing Markets Foundation (2021) *Fashion industry addicted to greenwashing and fossil-fuel based synthetics (UK).* https://changingmarkets.org/press-releases/fashion-industry-addicted-to-greenwashing-and-fossil-fuel-based-synthetics-uk

[293] CMA (2023) *Fashion greenwashing: investigation into ASOS, Boohoo and Asda.* London: CMA. https://www.gov.uk/cma-cases/asos-boohoo-and-asda-greenwashing-investigation

[294] CMA (2023) *Fashion greenwashing: investigation into ASOS, Boohoo and Asda.* London: CMA. https://www.gov.uk/cma-cases/asos-boohoo-and-asda-greenwashing-investigation

[295] Brand, T.S. et al (2020) ‘The effect of dietary energy and protein level on feather, skin and nodule growth of the ostrich (Struthio camelus)’, *Journal of the South African Veterinary Association,* 91. https://journals.jsava.aosis.co.za/index.php/jsava/article/view/2000/2631

- The development of cultivated meat, alongside the FSA and Food Standards Scotland's regulatory sandbox for cell-cultivated products, which runs until February 2027 and is intended to support the development of a regulatory framework for assessing these products.[296].
- Plant-based leather made of apples[297], pineapples[298], and cacti[299] is starting to be used in collections.
- London Fashion Week extended its 2018 fur-free policy and banned all exotic skins from being shown on the runway from 2025[300].
- Food manufacturers transitioning away from using animal-based ingredients, for example Flora removed all dairy from their spread products, which are now entirely plant-based[301].

Discussion and Recommendations

The Animal Welfare Act 2006, and the other animal welfare and protection Acts explored in this report all have one thing in common; they lay out high welfare standards but face challenges with enforcement and compliance. This is the most pressing issue with the UK's animal protection framework. A recurring factor underlying many of these implementation problems is the tension between animal protection and economic interests. Resource constraints affect enforcement bodies, while regulated industries may face commercial incentives that conflict with improvements in animal welfare. Individuals are rarely held to account, despite some of them committing severe animal cruelty; if and when non-compliance is reported to the relevant agency, remedies are often arguably lenient; the offender might receive inspector advice or a warning, but prosecutions are rare due to the expense incurred through doing so. Local authorities face challenges in regularly inspecting animal facilities like zoos and pet shops to ensure they are adhering to local licenses, as does the Government in funding proper enforcement of any animal welfare or protection laws or prosecuting abusers, and the result is widespread non-compliance in every sector.

The Government is slow to act on improving the lives of animals in the UK, prioritising the interests of lobbyists, powerful actors and their own interests over the interests of animal

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[296] Ghosh, P. (2025) 'Lab-grown food could be sold in UK within two years', *BBC News,* 10 March. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c2ern1zjkvyo

[297] Oliver Co. (no date) *Apple Leather.* *https://olivercompanylondon.com/pages/apple-leather?srsltid=AfmBOopDSqty_5oFRoUpZnD55uoK6YKmnRewwG7fmPZrowlEkT8OSs2s*

[298] Shop Like You Give A Damn (2025) *What is Piñatex Pineapple Leather and Why Is It So Popular?* *https://www.shoplikeyougiveadamn.com/blogs/what-is-pinatex-pineapple-leather-and-why-is-it-so-popular/bl-899*

[299] Lebby, S. (2022) 'What Is Cactus Leather? Is It Sustainable?', *Tree Hugger,* 31 May. https://www.treehugger.com/what-is-cactus-leather-5271048

[300] Hu, Z. (2024) 'London Fashion Week bans wild animal skins', *Drapers,* 29 November. https://www.drapersonline.com/news/london-fashion-week-bans-wild-animal-skins

[301] Foreman, P. (2023) 'Flora Removes Dairy From 'Buttery' Spread, Making Entire Range Vegan', *Plant Based News,* 4 October. https://plantbasednews.org/lifestyle/food/flora-removes-dairy-buttery-spread/

welfare. The recent actions of the Government have shown a trend of disinterest in animal protection issues, even as far as to actively roll back on previous policies. Labour Government pledged prior to the 2024 election that they were going to ban the import and sale of fur and foie gras, but unfortunately rolled back on this promise in 2026 during EU trade negotiations[302] after Brussels refused to allow the UK to block certain food items as part of the deal[303]. The Government has claimed that the deal would improve growth, which is prioritised over animal welfare.

They have also not yet succeeded in banning trophy hunting imports, puppy smuggling, trail hunting and fur imports, which were all part of their manifesto commitment. These moves have been heavily criticised by animal rights organisations, and it is evidence that the Government does not prioritise animal protection – it is only willing to progress animal protection if it does not come at a detriment to any other aspect of society, and will not negatively impact the economy or private sector interests. This is an ongoing theme with the Government – it only banned wild animals in circuses when there were only two circuses left which used wild animals[304], it refuses to ban animal experimentation until humane-science becomes widely available through its new phase-out scheme (announced as part of the 2025 animal welfare strategy), and it is eager to roll back on animal protections when doing so will increase profits for private businesses, such as legalising picking chickens up by both legs in 2026. Overall, it is the unfortunate truth that economic interests are prioritised over animal welfare, and as animals are unable to pay their own way to receive the rights they should be afforded, the responsibility to advocate for them falls on non-profits and individuals, who do not have the economic capacity to compete with powerful actors such as the EU, the animal agriculture industry and Big Pharma.

The evidence considered throughout this report suggests that economic incentives and resource allocation represent major barriers to progressing animal protection. From an animal rights perspective, this raises an important strategic question: alongside seeking to change public attitudes towards the ethics of animal use, progress may also depend on making non-animal alternatives economically competitive with, or preferable to, systems dependent on animal exploitation. This could be done through:

- food production (making plant-based food cheaper to make, cheaper to sell and more profitable than animal-based food);
- prioritising the development of humane alternatives to animal experimentation which are more cost-effective, reliable and time-efficient than animal models
- investing in the environment and reframing wildlife as a valuable commodity *when left undisturbed in their natural environment* instead of as pests to be exterminated or as collateral damage during construction and land use change, and;

[302] Horton, H. (2026) 'Labour to back down on foie gras and fur bans to ease EU trade deal', *The Guardian,* 5 April. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/apr/05/labour-back-down-foie-gras-fur-bans-eu-trade-deal?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

[303] West, T. (2026) 'Government drops manifesto pledge to drop foie gras imports', *Food Manufacture,* 29 June. https://www.foodmanufacture.co.uk/Article/2026/06/29/government-drops-foie-gras-ban-pledge-to-secure-eu-deal/

[304] *Freedom for Animals* (2020) 'Victory: Wild Animals Are Banned in Circuses in England' [news article], 20 January. https://www.freedomforanimals.org.uk/news/victory-wild-animals-are-banned-in-circuses-in-england

- investing in the development and production of plant-based materials and recycled animal materials for use in fashion and design.

Recommendations

The UK animal welfare framework provides a strong foundation for protecting animal welfare; however, evolving scientific understanding, changing societal expectations, and emerging ethical challenges highlight opportunities for further improvement. The following recommendations aim to strengthen existing systems while supporting practical implementation across sectors.

1. Auditing and assessment: A priority area for development is the introduction of more consistent and robust welfare auditing and assessment systems. Standardised assessment methodologies, incorporating both resource-based and animal-based welfare indicators, would help improve comparability across organisations and sectors while supporting evidence-informed decision-making.

2. Supply chain transparency: Improving transparency throughout animal supply chains is also essential. Greater public access to information regarding animal welfare practices, sourcing decisions, and welfare outcomes would support informed consumer choice and strengthen organisational accountability. Enhanced traceability systems and clearer welfare labelling could contribute to this objective. Furthermore, organisations using animal-derived products should be encouraged to adopt clear sourcing policies, strengthen supplier oversight, and improve traceability mechanisms to ensure welfare considerations are integrated throughout the supply chain. Labelling on animal-derived products such as food and clothing should be tightly regulated to stop it from misleading the public to drive profits. For example, the UK should follow the Swiss labelling standard and state certain painful practices endured by the animal on food labelling.

3. Standardised welfare frameworks: The development of more standardised welfare frameworks across sectors would help reduce inconsistencies in the interpretation and application of welfare standards. While flexibility is necessary to account for species-specific needs and operational differences, greater alignment between legislation, guidance documents, assurance schemes, and industry standards would improve clarity for organisations and regulators.

4. Enforcement: Greater investment in enforcement capacity, professional training, and cross-sector collaboration will be essential to align practice with animal welfare regulations. Government agencies should prioritise investing in more inspectors to ensure compliance in places like farms, slaughterhouses and animal testing facilities, building on their current risk-based enforcement. Furthermore, when non-compliance is reported, stronger penalties should be issued as an example to others, including prosecuting individuals and businesses for severe animal cruelty. Effective animal welfare governance depends not only on the existence of robust legislation, but also on the availability of sufficient resources, expertise, and organisational commitment to support implementation.

5. Development of alternatives: Businesses should prioritise developing alternatives to using animals across food, fashion, science and entertainment, without incurring profit loss. By reducing the number of animals used, compliance and enforcement of the law becomes easier as there are fewer animals which need to be monitored.

As animal welfare continues to intersect with issues such as sustainability, biodiversity, and ethical consumption, future policy development is likely to require increasingly integrated approaches that recognise the complex relationships between animal welfare, environmental stewardship, and societal values.