

22nd April 2020

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about the welfare of farm animals.

I am proud that the UK has some of the highest standards of animal welfare in the world and the Government has made it clear that it places great importance on the welfare of farmed animals. The recent 'End the Cage Age' petition calls for a ban on the use of barren and enriched cages for farmed animals, and I am aware that Ministers are keen to explore the issue while continuing to focus on maintaining world-leading farm animal welfare standards through both regulatory requirements and statutory codes.

In the UK, there is comprehensive legislation to uphold farm animal welfare standards, as well as guidance on how best to protect the welfare of specific animals living on farms, such as hens, pigs and cattle. The Government has already banned cages or close confinement systems where there is clear scientific evidence that they are detrimental to animal health and welfare.

The new statutory Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens and Pullets came into force in August 2018. The Code provides improved guidance on welfare legislation and reflects the latest scientific and veterinary advice. The Government is currently examining the future use of cages for all laying hens and all major supermarkets have said they will stop selling eggs from hens kept in enriched cages by 2025.

On pig welfare, the Government has made it clear that it remains completely committed to the ambition that farrowing crates should no longer be used for sows. It is important that progress is made as quickly as possible towards a system that both works commercially and safeguards the welfare of the sow and her piglets. The UK is already ahead of most pig-producing countries on this issue, with about 40 per cent of our pigs living and farrowing outside. It is clear that good progress has been made, but there is more to do.

Turning to the issue of animal sentience, I believe animals are sentient beings who can feel pain and suffering, and I would like to reassure you that strong action is being taken to reduce their risk of harm.

The Government is committed to making any necessary changes to UK law in a rigorous and comprehensive way to ensure animal sentience is legally recognised after the transition period and legislation will be brought forward when Parliamentary time allows. This also includes ensuring the UK has an effective means of making sure animal sentience is reflected in future policy decisions. I understand that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is currently engaging closely with relevant organisations and authorities to enhance its policies on this issue further.

Encouraging action is being taken to improve animal welfare at home and abroad by increasing maximum sentences for animal cruelty, banning third party sales of puppies, and introducing one of the world's toughest bans on ivory sales. I believe these very welcome steps demonstrate exactly how seriously this Government takes animal welfare.

Follow Alok on Twitter: @AlokSharma_RDG

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Alok Sharma, MP for Reading West

Having left the EU, I am pleased that the UK will now have the opportunity to do even more. A consultation will shortly be carried out on restricting live animal journeys, requiring approval for longer journeys and bringing forward welfare conditions for these journeys when they are necessary. The Government is also looking at proposals to ban the trade in pet primates, extending compulsory microchipping to cats and controlling the trade in hunting trophies from endangered animals.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Alok Sharma MP

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