

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2055](#): Stop the exportation of live animals as a priority

An overview of issues raised by the petition

The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament “to urge the Scottish Government to stop the exportation of live animals from Scotland to any country as a matter of priority and until such time, ensure that:

- “animals are treated humanely during transit; and
- “where animals are to be slaughtered after arrival, this is done in a humane manner and to a high standard.”

Background

The live export of animals is a topic of debate due to the potential stress caused to animals during transport. Animals may be born and reared to a point in one country and transported to another to, for example, be bred, slaughtered or fattened (the final stage of an animal being reared before slaughter).

Animal welfare is a devolved policy area, but [animal transport is an area where co-ordination is seen as desirable](#). Following EU exit, UK nations have made various commitments to ending live exports specifically for fattening and slaughter in response to welfare concerns.

A number of actions have been taken so far. The UK Government held a [call for evidence on controlling exports for slaughter and improving animal welfare during transport in 2018](#). At the same time, [a systematic review was commissioned by Defra and the devolved administrations to look generally at animal welfare during transport](#).

Following the call for evidence, the UK Farm Animal Welfare Committee (now the Animal Welfare Committee), which reports to Defra and the devolved administrations, was commissioned to produce an opinion on the welfare of animals during transport. [The FAWC Opinion on the Welfare of Animals during Transport report was published in April 2019](#).

In addition to a number of other detailed recommendations, FAWC recommended in relation to live animal exports that:

- “animals are only transported if it is absolutely necessary and that the most welfare considerate route is chosen; which is a combination of journey quality, including the type of transport, duration and suitability. Therefore, animals should not be transported longer distances if suitable alternatives are available. Transporters intending to export animals to be slaughtered or further fattening in a different country should apply to APHA for consent to do so, indicating reasons why alternative arrangements have not been made.”
- “there is a review of the availability of abattoirs related to the points of production and particularly mindful of end of life requirement. This will identify where abattoirs need to be sited in order to meet the needs of farmers and to minimise journey times and thereby meet the welfare needs of animals.”
- “further research [is required] into the feasibility of the economics, design and use of mobile slaughter facilities so as to reduce the need to transport animals over long distances particularly with regard to sea crossings.”

They noted that animals may also be exported for breeding “so as to meet a requirement for improved genetic capabilities and these journeys should be considered as providing a more justifiable reason for an export journey by comparison with those related to further finishing or slaughter where such actions could be carried out within the host country”.

The [Scottish and Welsh Governments responded jointly to the recommendations](#), and both the UK and Scottish governments published consultations on the Committee’s recommendations. The [Scottish Government consultation was published on 4 December 2020](#).

Prior to this, commitments were made by the Scottish Government to stop the export of unweaned male calves in September 2020, following a legal challenge from animal welfare organisation Compassion in World Farming. The [legal proceedings were subsequently dropped after the Scottish Government accepted that the trade of unweaned calves was being carried out in breach of EU regulations](#) on animal welfare during transport.

Commitments in Scotland have since gone further; in their [2021 election manifesto](#), the SNP committed to “ban live exports of animals for fattening and slaughter and only allow live transport of livestock to and from islands and the mainland with stringent welfare standards in place”.

Banning live animal exports for slaughter and fattening underway

There are existing commitments to ban live animal exports where animals are destined for slaughter. Legislation giving effect to a ban has been brought forward in the UK Parliament in different iterations since 2021.

The UK Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 8 June 2021 and included provisions for, among other things, prohibiting the export of animals from Great Britain to anywhere outside the British Islands (the UK, Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) for slaughter or fattening. Those provisions were to apply in Scotland and impact on devolved areas, and as such [the Scottish Government lodged a Legislative Consent Memorandum \(LCM\) at the time](#). In the LCM, the Scottish Government expressed support for the ban, referring to earlier Scottish Government commitments “to work with other administrations to seek to end the unnecessary long distance transport of animals for fattening or slaughter outside the UK”. The Scottish Government indicated that it is content for the UK Parliament to legislate on behalf of Scotland on this issue, as a UK-wide approach is preferable:

“It will be important to have consistent controls introduced at the same time across Great Britain to avoid potential exporters seeking to change the country the export journey commences or the point of departure to exploit any inconsistencies between administrations. This will also assist enforcement authorities. Allowing the UK Parliament to legislate for Scotland in these areas will be the most timely and efficient way to achieve this.”

However, the Bill was subsequently [withdrawn on 8 June 2023](#). The [House of Commons Library](#) notes that:

“On 25 May 2023, the Mark Spencer, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, announced that the [Bill would not continue any further](#). Instead, the government would be taking forward measures in the Kept Animals Bill individually as single-issue bills during the remainder of the current Parliament. The Secretary of State referred to concerns about “scope-creep” for the Bill...”

However, the Secretary of State continued to commit to addressing live exports. [On 25 May 2023, he said](#):

“Having left the EU, we are able to and will ban live exports for fattening and slaughter. There have been no live exports from Great Britain since 2020, but our legislation will ensure this becomes permanent, and we remain committed to delivering it.”

On 4 December 2023, [the UK Government introduced the Animal Welfare \(Livestock Exports\) Bill](#) to the UK Parliament. The legislation aims to ban the live export of cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and horses which are destined for slaughter or fattening for slaughter from Great Britain to anywhere outside the British Islands. The ban would apply in Scotland. Live exports in other specific circumstances, such as breeding and competitions, will still be permitted.

The legislation will not apply to exports from Northern Ireland or affect the movement of livestock within the island of Ireland. The movement of animals from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is covered by EU rules.¹

The legislation empowers the appropriate national authority – in Scotland’s case, the Scottish Ministers or the Secretary of State with the consent of Scottish Ministers – to make regulations to provide for the enforcement of the prohibition.

The Scottish Government [lodged a Legislative Consent Memorandum and Motion on 4 December 2023](#) indicating its support for the bill, and citing similar reasons to its support for the export provisions in the UK Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill.

More information on the bill can be found on [the UK Parliament’s bill pages](#), and in the [House of Commons Library briefing](#).

Anna Brand, Senior Researcher

9 January 2024

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

¹ See [the House of Commons Library’s bill briefing](#) for further information on animal exports in relation to Northern Ireland.