

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE BRIEFING NOTE

ANIMAL WELFARE (KEPT ANIMALS) BILL

HOUSE OF COMMONS, SECOND READING

MONDAY 25 OCTOBER 2021

Key points

- **The Countryside Alliance generally supports this Bill, in particular its provisions on livestock worrying and those to address the problem of the misuse of the current rules on pet movements.**
- **We welcome the intention of the Government to use powers granted under the Bill (Clause 44) to amend existing retained EU legislation to tackle the importation of puppies under six months old, heavily pregnant bitches, and those which have been subject to mutilations that are not legal in this country, subject to some limited but important exemptions.**
- **Livestock worrying - The Bill would retain the existing exemption to the offence of being in charge of a dog ‘at large’ with livestock present for working dogs, including working gun dogs or packs of hounds.**
- **We also welcome the proposed ban on the export of live animals, but suggest that the Secretary of State be granted the power to dispense with this prohibition on a temporary, emergency basis. We also believe the Government needs to ensure a network of local abattoirs so that all animals are slaughtered as close as possible to where they are born and raised. Simply banning live exports is not enough.**
- **Our departure from the EU also provides an opportunity to ensure better food labelling so that meat, and products containing meat, labelled as British only contain meat from animals which have been born, raised and slaughtered in this country. People need to consume high welfare British meat, slaughtered locally.**

Introduction

- The Countryside Alliance supports the intention, given effect in this Bill, to introduce new measures to tackle livestock worrying, and extend existing protections for livestock to include poultry and gamebirds. We also support the proposed ban on the export of live animals for slaughter but suggest an amendment that would permit it by emergency exception. We also support the changes proposed for the movement of dogs, cats and ferrets. We take no position on the changes proposed regarding primates.

Livestock worrying – Part 2, Clauses 26 - 41

- An offence of owning and/or being in charge of a dog that attacks or chases livestock on agricultural land was introduced in the Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953. Amendments in the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 enlarged the definition of dog worrying to include “*being at large (that is to say not on a lead or otherwise under close control) in a field or enclosure in which there are sheep.*” An exemption to that provision was also introduced for certain working dogs, including “*a working gun dog or a pack of hounds.*”
- Part 2 of the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill would repeal and replace the amended 1953 Act. The offence structure is functionally similar: we welcome that the definition of livestock protected from dogs ‘at large’ within their enclosures has been extended beyond sheep to include poultry and gamebirds, and that the exemption to the ‘at large’ provisions for working dogs has been retained.
- The main changes the Bill would introduce are the creation of control orders, destruction orders and disqualification orders that the courts may impose following conviction for a livestock worrying offence. Control orders would require owners to take specified steps to avoid future offences, destruction orders would require the dog whose actions resulted in the offence to be destroyed, and disqualification orders would prohibit the owner from owning or keeping any dog, for a period at the court’s discretion.
- We believe that it would be preferable that the provision on ‘at large’ dogs be further strengthened to require that dogs in fields with relevant livestock present be kept on leads at all times, subject to the working dog exemption. Currently the Bill also exempts dogs that are within the keeper’s sight, where the keeper is aware of its actions and is reasonably confident that the dog will come to heel at their command. This is a view shared by other rural organisations such as the NFU.
- In addition, we would also prefer the fine for responsibility for a dog attack to be unlimited, rather than capped at level 3 (currently £1,000), reflecting the severity of the offence and the costs incurred by victims. This is a view shared by other rural organisations such as the NFU.

Live animal exports - Part 2, Clause 42 & 43

- Clauses 42 and 43 of the Bill would prohibit the export of live animals for slaughter or fattening. We support this measure on the grounds of animal welfare.
- We would suggest that in order to account for unanticipated emergencies, the Bill be amended to grant the Secretary of State the power to dispense with the prohibition on a temporary basis. If, for instance, the country faced circumstances in which domestic slaughterhouse capacity became severely restricted, it would be preferable for the range of emergency measures available to the government to include an option to permit export for slaughter temporarily, rather than being limited to culling.
- We would also argue that this is an opportunity for Defra to work to ensure a proper network of local abattoirs so livestock are slaughtered as close to 'home' as possible. It is also an opportunity to address food labelling so that meat, and products containing meat, which are labelled as British only contain meat that is born, raised and slaughtered in this country.

Reduction in the limit on non-commercial movement of dogs, cats and ferrets – Part 3, clause 45 & 46

- The Countryside Alliance welcomes the proposed changes to the number of animals that can be moved under retained EU rules for the non-commercial movement of dogs, cats and ferrets. The current maximum of five animals per person will be reduced to three, or a maximum of five per vehicle. This will help reduce the current abuse of the system, which allows, in particular, the import of low-welfare puppies into the country.
- This amendment rightly retains the exemption for larger movements for sporting and competition purposes. This covers the exemption for pet animals which are being moved into Great Britain for the purpose of participating in competitions, exhibitions or sporting events or in training for such events. It is assumed that this applies equally to animals returning to Great Britain having been to another country, such as Ireland or France, to participate in competition, training or a sporting event.
- We also welcome the Government's intention to use the powers under clause 44 to amend retained EU legislation to prohibit the import of puppies under six months old, heavily pregnant bitches and those which have been subject to mutilations that would not have been lawful here, subject to necessary and sensible exceptions.

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