The Right Honourable Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

15th March 2022

Dear Prime Minister

We are writing on behalf of 30 of the UK’s most respected animal protection organisations, collectively representing the views of our millions of supporters. We are acutely aware that it
is an extremely challenging time in world politics, and a time in which our thoughts are firmly with both the people and animals affected by the war in Europe.

However, we are mindful that the government’s domestic legislative agenda and decision making, including on animal welfare, must continue. On this point, we wish to firstly register our disappointment that the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill, failed to complete its final stages in Parliament on 14 March due to the government supporting a Conservative backbench amendment and sending the Bill into ping pong. We urge you to prioritise Parliamentary time to ensure that the Bill passes without any further amendments before the end of this session, to ensure animal sentience is once again recognised in UK law, and that Government has to pay regard to it in policy formation and implementation.

We are alarmed to see recent media reports in *The Daily Telegraph*, based on comments from ministers, suggesting that your government is minded to de-prioritise animal welfare as a ‘peripheral’ concern.¹ As representatives of Britain’s leading animal protection organisations, we are acutely aware of how passionately the British public feel about animal protection. We are pleased to share with you the results of a new national opinion poll, commissioned by HSI/UK and conducted by YouGov 22/23 February this year, which directly challenges the notion that animal welfare is only of peripheral concern to the public. It asked ‘thinking about Government action on animal protection, which of the following comes closest to your view?’ The response, from a 1,687 weighted sample, was that 87% of respondents felt that Government should either increase its level of action (63%), or maintain its current level of action (24%). A further 12% did not know, and only 1% answered that Government should decrease its level of action on animal protection.² Public support for animal welfare is clear.

It is now ten months since the Government published its Action Plan for Animal Welfare (APAW), with the Defra Secretary stating that ‘Our departure from the EU has provided us with an opportunity to do things better.’ As a sector, we warmly welcomed the government’s commitment ‘to continue to raise the bar’ alongside an intent to ‘take the rest of the world with us’.

The APAW’s five ‘strands’ set out commitments on a number of animal welfare issues, with intent to channel primary legislation through a series of bills focused on sentience, kept animals and animals abroad. While warmly welcoming progress on the Sentience Bill, we must also convey our disappointment at the slow progress of the Kept Animals Bill. Our preference would be that this is given Parliamentary time to become law before the end of this session. If this is not possible then we strongly urge a formal carry over motion for this important Bill, to expedite its passage in the next session and deliver on the Government’s manifesto commitments to ban live exports, tackle puppy smuggling, and prevent private keeping of primates.

The inertia around the Animals Abroad Bill, including much delayed action on a 2019 manifesto commitment for a ban on imports of hunting trophies, is of serious concern to our organisations and our supporters. This has been exacerbated by media reports quoting ministers stating their views that people should have the freedom to purchase cruelly

¹ In an article on 9th March, the Telegraph’s Politics Editor Christopher Hope stated: “One minister told me there is likely to be “a bit more focus on what matters to our constituents and a bit less of the peripheral stuff. The party does care about [the environmental agenda] but it is a question of getting priorities right.”

https://tinyurl.com/5fhw54r

² https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/3fn6v5/HSI_AnimalProtection_220223_FULL_W.pdf
produced products, and ascribing their reservations as the reason for the alleged removal of fur and foie gras import bans from the planned Animals Abroad Bill.3

We respectfully challenge any assertion that de-prioritising animal welfare, including potentially scrapping the Animals Abroad Bill, would be popular amongst, as Christopher Hope put it, ‘the party’s traditional supporter base’. In the above-mentioned poll, 89% of respondents who voted Conservative at the last election supported animal protection action by the government being either maintained or increased, and just 2% supported decreased action.

As we approach the first anniversary of the Government’s APAW, and the start of the third Parliamentary session, we urge you to note our and the public’s eager anticipation of new laws to strengthen animal protection on a range of issues, including (but not limited) to address live animal exports; imports of hunting trophies, shark fins, fur, and foie gras made by force-feeding; pet theft, and imports of underage and mutilated dogs/cats4; commercial imports being passed off as pets; keeping of primates as pets; licensing of animal establishments; banning cruel trapping methods such as snares; welfare during transport; and phasing out the use of cages and crates for farmed animals.

For anyone querying why parliamentary time should be given to such efforts, or viewing them as a peripheral concern, we respectfully encourage Number 10 to remind them of the sentiment set out by the Defra Secretary in the APAW: “The way we treat animals reflects our values and the kind of people we are.” Animal welfare policy improvements matter not only because affording animals respect and compassion is the right thing to do, but because it speaks to our attitude towards the more vulnerable members of our society. Furthermore, in so many ways, ensuring the health and welfare of animals is fundamental to protecting our own health and wellbeing, and that of the environment.

We collectively support the Sentience Bill, Kept Animals Bill and Animals Abroad Bill in their entirety and seek assurances from the Government that Parliamentary time will be allocated to allow all Bills to pass as soon as possible. To fail to do so would be a betrayal of animals, and of the British public.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with your office and discuss the Government’s plans and ambitions for animals in the next session and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Elisa Allen, Director, PETA UK
Sonul Badiani-Hamment, UK Country Director, FOUR PAWS UK
Claire Bass, executive director, Humane Society International/UK
Richard Benwell, Chief Executive, Wildlife & Countryside Link
Cordelia Britton, Interim Managing Director, The Humane League UK

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3 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-60439796;

4 In particular mutilation/ear cropping of dogs, illegal in the UK, recent statistics from RSPCA show an increase in the number of reported cases having risen by 86% in 2021, and risen by 1,243% since 2015
Chris Butler-Stroud, CEO, Whale and Dolphin Conservation
Sarah Carr, CEO, Naturewatch Foundation
Ian Cawsey, Director of Advocacy & Campaigns, The Donkey Sanctuary
Jan Creamer, Animal Defenders International
Sarah Dixon & Nicola Skelley, Directors, The FOAL Group
Bob Elliot, Director, OneKind
Chris Fegan, CE Catholic Concern for Animals
Barbara Gardner, CE Animal Interfaith Alliance
Juliet Gellatley, Founder & Director, Viva!
Iain Green, Director, Animal Aid
Claire Howard, Executive Director, Crustacean Compassion
Dr Andrew Kelly, Freedom for Animals
Andy Knott, Chief Executive, League Against Cruel Sports
Sophika Kostyniuk, Managing Director, Aquatic Life Institute
Peter Laurie, CEO, Battersea Dogs & Cats Home
Philip Lymbery, Global CEO, Compassion in World Farming
Steve McIvor, CEO, World Animal Protection
Duncan McNair, CEO, Save the Asian Elephants
Roly Owers, Chief Executive, World Horse Welfare
Abigail Penny, Executive Director, Animal Equality UK
Chris Sherwood, CEO, Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Paula Sparks, UK Centre for Animal Law
Dominic Sullivan, Interim Chief Executive, Cats Protection
Elaine Toland, Director, Animal Protection Agency
Peter Tutt, Director, Shellfish Network
Will Travers OBE, Executive President, Born Free Foundation
Owen Sharp, Chief Executive, Dogs Trust

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