

## Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Bill: Briefing for Lords 2nd reading February 2024

This briefing is on behalf of Wildlife and Countryside Link ([Link](#)), the largest nature and animal welfare coalition in England, bringing together 82 organisations to use their joint voice to protect the natural world.

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The Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Bill prohibits the live export of specified British livestock for slaughter or fattening abroad.<sup>1</sup> This is a welcome prohibition as live exports see animals crammed into vehicles on long, stressful journeys causing them to suffer from exhaustion, dehydration and even death. This Bill will prevent animals from suffering these extreme stresses<sup>2</sup>, and avoid them being reared or slaughtered in countries that may have lower slaughter or farming standards than the UK.

At Lords 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading on 21.02.24, Link's [animal welfare group](#) urges peers to:

### Advocate swift progression of the Bill

The pausing (2022) and then abandonment of the Kept Animals Bill (2023), which contained measures it to prohibit live animal exports, has delayed the pace of reform.

As a result, live animal exports remain legal under UK law. Although no live animal has been exported from the GB to the EU for slaughter since December 2020, this is due to a lack of suitable post-Brexit Border Control Posts (BCPs) in French and Belgian ports, rather than the imposition of any permanent barrier to the trade. The creation of new BCPs (or upgrades to existing ones, such as the BCP at Calais) could allow a swift resumption of the trade; in July 2023 Government Minister Lord Benyon stated that the UK and French Governments were in active talks about creating a suitable BCP at Coquelles.<sup>3</sup> FOI data from 2019 shows around 35,000 sheep and calves were exported from Great Britain for slaughter or fattening in the EU. New BCPs could see exports resume at a similar scale at any time if a ban is not enshrined in law.

As the Secretary of State for Food, the Environment and Rural Affairs said at 2nd reading of the Bill in the Commons:

*“Given the demand from Europe’s slaughterhouses for livestock, especially British sheep, there is no reason to think that this trade would not resume at the first opportunity.”<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0017/230017.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ciwf.org.uk/our-campaigns/ban-live-exports/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2023-07-10/debates/DFCD59E8-8F9E-47E0-9612-C3F2A5153319/LiveAnimalsExportBan>

<sup>4</sup> [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-12-18/debates/1BBCDA13-C062-4973-A369-FE8D804679BF/AnimalWelfare\(LivestockExports\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-12-18/debates/1BBCDA13-C062-4973-A369-FE8D804679BF/AnimalWelfare(LivestockExports)Bill)

Failure to pass a legal prohibition on live exports within the current Parliament would extend the time period in which the live exports trade could resume, risking the infliction of unnecessary suffering upon millions of farmed animals.

There is also a democratic imperative to progress proposals contained in the governing party's 2019 General Election Manifesto, benefiting from overwhelming parliamentary and public support<sup>5</sup>, within the current Parliament. This is not a partisan issue: the policy was also included in the Labour Party's 2019 animal welfare manifesto<sup>6</sup> and the SNP's 2021 Manifesto.<sup>7</sup> The Liberal Democrats and the Greens have expressed their opposition to live exports for slaughter.

As such, we urge peers to keep the pressure on the Government to make the parliamentary scheduling decisions required to swiftly progress the Bill through subsequent stages. The Bill was introduced into the Commons in December 2023 and has proceeded to the Lords within two months. This pace must be sustained throughout Lords stages, to ensure the Bill becomes law before the next General Election.

### **Consider a simple enabling power to future-proof the Bill**

The prohibition on live exports in the Bill would currently apply to calves, sheep, pigs, wild boar, goats and equines (see clause 1). Whilst these are historically the main farmed animal groups subject to live exports for slaughter, this is not an exclusive list and other animals are exported live from GB.<sup>8</sup> It is also the case that a lack of historical precedent for a particular animal is not a guarantee that live exports will not take place in future, especially as UK livestock farming continues to evolve. There has been particular growth in the farming of deer and alpacas in the UK over recent years, with 45,000 farmed deer and 12,000 farmed alpacas recorded in 2021.<sup>9</sup>

Commons Committee stage on 15<sup>th</sup> January saw discussion of and a vote on an amendment<sup>10</sup> which would have provided an enabling power, allowing the Secretary of State (for England), and the Scottish and Welsh Ministers for Scotland and Wales, to add additional groups of livestock to the scope of the Bill, through a Statutory Instrument subject to the affirmative procedure. This would have empowered the Secretary of State to extend the export ban to other species, including deer and or alpaca, at a future date, if they felt that the science justified such a move.

In responding at Committee stage, Government Minister Mark Spencer resisted the amendment, arguing that there was no species outside of those mentioned in the current Bill would be exported

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.rspca.org.uk/-/news-new-defra-secretary-urged-to-ensure-live-exports-ban-is-top-of-in-tray->

<sup>6</sup> <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Labours-Animal-Welfare-Manifesto.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.snp.org/manifesto/>

<sup>8</sup> See for example adult poultry: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-06-29/24345>

<sup>9</sup> [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-15/debates/C3CADE59-E8E9-4644-9E28-FE6EBB20D958/AnimalWelfare\(LivestockExports\)Bill%E2%80%82](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-15/debates/C3CADE59-E8E9-4644-9E28-FE6EBB20D958/AnimalWelfare(LivestockExports)Bill%E2%80%82)

<sup>10</sup> See amendment 5 here: [https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0017/amend/animalwelfare\\_rm\\_cwh\\_0108.pdf](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/58-04/0017/amend/animalwelfare_rm_cwh_0108.pdf)



for fattening or slaughter at a significant scale.<sup>11</sup> This does not provide complete assurance. This history of the live animal exports trade from the UK shows how export numbers can rise sharply, if economic factors make live exports profitable. By way of example, between 1972 and 1982 the number of pigs exported live from the UK rose from 30,000 per year to over 600,000.<sup>12</sup> It is not inconceivable that such a sudden surge in live exports could apply to a farmed species not currently covered by the Bill.

As such, it seems reasonable for the Secretary of State and the devolved Governments to have the power to swiftly respond to changes in live export patterns, without the need for further primary legislation. A simple enabling power which could be applied in future to any species, such as the one proposed at Commons committee stage, could achieve this. The addition of this simple enabling power could also pre-empt extensive discussion as to whether particular groups of animals should be added to the scope of the Bill, further accelerating its parliamentary progress.

We encourage peers to consider the case for an enabling power to ‘future-proof’ the Bill.

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*For questions or further information please contact:*

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<sup>11</sup> [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-15/debates/C3CADE59-E8E9-4644-9E28-FE6EBB20D958/AnimalWelfare\(LivestockExports\)Bill%E2%80%82](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-01-15/debates/C3CADE59-E8E9-4644-9E28-FE6EBB20D958/AnimalWelfare(LivestockExports)Bill%E2%80%82)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/environment-animals/live-animal-exports/>