



RSPCA Rolling Briefing

Rural Affairs, North Wales & Trefnydd

Questions

Questions to the Minister for Rural Affairs, North Wales & Trefnydd

Date of Questions:	Tabled By:
2 February 2022	3.30pm on 26 January 2022

Recent Animal Welfare Updates

RSPCA evidence supports a ban on glue traps. With evidence from the RSPCA being collated as part of the Welsh Government's call to evidence on glue traps, it is clear that a ban on these cruel and indiscriminate devices is much needed. RSPCA Cymru have long campaigned against the sale and use of glue traps, as well as snares, and were delighted when the Welsh Government signalled its intention to ban both devices in its policy response to the Agriculture (Wales) Bill's White Paper in September. However, more information on these plans would be welcome, with no reference of them in either the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales or the recently-published Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework (WAHWF)s Implementation Plan. With both glue traps and snares having the potential to cause immense pain and suffering to animals, including pets, it is imperative that the use of these indiscriminate devices be banished to the history books in Wales once and for all. The RSPCA is also urging the Welsh Government to work with other UK nations to ensure the ban extends to the sale as well as use of glue traps.

The WAHWF Implementation Plan is welcome, but more is needed. The Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework (WAHWF) Implementation Plan was published earlier this month, providing a greater insight into the Welsh Government plans to improve animal welfare in the coming years. The plan outlines WAHWF's priorities up until 2024, when a new 10-year plan will be published, and further elaborates on previous Welsh Government commitments made within the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales and Programme for Government. As well as including a clear focus on responsible ownership and the wider benefits of good welfare standards such as improved human wellbeing and tackling climate change, the plan includes positive signs about plans to reward higher welfare standards as part of Wales' post-Brexit farm payments plan. While this is positive news, RSPCA Cymru is calling for payments to be clearly linked to good husbandry and higher welfare practices, in addition to disease prevention and biosecurity. Further detail with regard to restricting the use of cages for farmed animals in Wales and the proposed timeframes for licensing sanctuaries, rescue and rehoming centres are also much needed.

The RSPCA is reviewing its policy on racing greyhounds. Greyhound racing has received significant political attention in Wales as of late, following a petition from our friends at Hope Rescue calling on the sport to be banned having reached more than 23,000 signatures, with a Senedd debate on this topic expected in the near future. With the potential for greyhound racing tracks to be included in extensions of current legislation cited in both the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales and the WAHWFs Implementation Plan, we'll be taking part in discussions with the Welsh Government and other political parties on this topic over the coming months with the aim of working to improve the welfare of racing greyhounds in Wales. The recent focus on greyhound racing in Wales coincides with a joint review with our friends at Dogs Trust. This review is currently being undertaken by an independent agency, with input from independent animal welfare experts, and its findings will be used to shape RSPCA policy on racing greyhounds in Wales and beyond.

Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) pose a threat to Wales' welfare standards. Following the announcement that the UK Government has launched negotiations with India regarding a potential trade agreement, and deals with Australia and New Zealand at an advanced stage, RSPCA Cymru is calling on the Welsh Government to use all of the levers at its disposal to ensure Wales' animal welfare standards are not undermined by future FTAs. RSPCA Cymru is concerned that the current negotiation of FTAs following our exit from the European Union poses profound challenges for the future of food production in Wales, particularly if an FTA allows the importation of agricultural products reared to standards lower than domestic rules allow. It would be particularly concerning if, at a time when the Welsh Government is considering recognising farmers delivering higher welfare standards in its post-Brexit payments programme, future FTAs risked undercutting and undermining domestic standards by encouraging lower welfare imports.

Glue traps

The Welsh Government is collating evidence from stakeholders on the use and sale of glue traps in Wales. Between 2015 and 2020, the RSPCA received 264 calls across England and Wales related to animals in distress from glue traps, regarding both target and non-target animals caught in these devices. Animals caught can be trapped for prolonged periods of time - experiencing potential pain, distress and severe suffering. Unattended animals can die slowly from dehydration, starvation or exhaustion - and the RSPCA does not consider glue traps a viable method of pest control; and hopes a ban, anticipated via a future Agriculture (Wales) Bill, will soon be implemented.

Based on the experiences of our inspectorate while rescuing animals caught in these traps as well as scientific research, the RSPCA considers glue traps to be cruel and indiscriminate, which risk causing unnecessary suffering to target and non-target species alike. Indeed, glue traps, compared to alternative methods of rodent control, are significantly worse when measured in terms of humaneness and non-target catch, as any small animal can be caught in them for up to 24 hours without access to food or water, with their movements severely constrained. Glue traps are unfortunately a cheap, accessible method of 'pest' control that are easily obtainable by those with no experience of wildlife management. The RSPCA has seen a wide variety of non-target animals caught in glue traps including cats, squirrels, owls and other birds, with nearly three out of four cases of animals reported to the RSPCA being related to non-target animals such as these. In many cases involving glue traps, animals have either been left to suffer and/or die, with many of the traps in question having been laid by non-trained or licensed pest operatives.

As well as safeguarding animal welfare, RSPCA Cymru believes a ban on the use of glue traps would be in line with the public's expectations, and societal norms and values. Since April 2015, the RSPCA has been running a campaign to encourage members of the public to notify us about stores where glue traps are on sale, and we then urge the store to consider removing the traps from sale. We've had over 500 reports of glue traps on sale in both physical and online stores in England and Wales, illustrating the degree of public concern about the availability and use of these traps. Some of the comments we have received from members of the public when reporting sellers of glue traps in Wales have described traps as 'disgusting' and 'cruel and immoral', with many 'shocked and upset' to see them on sale. Because of these experiences, RSPCA Cymru has long called for their use and sale to be banned in Wales and were delighted when the Welsh Government announced its intention to include such a ban in the Agriculture (Wales) Bill. With no mention of this commitment in either the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales or the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Implementation Plan 2022-2024, we are calling on the Welsh Government to continue showing the ambition needed to ensure that glue traps no longer pose a threat to animals.

The Welsh Government's work on glue traps coincides with the UK Government's current focus on these devices, with the Glue Traps (Offences) Bill currently making its way through Westminster following the tabling of a Private Members Bill by Jane Stevenson MP back in June. The Scottish Minister also announced on January 18 that she is now intending to ban glue traps. With all UK countries considering banning these devices in the near future, the RSPCA is calling for a consistent approach to be undertaken to ensure that these devices will not continue posing a threat to animals on either side of the border, should one country pass legislation on glue traps before the other. The Glue Traps (Offences) Bill is now due to have its final Commons stages soon¹, RSPCA Cymru is keen to see the Welsh Government introduce legislative proposals for a ban on glue traps 'by early summer' this year as previously suggested in the Senedd by the Minister for Rural Affairs back in November². Additionally, at a Public Bill Committee, Jane Stevenson MP highlighted that her Private Member's Bill does not extend to the sale of glue traps due to issues related to "the devolved Administrations" - given the ease of sale between England, Wales and Scotland; and, presumably, conditions of the Internal Market Act. However, with Wales and Scotland exploring bans too, she hoped that "at a future date the legislation, when it is aligned, will ban the sale of glue traps"³ - and RSPCA Cymru urges the Welsh Government to work with counterparts in other UK nations to ensure a ban can apply to both the sale and use of glue traps.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Can the Minister confirm whether the Welsh Government is still on course to introduce legislative proposals to ban glue traps in Wales in 2022?**
- 2. Does the Welsh Government intend to seek to ban the sale of glue traps, as well as their use?**
- 3. Can the Minister confirm whether any conversations have been held with the UK Government with regard to ensuring a consistent approach towards the use of glue traps, with both considering a ban on the devices in the near future?**

¹ Parliamentary Bills - Glue Traps (Offences) Bill, accessed on 24 January 2022

² [Record of Proceedings](#), 17 November 2021

³ Public Bill Committees - Glue Traps (Offences) Bill, debated on 19 January 2022

WAHWF Implementation Plan 2022-2024

On January 4, the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework (WAHWF) Implementation Plan 2022-2024 was published, further confirming the Welsh Government's animal welfare-related priorities for the foreseeable future. The publication of the plan comes at a critical junction for animal welfare in Wales, with both Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic having a significant impact on the agricultural and animal welfare sectors alike.

The implementation plan acknowledges how health and welfare concerns have been heightened due to animals having to remain on farms' as a result of the pandemic and the subsequent staff shortages and supply chain issues, as well as the unprecedented pressure faced by veterinary professionals. Positively, within the plan, the role higher welfare standards can play with regard to food safety and quality is recognised, along with the wider human wellbeing benefits contact with animals has been proven to provide.

Under the plan's 'One Welfare' concept, there is support for the recognition and reward of higher animal welfare standards in the proposed new Sustainable Farming Scheme, including rewarding farmers for outcome-focussed achievements, and recognising higher welfare standards as part of the new post-Brexit agricultural payment plan. While we are glad to see further confirmation that incentivising animal welfare standards could play an important role in the Welsh Government's post-Brexit agricultural policy, RSPCA Cymru is hoping the plan will go further by rewarding farmers for more than disease prevention and good levels of biosecurity.

The incoming Sustainable Farming Scheme provides Wales with the biggest opportunity in the history of devolution to improve farm animal welfare by directly incentivising farmers via payments for delivering higher welfare standards on their farms. Higher welfare and good husbandry practices play a crucial role in the prevention and spread of disease and good biosecurity, as well as ensuring a good quality of life for farmed animals. Providing animals with the correct environment, adequate space and the correct nutrition is imperative, with good husbandry practices also having the potential to not only help minimise animal stress, but also bring about positive mental states. 80 percent of adults in Wales say the welfare standards of the animals reared is important in their purchasing decisions⁴, while 72 percent would pay more for products from animal welfare-friendly production systems⁵. Because of this, RSPCA Cymru firmly believes reform of Wales' farm payments scheme should incorporate a focus on higher welfare produce at its heart, to help improve the lives of farm animals while ensuring that consumers can readily make ethical choices with more access to the higher welfare products they seek; and ensuring 'Brand Wales' becomes increasingly synonymous with higher welfare standards.

The implementation plan also includes more detail on welcome proposals for a national model for regulation of animal welfare and the requirement for CCTV to be installed in all slaughterhouses, as is currently the case in England. Plans to restrict the use of cages for farmed animals are also very positive - though further information on the extent of those restrictions, along with proposed timeframes for these proposals and how this area of joint working with the UK and Scottish Governments is progressing is much needed, especially with the first draft of the Agriculture (Wales) Bill expected soon.

The licensing of Animal Welfare Establishments (AWEs) such as sanctuaries, rescue and rehoming centres is also featured within the implementation plan, with further confirmation that the Welsh Government will be re-consulting on this matter, as well as others, such as mobile animal exhibits, included. Confirmation with regard to the proposed timeframes for this would be useful, especially with Members of the Senedd having voted in favour of the regulation of AWEs during a debate in the Senedd late last year⁶.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Can the Minister confirm how higher welfare and good husbandry practices will be considered in future plans to incentivise farmers and the creation of the Sustainable Farming Scheme?**
- 2. Can the Minister provide any update with regard to the proposed timeframes for restricting the use of cages for farmed animals in Wales and how this area of work is progressing with the UK and Scottish Governments?**
- 3. Can the Minister give any indication as to when the Welsh Government will recommence its consultation process on the licensing of Animal Welfare Establishments such as sanctuaries, rescue and rehoming centres?**

⁴ YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,001 Welsh adults (aged 18+). Fieldwork was undertaken between 4–8 September 2014. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Welsh adults (aged 18+)

⁵ European Commission, 2016. Attitudes of Europeans towards animal welfare. Special Eurobarometer 442

⁶ Record of Proceedings, 24 November 2021

Racing greyhounds

RSPCA Cymru has long called for the welfare of racing greyhounds in Wales to be better safeguarded and welcomes recent developments from Welsh Government in the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales and the WAHAWG's Implementation Plan suggesting the inclusion of greyhound racing tracks as a potential area of focus, potentially under the future expansion of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021. There is one independent 'flapping' greyhound track that currently operates in Wales, with no requirement for veterinary presence or welfare oversight in place as it stands.

In 2019, the RSPCA co-wrote a voluntary Code of Practice for the Welfare of Racing Greyhounds on behalf of the greyhound welfare working group, a subgroup of the Animal Welfare Network for Wales⁷, following a request for action from the Welsh Government. This was a key step forward, presenting relevant minimum legislative standards as well as encouraging track operators, trainers and owners to adopt higher standards relating to the training of greyhounds, management at the track, vet attendance at the track, dog breeding, transportation, biosecurity and sale. However, without formal regulation underpinned with high welfare standards and enforcement, there are currently no guarantees about the welfare of greyhounds competing in a racing environment, with Wales continuing to lag behind England on this matter - who have had formal regulation in place since 2010.

Due to the long-running welfare concerns associated with greyhound racing, calls for the 'sport' to be banned in Wales have reached unprecedented levels, with a Senedd petition from our friends at Hope Rescue having reached over 23,000 signatures. This petition and issue is expected to be debated by Members of the Senedd in the near future, with a roundtable event on the subject of greyhound welfare hosted by Luke Fletcher MS and Jane Dodds MS on January 26.

The RSPCA and Dogs Trust have recently commissioned an independent review to help shape their policies on racing greyhounds. Both organisations have worked on the issue of greyhound welfare for a number of years and have raised many different areas of concern during this time. Both organisations are members of the UK Greyhound Forum which engages with the greyhound industry to encourage welfare improvements for these dogs. While the forum has achieved important welfare improvements through engaging directly with the industry, significant issues which urgently need tackling to ensure that welfare is adequately safeguarded remain, both in England and in Wales.

Along with many other industries, greyhound racing in the UK has been heavily affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has further added to concerns with regard to its future financial stability. While bookmakers have the option of making voluntary contributions to the industry via the British Greyhound Racing Fund⁸ questions exist with regard to whether the voluntary levy is sufficient enough to make the improvements needed to protect greyhound welfare. The current absence of a secure and consistent source of funding means that the ability for every racing greyhound to be afforded at least a life worth living appears increasingly challenging, which is one of the reasons for recently commissioning an independent review of racing greyhound welfare in the UK. This will report in the first half of 2022 and its findings will be used to shape our future policy.

This review will be undertaken by an independent agency, with input from independent animal welfare experts, and will shape each organisation's future policy while helping us make a valid contribution to future discussions on the welfare of racing greyhounds in Wales - at a critical juncture for the issue. RSPCA Cymru looks forward to discussing the findings of the report and their subsequent policy with the Welsh Government and Members of the Senedd in the hope it will influence policy in Wales and beyond.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Can the Minister elaborate on what action is being taken to protect the welfare of racing greyhounds in Wales while the Welsh Government reviews its future position on this issue?**
- 2. Can the Minister confirm if any assessment has been made with regards to the success of the Welsh Government's voluntary Code of Practice on the welfare of racing greyhounds to date, and how this success is being monitored?**
- 3. How is the Welsh Government liaising with Caerphilly County Borough Council on inspections of the existing greyhound racing track in Wales to ensure animal welfare standards?**

⁷ Welfare of racing greyhounds: voluntary code of practice, first published 24 August 2020

⁸ [The British Greyhound Racing Fund](#)

Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)

On January 13, it was announced that the UK Government has launched negotiations with India on a potential Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two countries⁹, further adding to the RSPCA's concerns with regard to the future importation of food produced to lower welfare standards than our own.

With FTAs already having been reached with Australia and in principle with New Zealand, RSPCA Cymru is calling for consideration to be given as to how the import of animal-derived products into Wales has the potential to undermine Wales' welfare standards while contributing significantly towards our greenhouse gas emissions and ecological footprint. The current negotiation of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) following our exit from the European Union poses profound challenges for the future of food production in Wales, particularly if an FTA allows the importation of agricultural products reared to standards lower than domestic rules allows or products produced by methods that will increase, rather than mitigate, climate change, such as beef produced on deforested land in Australia, for example.

Mutual zero tariff market access for agricultural products has been a persistent talking point of FTA negotiation - such as in the deals struck between the UK and Australia and New Zealand. Not only does importing lower-welfare products from countries such as Australia have implications for animal welfare, but would contribute to our ecological and climate change footprint. Bearing this in mind, RSPCA Cymru believes that incentivising the domestic production of higher-welfare products with a lower carbon-footprint and positive environmental impact could help mitigate against this risk, and support current and future marketing and trade opportunities for Wales, by helping to financially sustain higher welfare production against the spectre of lower welfare, cheaper imports. With the first draft of the Sustainable Farming Scheme expected later this year, rewarding farmers for the production of higher-welfare produce could provide a vital line of support to Wales' agricultural sector and reduce the need to cut costs in order to compete with cheaper imports.

With the potential for lower-welfare imports to start reaching supermarket shelves in the near future, RSPCA Cymru is also renewing its call for the Welsh Government to strengthen statutory requirements on food labeling and hopes that this will include the requirement of 'method of production' labelling for all meat, fish and dairy products, as well as more information with regard to where the products originate from. Such labelling would give renewed confidence and assurance to consumers and producers, and potentially revolutionise purchasing decisions in the same way whole egg labelling has done over the last 15 years. Many consumers seek higher welfare and locally sourced options, with ethically sourced and environmentally-friendly produce an increasingly desirable marketing tool for many companies. As it stands, unclear or absent labels continue to cause confusion and make it difficult for consumers to make adequately informed decisions, or make purchases in line with their intentions. Furthermore, inadequate labelling hinders the sale of higher welfare and locally sourced products and therefore unfairly disadvantages the farmers producing them.

We have seen the impact transparent labelling can have with regards to helping consumers make informed choices through our own scheme - RSPCA Assured, the RSPCA's farm assurance and food labelling scheme. Covering the producer, haulier and abattoir, the scheme is unique in its dedication to farm animal welfare and has gone from strength to strength since its launch in 1994. RSPCA Assured products are sold in many of the UK's biggest supermarkets, including Tesco, Sainsbury's, Lidl, Aldi and Marks & Spencers, as well as by other major high-street chains, such as McDonalds, Wetherspoons and Frankies and Benny's. 61% of consumers now recognise the RSPCA Assured logo on produce and have safeguards about the treatment of the animals reared from birth to slaughter¹⁰. The scheme provides us with an example of how impactful welfare-related labelling can be and we urge the Welsh Government to seek to give consumers more knowledge than ever before about the food they are buying.

Questions to consider:

- 1. What action is the Welsh Government taking to mitigate against Wales' domestic welfare standards being undermined by the signing of Free Trade Agreements?**
- 2. What assessment has the Welsh Government made with regard to the potential impact a Free Trade Agreement with India could have on farm animals welfare standards in Wales, and the future sustainability of our agricultural sector?**
- 3. Can the Minister confirm whether the Welsh Government has any intention to strengthen statutory requirements on food labelling to give consumers more information on the products they are purchasing, and their welfare standard?**

⁹ UK Government News - [UK launches India negotiations to kick off 5-star year of trade](#), 12 January 2022

¹⁰ <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/consumer/articles-reports/2022/01/19/do-britons-know-what-food-quality-labels-mean>

RSPCA Cymru incidents, October - December 2021

From October to December 2021, the RSPCA responded to 3,782 incidents across Wales - an 11.5 percent increase on the same time period last year; with Covid-19 restrictions now significantly eased and people spending more time out and about. This marks an increased degree of normality on the frontline, after a decline in calls to the RSPCA's emergency line amid restrictions as people spent more time at home.

Local Authority	October - December 2021	October - December 2020
Blaenau Gwent	89	79
Bridgend	153	140
Caerphilly	176	137
Cardiff	417	302
Carmarthenshire	236	231
Ceredigion	86	71
Conwy	177	186
Denbighshire	148	111
Flintshire	158	160
Gwynedd	142	143
Isle of Anglesey	98	89
Merthyr Tydfil	81	57
Monmouthshire	108	78
Neath Port Talbot	195	169
Newport	237	197
Pembrokeshire	155	179
Powys	156	154
Rhondda Cynon Taff	236	201
Swansea	351	326
The Vale of Glamorgan	141	119
Torfaen	92	106
Wrexham	150	155
TOTAL	3,782	3,390

More information on the work of the RSPCA, and bespoke briefings on all of our campaigns can be found on the [PoliticalAnimal website](http://www.PoliticalAnimal.wales) - a dedicated resource for politicians and their staff. The news issue also features updates per Senedd region which may prove useful for supplementary questions.