



# Delivering a better world for animals:

2024 General Election manifesto asks



In 2024 we will celebrate the RSPCA's 200th birthday and the seismic positive change introduced for animals over those two centuries.

While the UK was once a global leader in animal welfare, there is concern we're now falling behind and pets, farm animals, wildlife and animals used in science could all pay the price. Prioritising the welfare of animals is not only the right thing to do, but also has huge public support. That's why political parties must use this General Election to be innovative and propose solutions that will genuinely make this animal-loving nation an even kinder place, and recognise the incredible role the animal kingdom plays in all of our lives. Our manifesto is packed full of ideas that you can use to put the UK back on the path of global leadership for all animals.

#### **Our nine asks:**

- 1. Agree a phase-out of the use of animals in experiments.**
- 2. Develop an effective food strategy that ensures high animal welfare.**
- 3. Protect animal welfare in trade agreements.**
- 4. Protect all wild animals.**
- 5. License animal sanctuaries and introduce a licensing scheme for kept animals.**
- 6. Restrict the use of fireworks.**
- 7. Ban the non-stun slaughter of animals.**
- 8. Secure a better deal for dogs, with legislation that prioritises their health and welfare.**
- 9. Include animal welfare in schools' curricula.**

#### **In our 10-year strategy<sup>1</sup> we set out some ambitious but achievable goals, including:**

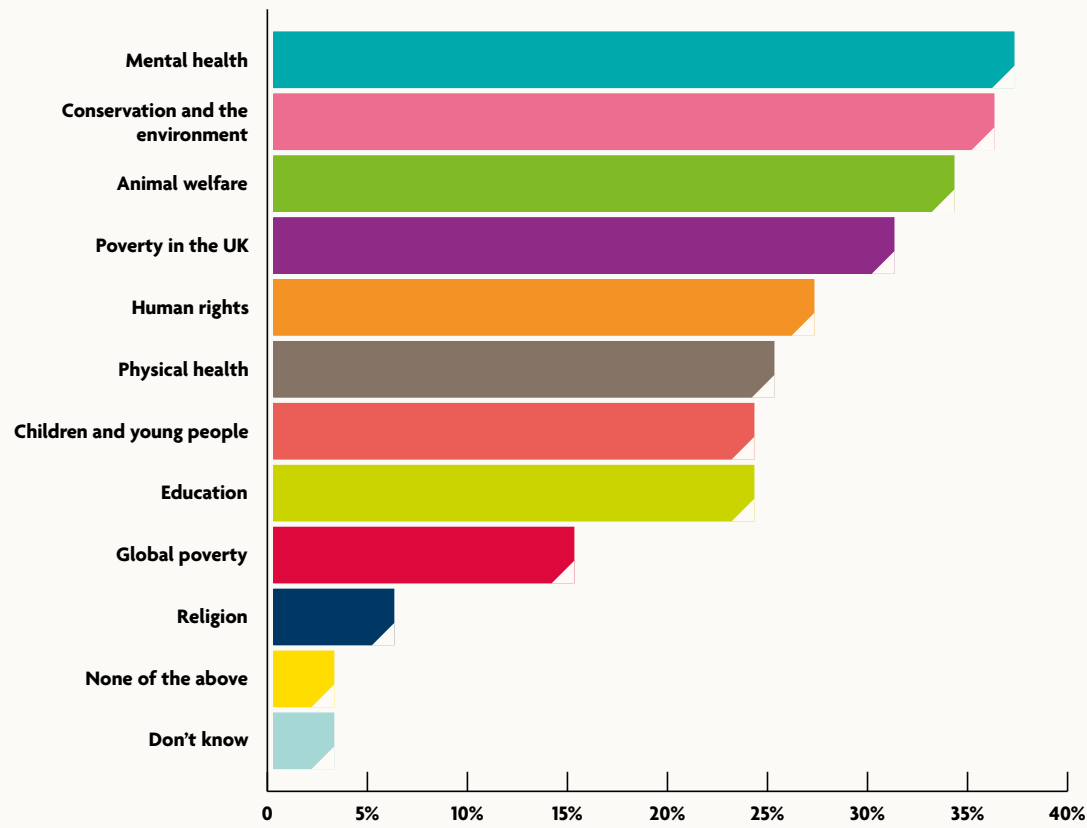
- Reduce animal neglect and cruelty by half.
- See more than half of all UK farm animals reared to RSPCA welfare standards.
- Secure a global commitment to developing, validating and accepting non-animal technologies to replace animal experiments, and put an end to 'severe' suffering for laboratory animals.
- See animal welfare education as a recognised and valued topic of the curriculum for schools.

We believe governments must be equally ambitious so we can create a society where animals are treated with more respect, cruel acts which have become legitimised and institutionalised are challenged, and where the interconnectedness of human and animal wellbeing is better understood.

---

<sup>1</sup> [rspca.org.uk/whatwedo/strategy](https://rspca.org.uk/whatwedo/strategy)

## Which causes are important to you? (pick three)



We are a nation of animal lovers. Animal welfare was picked by the public as a 'top three' issue for them<sup>2</sup>, and more than three-quarters of the public want better legislative protection for animals<sup>3</sup>.

This document sets out a series of pledges for political parties to commit to, which the public would welcome, in their manifestos. As animal welfare is mainly a devolved issue our asks are directed at a UK or England level, but we hope the other nations would follow suit.

<sup>2</sup> RSPCA 2022 Animal Kindness Index polling of 4,102 people April 13–25 2022 YouGov.

<sup>3</sup> **MRP poll data:** The polling was run on the Focaldata platform. Data was collected from a nationally representative sample of 10,018 adults between 11 and 20 April 2022. Using the polling data, Focaldata completed a constituency-level analysis using MRP modelling.

# Together for animal welfare

## Phase out animal use in experiments and phase in non-animal alternatives

We commit the UK to an ambitious and world-leading strategy for ‘phasing out’ animal use in research and testing, in conjunction with a significantly increased commitment to promote the development, uptake and ‘phasing in’ of non-animal alternative methods.

### Scope: UK

Around three million scientific procedures are carried out using animals in the UK each year<sup>4</sup>. A further 1.8 million laboratory animals are bred and killed, for example so their organs or tissues can be used in research<sup>5</sup>. This means that UK life sciences currently impact around five million animals every year. Animals used in research and testing can and do experience pain and distress which can be ‘severe’.

We believe that much more could, and should, be done to avoid, or reduce, this suffering, and the UK public agrees. Recent polling shows that 76 percent of UK adults are very concerned about the use of animals in scientific research and testing and 79 percent of UK adults agree that more needs to be done to speed up the development and uptake of alternatives to replace animal experiments. In addition, more than three-quarters (77 percent) of UK adults agree that the UK Government should commit to phasing out the use of animals in scientific research and testing, and 76 percent agree that the UK should be a global leader in moving towards the use of non-animal alternatives in scientific research<sup>6</sup>.

Phasing out animal experiments, coupled with phasing in advanced, non-animal technologies (NATs) and new approach methodologies (NAMs), offer clear ethical, animal welfare, scientific and economic benefits. Indeed, the global non-animal alternatives testing market is growing annually and is expected to be worth an estimated \$2.6 billion by 2026<sup>7</sup>. Recent years have seen new technological advances that are offering increasing potential and opportunities for replacing current animal use in some specific tests and areas. For example, advanced in vitro models, such as organoids and organs-on-chips<sup>8</sup>, are increasingly available in biomedical research, and a rising number of approaches which avoid the use of animals are being introduced to assess the safety of chemicals<sup>9</sup>.

But despite the huge transformative opportunities and potential benefits offered by these new technologies and approaches to replace animal use, the UK Government currently invests less than 0.17 percent of its research and innovation budget directly towards their development<sup>10</sup>. This is a real missed opportunity and the UK is in serious danger of being left behind by the ambition and leadership of others in the Netherlands, Germany and the USA. We believe that now is the time for the political parties in the UK to increase their ambitions and commit to work harder to help facilitate a faster transition away from the use of animals in experiments.

<sup>4</sup> [gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-of-scientific-procedures-on-living-animals](https://gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-of-scientific-procedures-on-living-animals)

<sup>5</sup> [gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-of-scientific-procedures-on-living-animals#additional-statistics-for-2017](https://gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-of-scientific-procedures-on-living-animals#additional-statistics-for-2017)

<sup>6</sup> Savanta ComRes Polling, April 2022.

<sup>7</sup> [researchandmarkets.com/reports/5515092/non-animal-alternatives-testing-global-market](https://researchandmarkets.com/reports/5515092/non-animal-alternatives-testing-global-market)

<sup>8</sup> [cpm.qmul.ac.uk/emulate](https://cpm.qmul.ac.uk/emulate)

<sup>9</sup> [unilever.com/news/news-search/2020/ending-animal-testing-behind-the-scenes-at-our-research-hub](https://unilever.com/news/news-search/2020/ending-animal-testing-behind-the-scenes-at-our-research-hub)

<sup>10</sup> Based on a UK budget for research and innovation of +£6bn a year; and the Government's funding for the NC3Rs – part of whose activities are aimed at ‘replacing’ animals – being £10m per year, via UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).





## An effective food strategy for the future

We will commit the UK to taking forward a food strategy which ensures access to affordable, nutritious food for all, while driving up farm animal welfare standards, driving down poor production methods, and encouraging the public to eat ‘less and better’ in line with climate change and human health concerns.

### Scope: England

In June 2022 the UK Government published its Food Strategy for England<sup>11</sup>. The document represented a once-in-a-generation opportunity to recast our relationship with food and farming for the age we live in, and address big issues around food supply and security, sustainable food production, climate change, public health, and the protection of the UK’s high environmental and animal welfare standards.

The document was developed in response to an independent review of the nation’s food systems, commissioned by the UK Government in 2018 and carried out by Henry Dimbleby. A food strategy needs, as recommended in the Dimbleby review, to:

- Develop a set of ‘core standards’ for animal welfare and the environment which would be used in all the government’s future trade negotiations.
- Reduce meat consumption by 30 percent by 2030 to protect both farm animals and the environment, helping the UK achieve its climate change goals.
- Shift from farmed meat to high-tech alternatives such as lab-grown meat, plant-based alternatives and precision fermentation food.
- Move away from intensive agriculture, building on the ban of the battery cage and sow stall to move entirely away from cages.

Unless there is a significant change to our diets, we are likely to see an unsustainable rise in the number of animals (particularly fish and chickens) farmed for their meat over the coming decades. This will place even greater pressure on already stressed environments, natural habitats and scarce resources as well as the negative impacts on animal welfare of more animals being farmed, potentially in intensive systems. The government committed in 2021 to phasing out cages for laying hens and pigs, and promoting more humane methods of farming such as the Better Chicken Commitment<sup>12</sup>. This needs to be taken forward alongside improving transparency in the food chain through mandatory method-of-production labelling.

We must begin to act now to reduce the number of farm animals through reducing both consumption and production of meat and dairy products, and encouraging alternatives such as the development of cultured meat through specific government grants. This would be good for business and employment, help meet climate change commitments and encourage UK higher welfare systems such as RSPCA Assured. Even in the midst of the cost-of-living crisis, this is an achievable goal.

<sup>11</sup> [gov.uk/government/publications/government-food-strategy/government-food-strategy](https://gov.uk/government/publications/government-food-strategy/government-food-strategy)

<sup>12</sup> [hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2022-06-20/debates/A8711335-BF26-47F0-97B4-F6ED2471EB7F/FarmedAnimalsCages](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2022-06-20/debates/A8711335-BF26-47F0-97B4-F6ED2471EB7F/FarmedAnimalsCages)



## Trade agreements

We commit the UK Government to safeguard the UK's animal welfare standards when negotiating new trade deals, via a commitment to equivalence-based core animal welfare standards in its trade policy and any Free Trade Agreement, as well as putting forward a programme at the World Trade Organization (WTO) to recognise animal welfare in trade, and ensuring there is a transparent process to ratify any trade agreement.

### Scope: UK

We want to see conditionality clauses giving equivalence on animal welfare standards between the countries in any trade deal. While there is language in the UK-Australia and UK-New Zealand deals on non-regression and non-derogation from standards, it is overridden by the reduction in tariffs on beef and lamb in both agreements. There is no language on providing access to these products based on conditionality of standards, leaving our farmers who are producing to higher standards exposed. Animal welfare standards for both sheep and lamb production in Australia are lower than the UK's. As there is no conditionality on imports, Australian beef and lamb will be imported that has been produced below UK standards.

The UK has upgraded its welfare standards over the past 40 years but now risks undermining those producers with cheaper imported products produced to lower standards. The UK pig industry alone earned £1.4 billion in 2020<sup>13</sup> with more than one-third of these animals being produced to RSPCA higher animal welfare standards showing the benefit of these standards to the UK economy. However, the UK imports more than half of the pig meat consumed in the UK. The UK no longer has sow stalls and more than one-third of pigs are kept without farrowing crates, compared to Canada, Mexico and Australia which retain both systems. The UK is 65 percent self sufficient in chicken, but one-third of total imports already come from outside the EU.

The UK has committed to working at the international and WTO level to recognise the importance of animal welfare in trade, and needs to initiate a programme to achieve this goal.

Finally the UK needs to set out a more transparent process to negotiate trade deals, include all the devolved governments in such a process and agree on a clear and fair process for legislators to agree or reject any ratification of trade agreements using cages to farm animals.

---

<sup>13</sup> [statista.com/topics/7280/pork-in-the-united-kingdom](https://www.statista.com/topics/7280/pork-in-the-united-kingdom)



## Introduce licensing of animal sanctuaries and kept animals

We commit to ensuring all animal sanctuaries are licensed under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 to bring England into line with Scotland, and compatible with proposals from Wales.

We commit the UK Government to introducing a positive list and licensing scheme for the ownership of all kept animals.

### Scope: England

We believe that all rescue centres, rehoming centres and sanctuaries should be licensed under the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018. This would improve the welfare of animals kept in such establishments by creating a legislative structure that drives improvements in standards of keeping, and allows for enforcement of such standards. It would also close the loophole that exists within the ban on puppy sales from anyone other than the breeder to prevent third-party sellers from setting up as bogus rescue centres. Usefully, standards already exist, produced by the Association of Dog and Cat Homes, reducing the burden on local authorities.

A licence is needed to run a pet shop or a boarding kennels but anyone can set up an animal rescue or sanctuary. Inevitably many of these establishments take on too many animals and have too little money which results in animal welfare problems. At present we have to pick up the pieces, costing us £500,000 annually to investigate and educate poorly run sanctuaries and care for animals. In the past 10 years we have successfully prosecuted 16 unlicensed rescues and sanctuaries leaving us with the challenge of rehoming more than 500 birds, 100 horses, 40 ferrets and a number of farm and wild animals.

Scotland and Jersey already have successful licensing systems. Scotland introduced licensing for all rescues and sanctuaries in 2021 improving conditions for those that keep animals. The Welsh Government is also considering licensing during its present term. If England, which has more than three-quarters of all UK rescues, commits to licensing this would ensure harmonised regulation and close the loophole of allowing unregulated rescues to undermine laws in the other devolved regions.

England already has a licensing scheme for eight different activities such as the commercial selling of animals and the breeding and boarding of dogs. Dog licensing was abandoned over 35 years ago. The RSPCA believes this should be brought back alongside a positive list showing those animals that should be permitted to be owned. This would act as a strong enforcement tool for improving animal welfare by attaching conditions to owning an animal and providing an income stream funding welfare initiatives such as improved dog control.

The keeping of animals, recognised in law as sentient beings, is a serious undertaking and one for which a licence should be required. This licensing system would provide a mechanism for the control of poor practices, as well as a potential income stream to support the promotion of animal welfare. The data collected by such a scheme would be transformative in our understanding of the development of animal disease, the contribution of animals to our economy, and developing trends.







# Their pain, no gain

## Update and consolidation of wildlife legislation

We will commit the UK to review the Law Commission's report on wildlife legislation and bring forward proposals to update and consolidate the law in this area.

We commit the UK Government to prohibit trail hunting on government-owned land in England and Wales and strengthen the Hunting Act by introducing an offence of recklessly hunting a wild mammal; removing exemptions exploited under section 1 of the Act; introducing custodial sentences and a 'vicarious liability' provision to cover employers and landowners.

### Scope: England

The legal system providing for controls and protection of wildlife is complex and incredibly wide, with legislation dating back over a century and built up over time in a piecemeal way that does not provide for an effective holistic approach. For years many enforcement bodies have stated there is a need to update and consolidate the law in this area to make it more user friendly and provide better protection for wildlife. In 2015 the Law Commission, having been asked to review the law, produced a report and draft Bill<sup>14</sup>.

Post Brexit more work is needed to build upon the work of the Law Commission, and the RSPCA believes the time is ripe for taking this forward. It is one of the last remaining areas of animal welfare law where there has been no review or consolidation to bring the regulatory regime in line with current scientific thinking and understanding, as well as public expectations.

Hunting with dogs is barbaric and has no place in a modern, compassionate society. Though banned under the Hunting Act 2004, the use of 'trail' hunting and exemptions in the Act provide cover for illegal hunting and fines imposed are an insufficient deterrent.

In October 2021, the high-profile trial of a senior huntsman<sup>15</sup> highlighted how trail hunting has been used as a smokescreen for illegal fox hunting in recent years, much to our concern.

Major landowners – including the National Trust<sup>16</sup>, Natural Resources Wales<sup>17</sup> and Forestry England<sup>18</sup> – have since banned trail hunting on their land. United Utilities<sup>19</sup> and the Lake District National Park<sup>20</sup> have suspended trail hunting on their land for the time being, the latter describing their suspension as indefinite. In 2023 the Scottish Parliament agreed to a new Hunting Act which would end trail hunting in Scotland.

We recognise the clear distinction between drag hunting and trail hunting – recognising drag hunting as a traditional sport that offers a non-controversial alternative to chasing live quarry, using trails based on artificial, or non-animal based, scents.

<sup>14</sup> [lawcom.gov.uk/project/wildlife-law](https://lawcom.gov.uk/project/wildlife-law)

<sup>15</sup> [judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/R-v-Hankinson-judgment-1.pdf](https://judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/R-v-Hankinson-judgment-1.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> [nationaltrust.org.uk/features/our-position-on-trail-hunting](https://nationaltrust.org.uk/features/our-position-on-trail-hunting)

<sup>17</sup> [naturalresources.wales/about-us/news-and-events/news/nrw-stops-trail-hunting-on-its-land/?lang=en](https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/news-and-events/news/nrw-stops-trail-hunting-on-its-land/?lang=en)

<sup>18</sup> [forestryengland.uk/trail-hunting#:~:text=The%20Hunting%20Act%202004%20banned,Act%20and%20is%20still%20legal](https://forestryengland.uk/trail-hunting#:~:text=The%20Hunting%20Act%202004%20banned,Act%20and%20is%20still%20legal)

<sup>19</sup> [unitedutilities.com/trail-hunting-on-our-land](https://unitedutilities.com/trail-hunting-on-our-land)

<sup>20</sup> [lakedistrict.gov.uk/caringfor/policies/trail-hunting-faqs](https://lakedistrict.gov.uk/caringfor/policies/trail-hunting-faqs)

## Tighter controls over the use of fireworks

We commit the UK Government to follow the lead of the Scottish Government and introduce legislation that brings in tighter restrictions on the sale and use of fireworks, and raises awareness about the negative impact of fireworks.

### Scope: England

The RSPCA acknowledges that fireworks are used by people throughout the year to mark different events, e.g. Bonfire Night, New Year, Chinese New Year, Diwali, etc. While some people enjoy fireworks, they can cause significant injury, problems and fear for other people and animals.

From an animal welfare perspective, aversive stimuli such as loud noises that are unpredictable and out of an animal's control – as is the case with fireworks – are particularly stressful for them<sup>21</sup>. Being unpredictable, as well as intermittent and relatively infrequent, also makes it unlikely that animals will acclimatise to noise from fireworks<sup>22</sup>.

Polling that we undertook in October 2019 found that 62 percent of dog and 54 percent of cat owners surveyed reported their pets show signs of distress during the fireworks season<sup>23</sup>. In polling carried out in 2020, only two in five (41 percent) of UK adults said they were confident they could care for a pet, horse or other animal that was distressed due to fireworks<sup>24</sup>. Animals affected not only suffer psychological distress but can also cause themselves injuries, sometimes serious, or even die as they attempt to run or hide from the noise.

In 2021, we started an annual survey of members of the public about the impact of fireworks on their animals. In total we received 11,785 responses in the first year – here are the key highlights:

- The animals most reported to be affected by fireworks were dogs (9,179) followed by cats (2,265) and then horses, ponies and donkeys (772). Small furries, i.e. rabbits, guinea pigs, etc. (702), birds (522) and livestock (369) were also reported. These figures show the wide range of species and sheer numbers of animals affected (at least 13,809). These were just the animals reported to the RSPCA, and likely to be the tip of the iceberg.
- In addition, 68 percent of those who responded stated that they thought it was a private firework display in someone's back garden that caused the problem for their animals.
- They were also asked if they had advanced warning of any firework displays – 94 percent said they did not.

The Scottish Government has looked at this issue and an advisory panel set out an action plan to tackle anti-social behaviour involving fireworks<sup>25</sup>. Their recommendations included changing the way fireworks are bought and used, for example restricting the days and times when they can be let off and also creating 'no-firework' zones. As a result of this, the Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Act 2022 was adopted in 2022. We believe England and Wales should follow suit with similar legislation and awareness-raising campaigns.

21 Bassett L & Buchanan-Smith HM (2007). Effects of predictability on the welfare of captive animals. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 102: 223–245.

22 Wright AJ, Soto NA, Baldwin AL, Bateson M, Beale CM, Clark C, Deak T, Edwards EF, Fernandez A, Godinho A, Hatch LT, Kakuschke A, Lusseau D, Martineau D, Romero LM, Weilgart LS, Wintle BA, Notarbartolo-di-Sciara G & Martin V (2007). Anthropogenic noise as a stressor in animals: a multidisciplinary perspective. *International Journal of Comparative Psychology* 20: 250–273.

23 Kantar Onlinebus poll for RSPCA, October 8–10 2019.

24 Savanta ComRes poll for RSPCA, October 2020.

25 Scottish Government. [Tackling anti-social fireworks use](#). 3 November 2020.



## Improving the slaughter of farm animals

We commit the UK Government to bring forward measures that require: all animals to be effectively stunned prior to slaughter; to limit the number of animals slaughtered according to religious rites to meet the demand of local religious communities only, and the export of non-stun meat is prohibited; and where any slaughter without pre-stunning is permitted then any meat or fish from this source is clearly labelled.

We commit to finding an alternative to the use of CO2 for pig and poultry production by 2025.

### Scope: England

Farm animals are sentient beings – they have the capacity to suffer and feel pain. This must be taken into account throughout an animal's life, including at the time of slaughter. Stunning before slaughter ensures animals are unconscious and therefore do not feel pain or suffer unnecessarily at the time of killing. According to the Food Standards Agency in 2022, 17,000 cattle, 2.5 million sheep, and 22.1 million poultry birds were slaughtered without pre-stunning in England and Wales<sup>26</sup>.

Scientific evidence clearly shows that slaughter without pre-stunning can cause unnecessary suffering. The level of restraint required to hold an animal still, expose the throat, and perform an effective neck cut is typically greater than that needed for stunned slaughter. When the neck cut is performed it triggers a barrage of sensory information to the brain in the conscious animal. Twenty years ago the Farm Animal Welfare Council stated: *"We are persuaded that such a massive injury would result in very significant pain and distress in the period before insensibility supervenes."*

The current legal derogation states that animals that are not stunned before slaughter should be slaughtered in accordance with religious rites, for consumption by Jews or Muslims. Stricter measures are needed to ensure that the supply of meat not stunned before slaughter matches the demand from the local communities that the derogation is intended to serve. For example, Germany requires that abattoirs apply for a licence by defining the number of animals to undergo non-stun slaughter to meet local demand only. The UK presently has no system to monitor this, even allowing the export of non-stunned meat abroad. The latest Food Standards Agency (FSA) figures show that the meat from more than 800,000 sheep slaughtered without pre-stunning could be exported in 2022. This is an increase on the proportion exported since 2018, despite the number of animals being slaughtered without pre-stunning overall falling considerably in this period.

Some animals that are intended for the markets serving religious communities do not reach the required standards demanded by these communities for a number of reasons: for example, the knife may have been damaged during the process or the meat from the hindquarters may not be considered kosher. This then leads to the animal, or animal part, being rejected for consumption by the religious community and, as a result, the animal is likely to enter the mainstream supply chain and conventional market. The FSA acknowledges in its latest figures that it has "no meaningful data" on what happens to the hindquarter meat.

New Zealand has a vibrant export trade in stunned sheep to Indonesia and the Middle East earning the country more than \$60 million in exports to these countries in 2021 and a total export of lamb of more than NZ\$3billion.

High-concentration CO2 stunning causes pain and distress in pigs from first exposure to the gas to loss of consciousness, which can take up to a minute to occur. The European Commission is now looking for alternatives so that CO2 stunning can end by 2025. The UK Government should also undertake similar work particularly as the UK has a shortage of CO2, as shown by the closure of several production plants in the past two years that required government intervention. To provide for food security and improved animal welfare the government should set a date to end the use of CO2 in slaughtering.

<sup>26</sup> FSA (2022). *Farm Animals: Survey of Slaughter Methods 2022* (accessed 22/08/22).



## Better deal for dogs

We commit the UK Government to ensure dogs have a better deal by: repealing outdated breed specific legislation and replacing it with an updated dog control law; developing mechanisms to prohibit the breeding of dogs (and other animals) whose conformations cause them health problems; and prohibiting greyhound racing.

### **Scope: England**

Animal welfare legislation covering dogs has existed for nearly 190 years. However it has failed to keep up with: new ways of breeding dogs which prioritise looks over health; illegal methods to import dogs; and the rise in mutilations such as ear cropping. The Kept Animals Bill has proposals which would solve a number of these problems such as the proposed ban on the import of puppies, pregnant bitches and dogs with cropped ears. The government has failed to progress this Bill since November 2021 – it needs to be completed or prioritised in manifestos.

The number of hospital admissions due to dog bites in England increased by 76 percent over the ten year period to 2017. There needs to be a new approach to dog control. The present Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 has made no significant reduction in the number of dog bites. There is no evidence to suggest that prohibited types are more likely to be involved in dog bite incidents or fatalities than any other breed or type of dog. We believe breed specific legislation is now outdated and a new approach to public safety around dogs is required, prioritising educational support around dogs along with effective enforcement.

We now believe it is time to call for an end to greyhound racing. There are serious challenges for greyhounds' physical and mental health at all stages of their racing career. Greyhound racing is inherently dangerous for the dogs involved. Running at speed around oval tracks causes significant injury to many dogs, and in some cases the injuries are so severe that it is necessary to euthanise the dog. There are significant issues around the racing of greyhounds in extreme weather, and the number of puppies that are unaccounted for between birth and racing registrations (often referred to by the sector as the "wastage"). The number of racing tracks is declining and we want to see an end to greyhound racing announced as soon as possible across the UK.

# Don't forget respect

## Prevention and education

We commit the UK Government to include animal welfare, sentience, and the Animal Welfare Act 2006 in the schools' curricula in England.

### Scope: England

More than 40 percent of people have seen animal cruelty online, on television or in real life<sup>27</sup>. We believe teaching animal welfare in schools would ensure that far more children leave school with a basic understanding of how to care for and respect the natural world, which would result in a step-change improvement in some of the animal welfare and other environmental issues which impact on today's society. And 84 percent of the public agree with us, a number that has increased from 78 percent in the past four years.

Teaching animal welfare in schools would contribute to the development of crucial life skills, such as compassion and empathy for other living things. We believe, along with many education experts, that teaching children to care for and respect animals from an early age can bring about positive change for animals, the environment and society as a whole. Research conducted by the Scottish SPCA and the University of Edinburgh<sup>28</sup> shows that by teaching animal welfare you can help a child to develop positive attitudes towards animals and influence a child's belief that animals have feelings. Encouraging empathy and respect for living things is important for young people's personal development and ensuring that young people integrate effectively into society.

In England, the Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) curriculum is evolving, continuously responding to the needs of young people growing up, with areas such as financial literacy, first aid, and relationships and sex education having been added. We want to see animal welfare there too.

There is strong public support for the inclusion of animal welfare learning in schools; between 84 and 90 percent of adults in recent RSPCA polls thought it was important that young people learn about the needs of animals. A recent survey of young people we commissioned also showed a clear demand for animal welfare education in schools among school age pupils themselves, with 96 percent of respondents agreeing that animal welfare and the laws about protecting animals should be taught in schools.

Wales introduced a new curriculum in September 2022 which has a module on empathy and animal welfare. We also believe that animal welfare and laws about animal protection could form part of the syllabus of the new GCSE in Natural History being developed by exam board Oxford Cambridge RSA (OCR).



<sup>27</sup> RSPCA 2022. [rspca.org.uk/whatwedo/latest/kindnessindex](https://rspca.org.uk/whatwedo/latest/kindnessindex)

<sup>28</sup> Hawkins RD, Williams JM & Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (2017). Assessing Effectiveness of a Nonhuman Animal Welfare Education Program for Primary School Children. [tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10888705.2017.1305272?journalCode=haaw20](https://doi.org/10.1080/10888705.2017.1305272?journalCode=haaw20) (accessed 21/6/2022).



**Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**  
[www.rspca.org.uk](http://www.rspca.org.uk)  
RSPCA, 4th Floor Parkside, Chart Way, Horsham RH12 1XH

[facebook.com/RSPCA](https://facebook.com/RSPCA) [twitter.com/RSPCA\\_official](https://twitter.com/RSPCA_official) [www.instagram.com/official\\_rspca](https://www.instagram.com/official_rspca)

The RSPCA helps animals in England and Wales. Registered charity no. 219099. The RSPCA only exists with the support of public donations. ©RSPCA 2023. All rights reserved. This material must not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the RSPCA. Photos: RSPCA Photolibrary