



RSPCA Rolling Briefing: World Animal Day special

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

Date of questions:	Tabled by:
4th of October 2023	3.30pm on 27th of September 2023

Recent animal welfare updates

Happy World Animal Day/Diwrnod Anifeiliaid Byd-eang Hapus! The first round of questions to the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd of the new Senedd year are particularly well-timed with them coinciding with World Animal Day (October 4). This occasion provides us all with the perfect opportunity to honour and reflect on the important role animals play in our society while considering what more could be done to improve their lives and welfare. As the first and only UK nation to have banned shock collars, snares and glue traps, Wales has demonstrated its ability to be a leader in terms of its commitment to animal welfare. However, if we are to protect the welfare of more animals, progress is needed in terms of recognising animal sentience in Wales' policy making process. RSPCA Cymru will be taking these calls to Cardiff Bay on October 3, where we'll be joined by representatives from across the sector to mark World Animal Day in the Senedd's Pierhead Building.

Fresh concerns for greyhound welfare in Wales. While World Animal Day offers an opportunity to applaud our animal welfare achievements to date, recent events suggest there is little to celebrate with regard to the current status of greyhound racing in Wales. It was confirmed that Wales' only track in Ystrad Mynach has been granted the relevant planning permission to extend the site early in the summer, with the stadium having since obtained a licence from the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB). On August 22, the track held its first official event under GBGB. This 'auction' saw races between two dogs at a time, with a number of concerning reports having arisen both during and after this event. With the anniversary of the formation of the Cut the Chase coalition taking place on September 28, our organisations are keener than ever to see this outdated activity phased out for good and look forward to contributing to the Welsh Government's upcoming consultation on this matter.

Landmark animal welfare legislation turns two years old. This September marks two years since the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021 (LAIAR) came into force, providing an opportunity to reflect on the landmark legislation's impact. Since its introduction, LAIAR has given local authorities a means of tackling issues related to the selling of companion animals by requiring those who sell pets for profit to be licensed. As well as introducing a ban on commercial third party sale of puppies and kittens, these regulations introduced stricter welfare standards for those licensed to sell animals as pets along with mandatory licensing conditions. With an upcoming consultation having the potential to see more activities and establishments coming under LAIAR in the near future, RSPCA Cymru is renewing its calls for the Welsh Government to ensure that local authorities and Animal Licensing Wales are well-equipped to deal with any further legislative changes.

Supporting higher welfare farming in Wales. In another landmark achievement for animal welfare in Wales, the Agriculture (Wales) Bill received Royal Assent on August 17. This means that a ban on the use of all snares and glue traps in all circumstances will come into force in October - making Wales the first UK nation to have taken such action. As well as enabling the Welsh Government to demonstrate its commitment to the welfare of our fellow beings, this first of its kind Bill could also see farmers who adhere to higher welfare standards rewarded for their efforts. With the launch of the final consultation on the Sustainable Farming Scheme expected soon, RSPCA Cymru is continuing our calls for higher-welfare farming to be incentivised, along with the introduction of mandatory method of production labelling for animal derived products.

World Animal Day celebrations to take place in the Senedd

World Animal Day falls on October 4, providing an opportunity to celebrate and acknowledge the role animals play in our everyday lives, while opening up discussions on what more can be done to improve their welfare in Wales. RSPCA Cymru currently receives more than 1,000 calls a month about animals in need in Wales. Meanwhile our centres in both Newport and Bryn-y-Maen, as well as our branches, are full with prospective pets - many of whom have been rescued by our inspectors from cruelty and neglect. To mark World Animal Day, RSPCA Cymru will be joining Hope Rescue, the Naturewatch Foundation and others from across the sector to host an event in the Senedd's Pierhead building on October 3. The event, which will be sponsored by Luke Fletcher MS, will give Members of the Senedd an opportunity to meet representatives from across the sector and hear about their work to better the lives of animals. With Wales having recently added to its list of relevant achievements by banning the use of snares and glue traps, this event will also celebrate the many achievements made for animals to date. While the RSPCA is among the many animal welfare organisations concerned that a ban on the use of shock collars by the UK Government may not be progressed, the Welsh Government undertook such action back in 2010. This in itself demonstrates Wales' longtime commitment to animal welfare since this matter was devolved to the Senedd and serves as an important reminder of what can be achieved by working together.

As part of our focus on World Animal Day, we are continuing our calls for the Welsh Government to recognise animal sentience in Welsh law. The issue of animal sentience has implications across all areas of human and animal interaction, with a wide range of animals having been proved as sentient. This means that they have the capacity to experience feelings both positive and negative, such as joy, pain and distress - just like us. Following the introduction of the UK Government's Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act last year, animal sentience is formally recognised in UK law, including reserved legislation applicable to Wales. The Act has cemented a new process in which sentience is recognised when making policy decisions across all areas, not just those solely concerned with animals. The Act has now formally established an Animal Sentience Committee, whose role it is to consider how UK Government policy decisions take into account animal welfare, with a similar committee also meeting in Scotland.

As the Welsh Government has yet to introduce similar legislation in Wales, devolved policies are not currently scrutinised for their impact on animal sentience before they are implemented. RSPCA Cymru therefore remains concerned that a scrutiny deficit could arise which could see animals in Wales finding themselves under less protection in comparison to elsewhere in the UK. In April 2022, the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd confirmed that the Welsh Government had the intention to "determine (its) own direction on sentience, recognising that animals are sentient beings"¹. However, with a year and a half having passed since this statement was made, RSPCA Cymru is keen to achieve clarity on the Welsh Government's position on this matter. We believe that acknowledging animal sentience within Welsh law would send the best possible message that the status and welfare of animals is respected here and that World Animal Day provides an ideal opportunity as any for the Welsh Government to revisit this important issue.

Questions to consider:

- 1. With World Animal Day taking place on October 4, will the Minister make a statement on the work of the animal welfare sector in Wales?**
- 2. What is the Welsh Government's current position on recognising animal sentience within its policy making process?**
- 3. Does the Minister support the eventual creation of a specialised committee that would have the role of scrutinising Welsh Government policy for its impact on animal sentience?**

¹ [Record of Proceedings](#) - 27 April 2022

#CutTheChase coalition on greyhound racing marks first anniversary

Following a busy summer for greyhound racing in Wales, many animal welfare organisations, including RSPCA Cymru, are entering the new Senedd year with an abundance of fresh concerns for the welfare of these dogs. In July, it was confirmed that Caerphilly County Borough Council has granted the Valley Greyhound Stadium with the relevant planning permissions, allowing them to expand the site. As a result, the track in Ystrad Mynach has now successfully obtained a licence by the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) - the self-regulated body for the industry.

Just days before the industry marked the launch of its inaugural National Greyhound Week on August 28, the Valleys track held its first event under GBGB licensing. On August 22, an 'auction' was held which saw a number of racing trials between two dogs at a time, with several concerning reports having arisen from the event. Sadly, an injury led to one dog having to be withdrawn from sale - despite the fact the track should have been adhering to GBGB's welfare and safety standards. Following the auction, reports of collisions between dogs and some losing their footing on the track's infamous first bend also arose, which has led to the Cut the Chase coalition making contact with GBGB to report our concerns. While the response we have received confirms that further work is now underway at the track following the auction, questions still remain with regard to why this event was allowed to happen if the track did not meet the standards needed to protect dog welfare at the time.

In addition to our concerns for the welfare of greyhounds at the track, it is also unclear whether August's 'auction' was overseen by the relevant local authority, Caerphilly County Borough Council (CCBC). More races between up to six dogs at a time have the potential to take place in the autumn once the aforementioned work has been completed. As a result, we call on the Welsh Government to request that events held at the track in the future are inspected by CCCB to ensure that an independent account of proceedings can be obtained. More than ever, we are concerned that continued racing at the Valleys track will result in a rise in the avoidable injury and death of more greyhounds. It is our view that regulating the greyhound racing industry in Wales will not remove the inherent risk of harm that racing poses to the welfare of these dogs. GBGB's latest statistics show that 4,354 injuries were sustained at licensed tracks across England in 2022, while 244 racing greyhounds died for reasons including the cost of veterinary treatment, euthanasia at tracksides or after being designated unsuitable for rehoming².

September 28 marks the first anniversary of the Cut The Chase coalition - comprising Blue Cross, Dogs Trust, Greyhound Rescue Wales, Hope Rescue and the RSPCA - with us currently looking ahead to the Welsh Government's consultation on this matter. While a great deal has changed since the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd confirmed that this will happen following a Senedd debate in March, we still firmly believe that no dog should become injured or lose their life for the sake of entertainment. As a result, we continue our calls for the Welsh Government to cut the chase on greyhound racing by phasing out this outdated activity so that Wales can join the long list of countries that have already taken such action.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Does the Welsh Government share the concerns of Members of the Senedd and the Cut The Chase coalition following recent developments relevant to greyhound racing in Wales?**
- 2. Can the Minister confirm whether the Welsh Government will request any action from Caerphilly County Borough, such as further inspections, following recent events at the Valley Greyhound Stadium?**
- 3. Can the Minister confirm if the Welsh Government has had any further correspondence or meetings with either the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB) or the Valley Greyhound Stadium?**

² <https://gbgb-prod-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/20093800/2018-2022-Injury-Retirement-Summary-Final.pdf>

Third party pet sales ban enters its third year in Wales

This September marks the second anniversary of the introduction of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021 (LAIAR). This highly-important legislation was introduced to tackle puppy farming and other issues that compromise the welfare of pets being sold for profit. In an important step forward for animal welfare in Wales, these regulations required business-focused pet sellers to be licensed and for them to adhere to minimum animal welfare standards for the first time. As well as introducing a ban on the commercial third party selling of puppies and kittens, LAIAR also means that puppies, kittens, ferrets or rabbits cannot be sold by anyone until they are at least eight weeks of age. Meanwhile, only puppies and kittens over six months old can be sold by someone who has not bred them themselves. With these regulations now entering their third year in Wales, RSPCA Cymru is keen to establish what assessment has been made of their success and how this is being monitored by the Welsh Government. According to our latest statistics, the number of reports RSPCA Cymru has received in relation to puppy farming and the pet trade in Wales has fallen by 45% since September 2021. With the number of relevant incidents being dealt with by our inspectors having also reduced by almost 30%, this suggests that LAIAR is making an impact as intended. However, it is important that local authorities are given the support they need to continue implementing this legislation and any new regulations that are introduced in the future.

As well as aiming to reduce Wales' previous association with puppy farming, the introduction of LAIAR has also potentially paved the way for more legislative changes which could improve the lives of countless animals. In the [Animal Welfare Plan for Wales](#), the Welsh Government commits to the licensing of animal exhibits and animal welfare establishments, possibly under LAIAR. As it stands, the Welsh Government is expected to consult on these areas and other activities involving animals before the end of 2023. With the outcome of this consultation having the potential to require additional resources from Wales' 22 local authorities and Animal Licensing Wales, RSPCA Cymru is renewing its calls for the Welsh Government to ensure these organisations are equipped to deal with any additional demand. The benefits of collaboration on animal welfare matters were recently demonstrated by the shutting down of an illegal puppy farming operation in Fochriw, near Caerphilly. This case saw 54 dogs rescued from '[atrocious conditions](#)' and highlighted the value of a coordinated approach between organisations such as local authorities, Animal Licensing Wales and the police, as well as ourselves and Hope Rescue who cared for the vulnerable pups. While statistics from RSPCA Cymru suggest LAIAR is having the desired effect, it is important that all enforcement bodies are given the support and tools needed to be able to prevent animal suffering in Wales.

To assist with the implementation of LAIAR and Wales' dog breeding regulations, the Welsh Government has provided and funded the Local Authority Enforcement Project. This ongoing training programme aims to equip officers to tackle puppy farming and backstreet breeding, with the successful project having recently been extended by another three years. While several animal welfare establishments in Wales play a vital role in supporting local authorities by providing rescue spaces for animals saved from puppy farms or illegal breeding settings, many are currently full. As a result, RSPCA Cymru is among the many organisations calling for extra spaces to be created for seized and saved animals so that more can be helped, without placing too much reliance on the already overburdened rescue sector. The current lack of spaces for seized dogs poses a significant challenge to enforcement officers and the rescue sector. Having nowhere for seized dogs to go while they are assessed for their behaviour or type could also see them remain in communities longer than they should. We therefore call on the Welsh Government to consider what more could be done in order to tackle this ongoing problem.

Questions to consider:

- 1. What assessment has the Welsh Government made of the success of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021 since their introduction?**
- 2. Can the Welsh Government provide an update on the progress of the training and other support measures provided to local authorities to enforce the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (Wales) Regulations 2021?**
- 3. What budgetary and practical support will the Welsh Government give to local authorities to house seized dogs when enforcing animal welfare legislation in Wales?**

Wales moves ever closer to a Sustainable Farming Scheme.

On August 17, the Agriculture (Wales) Bill received Royal Assent after passing through the Senedd's legislative process ahead of summer recess. This landmark legislation is set to overhaul agricultural payments in Wales via the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) which aims to advance our environmental, economic and social goals. RSPCA Cymru has long called for farmers who adhere to high welfare standards such as good husbandry practice and cage-free systems to be rewarded for their efforts. While the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023 is expected to grant Ministers with the relevant powers in this respect, there is seemingly no legal obligation for them to be used. In [an update on the SFS](#) published by the Welsh Government in July, it was confirmed that almost 70% of farmers in Wales are either already adhering to higher welfare standards (18%) or would be interested in doing so if they were incentivised (51%). With a final consultation on the Sustainable Farming Scheme expected before the end of 2023, RSPCA Cymru hopes this will pave the way for a new payments scheme that prioritises both animal health and welfare. Following this consultation, it is expected that the final SFS will be announced in 2024, ready for implementation in 2025.

As well as introducing a new payments scheme, the Agriculture (Wales) Act also features full bans on the use of both snares and glue traps in all circumstances. While these bans can now be safely added to the Welsh Government's ever-growing list of animal welfare achievements, it is vital they are properly enforced to ensure animals are protected as intended. A recent [written question](#) submitted by Samuel Kurtz MS suggests that the ban on the use of these devices will come into force on October 17. While this is undoubtedly fantastic news for countless animals in Wales, more confirmation is needed in terms of how these bans will be applied and enforced to ensure they are effective.

Elsewhere, the UK Government is currently negotiating an FTA (Free Trade Agreement) with India, with the twelfth round of negotiations having concluded on August 31³. As with the FTAs that have already been signed with Australia, New Zealand and the Trans Pacific Partnership, the RSPCA is concerned about the potential impact this agreement could have on animal welfare and Welsh farmers. With the aforementioned consultation on the SFS potentially paving the way for the rewarding of ethical farming in Wales, we remain concerned that any influx of cheaper imports could potentially undermine this initiative by making higher-welfare produce uncompetitive. With India having lower standards of animal welfare than Wales - especially in terms of egg production - we are also concerned that food that has been produced to lower standards than ours could soon find itself on the shelves of our supermarkets, unbeknownst to consumers.

Over the summer, plans for a consultation on mandatory animal welfare labelling was dropped by Defra - much to the disappointment of the RSPCA and other animal welfare organisations⁴. RSPCA Cymru has long called on the Welsh Government to consider how it can assist consumers in Wales make more informed choices about the meat, fish and dairy products they consume by strengthening statutory requirements on food labelling. Method-of-production 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 in recent years. 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. We therefore encourage the Welsh Government to consider how this can be rectified in the absence of a joined-up approach with other UK nations on this matter that seemed viable just a few months ago.

Questions to consider:

- 1. What consideration has the Welsh Government given towards measures rewarding farmers who adhere to good animal husbandry measures such as cage-free systems for their efforts?**
- 2. Can the Minister confirm which agency will enforce the new bans on the use of snares and glue traps to ensure they protect animal welfare as intended by the Welsh Government?**
- 3. What is the Welsh Government's position on the introduction of mandatory method of production labelling on animal derived products in Wales?**

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-outcome-statement-uk-india-round-twelve-of-fta-negotiations>

⁴ <https://www.fwi.co.uk/news/farm-policy/defra-drops-plans-for-mandatory-animal-welfare-labelling>

RSPCA Cymru incidents June 2023 - August 2023

From April to June 2023, the RSPCA responded to 3,854 incidents across Wales - a 23% decline on the previous year. However, this remains an exceptionally busy time for the RSPCA's officers, centres and branches, as well as the charity's emergency line.

Local authority	June 2022 - August 2022	June 2023 - August 2023
Blaenau Gwent	96	101
Bridgend	182	123
Caerphilly	202	186
Cardiff	523	435
Carmarthenshire	281	224
Ceredigion	77	85
Conwy	252	199
Denbighshire	258	196
Flintshire	184	163
Gwynedd	153	145
Isle of Anglesey	116	92
Merthyr Tydfil	98	74
Monmouthshire	84	78
Neath Port Talbot	246	222
Newport	227	229
Pembrokeshire	170	151
Powys	153	137
Rhondda Cynon Taff	286	232
Swansea	471	377
The Vale of Glamorgan	175	162
Torfaen	120	102
Wrexham	162	141
TOTAL	4,516	3,854

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