



RSPCA Rolling Briefing

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

| Date of questions: | Tabled by: |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 6th of December 2023 | 3.30pm on 29th of November 2023 |

Recent animal welfare updates

RSPCA Cymru's welfare wishes for 2024. The final questions to the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd of this year will be taking place in the Senedd on December 6. Following the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales (AWPW)'s second anniversary in November, RSPCA Cymru is busy reflecting on the progress made over the last year while looking ahead to 2024. The last 12 months have seen some incredible achievements made for animals in Wales, including a full ban on the use of snares and glue traps. Responsible dog ownership and greyhound racing have also been high on the political agenda in 2023, with an upcoming consultation on the latter potentially paving the way for Wales to become the first UK nation to ban this outdated activity too. It is hoped that the launch of this consultation will also facilitate the regulation of further activities involving animals, such as sanctuaries, rescues and rehoming centres and mobile animal exhibits. With the introduction of mandatory CCTV in abattoirs and the finalisation of the Sustainable Farming Scheme also set to happen in 2024, RSPCA Cymru will be entering the new year full of hope for another landmark year for animals in Wales.

Extending the live exports ban to Wales. On November 7, the King's Speech confirmed that legislation to ban the exportation of livestock for fattening and slaughter will be taken forward by the UK Government. While plans to introduce reserved legislation on puppy smuggling, livestock worrying or pet theft were unfortunately absent from the King's Speech, the RSPCA very much welcomed the ban on live exports following more than 50 years of campaigning on the issue. The Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Bill provides an important opportunity to end this cruel practice once and for all, preventing the unnecessary suffering of farm animals as a result of long journeys in cramped conditions. A ban on live exports marks an important step forward for animals following this year's biggest disappointment - the withdrawal of the Kept Animals Bill. We are now urging the Welsh Government to confirm that the live export ban will be applied to all GB exports at the same time to protect countless farm animals from potential suffering in the future.

American XL Bullies ban - further details published. With the end of November fast approaching, there is now just over a month until the UK Government's ban on American XL Bully type dogs comes into force in Wales and England. Concerns in relation to a rise in abandonments and the pressure the ban would place upon the rescue sector and local authorities were recently raised in the Senedd, with many affected dogs still facing an uncertain future. As animal rescues such as the RSPCA will not be able to legally rehome any XL Bullies after December 31, those still in rescues will have to be euthanised after this date. For owners who wish to keep their dogs, the relevant exemption process and associated guidance is now live on the UK Government's website. With Christmas on the horizon and with time scarce, the RSPCA remains concerned about the impact of the upcoming ban on animal welfare, owners, the rescue and veterinary sector and public services alike.

Owners urged to protect pet welfare over Xmas. With the festive season now in full swing, RSPCA Cymru is calling on Members of the Senedd to help us remind pet owners to be extra vigilant about the welfare of their companion animals this Christmas. While the months ahead will be full of food, fun and frolics for many of us, it is important that provisions are made for pets who may find the festivities overwhelming. Whether their owners will be hosting celebrations in their own homes or going elsewhere to enjoy with family and friends, Christmas can be a confusing time for pets - especially if they are accustomed to their routine, are unsure around familiar people and/or do not like being left alone. With many festive foods also having the potential to be toxic to pets, it's important that even the goodest boys and girls are not left to overindulge and become unwell as a result.

Improving animal welfare in Wales in 2024

The end of 2023 is almost upon us, providing an ideal opportunity to reflect on the progress made for animal welfare in Wales over the last 12 months. The year began with the Welsh Government in consultation around the use of CCTV in abattoirs. Thousands of animal lovers responded to an RSPCA Cymru campaign, supporting the Welsh Government's intention to make the use of closed-circuit television mandatory in all slaughterhouses. This commitment was featured in the [Programme for Government](#) and is now set to be rolled out in the coming months - much to our delight.

March saw the Senedd's first ever debate on greyhound racing, thanks to a petition from our friends at Hope Rescue. This [petition](#) was eventually signed by 35k+ people - including 18.7k from Wales. Cross-party support for a ban on this outdated activity was voiced during the debate, with a clear majority (44/54) voting to acknowledge the Petitions Committee's report and its recommendations. A [Statement of Opinion](#) later tabled by Carolyn Thomas MS was signed by 18 Members of the Senedd and co-submitted by a further seven.

The months that followed saw Senedd debates on the Agriculture (Wales) Bill and the proposed bans on the use of snares and glue traps. A full ban on the use of both snares and glue traps came into force in October, making Wales the first UK nation to take such action. Meanwhile, a consultation on the regulation of more activities involving animals such as animal sanctuaries, rescues and rehoming centres and mobile animal exhibits is expected before the end of the year. This would pave the way for the fulfilment of another commitment featured in the [Animal Welfare Plan for Wales](#), with significant progress having been made in terms of the Welsh Government's Local Authority Enforcement Project and CCTV in abattoirs. We launched a [new report](#) on the regulation of Animal Welfare Establishments in May, which demonstrated the clear need and appetite for the regulation of sanctuaries, rescues and rehoming centres and we hope to see this commitment progressed in the coming year.

With a question relevant to greyhound racing expected to be included within the aforementioned consultation - and with a final consultation on the Sustainable Farming Scheme also expected soon - 2024 is already set to be an important year for animals in Wales. Along with our Cut the Chase coalition partners - Blue Cross, Dogs Trust, Greyhound Rescue Wales and Hope Rescue - we are keener than ever to see greyhound racing phased out in Wales. Following a concerning summer which saw greyhounds injured and fall during the Valley Greyhounds Stadium's first events under the oversight of the Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB), and with racing at the track now underway again, we hold high hopes for a ban on this activity in 2024. It is still our firm belief that regulation is not enough to guarantee the safety of racing greyhounds, due to the inherently dangerous nature of the sport. GBGB's most recent [statistics](#) demonstrate that their oversight does not guarantee the welfare of racing greyhounds, with 244 having died in 2022 for reasons other than natural causes or terminal illness. The statistics also demonstrates the industry's over-reliance on the rescue sector - with more than two thirds of retired racing greyhounds (69.9%) currently handed over to trusts and charities at the end of their careers.

With the Agriculture (Wales) Act having received Royal Assent in the summer, the final details of the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) are now set to be decided upon in the coming year before the scheme is rolled out in 2025. RSPCA Cymru has long called for farmers who adhere to higher standards of animal welfare to be financially incentivised and rewarded for their efforts. While the Agriculture (Wales) Act grants the Welsh Government with the relevant powers in this respect, there is no obligation for these powers to be used. However, RSPCA Cymru is still keen to see the rewarding of higher welfare standards made possible via the SFS to ensure that farmers who are delivering on animal welfare and setting high standards in Wales are rewarded for their work. We now look forward to contributing to the Welsh Government's upcoming consultation on the SFS, in the hope of achieving a firm commitment for farmers who prioritise animal welfare in 2024.

Questions to consider:

- 1. What are the Welsh Government's main priorities for 2024 in terms of protecting animal welfare?**
- 2. Can the Minister make a statement on the progress made under the Animal Welfare Plan for Wales in 2023 and how this will be built upon in the coming years?**
- 3. Can the Minister provide a timeframe for the licensing of animal welfare establishments and mobile animal exhibits following the Welsh Government's forthcoming consultation?**

Ending the live export of farm animals

Following the disappointment that emerged as a result of the withdrawal of the Kept Animals Bill earlier this year, all eyes were on November's King's Speech in the hope that animal welfare would be among its priorities. While potential announcements for legislation to tackle puppy smuggling, pet theft and livestock worrying were unfortunately absent, confirmation that the Animal Welfare (Exportation of Livestock) Bill will be pursued was very much welcome.

Every year, millions of farm animals are at risk of facing long-distance journeys so that they can be exported for fattening and slaughter. With these journeys having the potential to cause animals to become mentally exhausted, physically injured, dehydrated and stressed, the RSPCA has been calling for a ban on this cruel practice for more than 50 years. Over the years, thousands of animals have travelled miles across Europe, where they have been exposed to exhaustion, extreme temperatures, suffering and even death. These journeys can sometimes take up to 96 hours before the animals are either slaughtered or kept in conditions that are potentially illegal in the UK for fattening purposes. While the exportation of livestock from the UK has not happened since the UK Government first announced the prohibition of this practice in 2020, it could be legally recommenced at any time - putting countless animals at risk. Because of this, it is vital that the new Bill becomes legislation before next year's General Election and that it is applied to Wales via legislative consent.

The Welsh Government previously indicated its support for a ban on live exports via the [Legislative Consent Memorandum](#) (LCM) that was prepared in relation to the Kept Animals Bill. Before this legislation was withdrawn, it looked likely that this LCM was going to be put before Members of the Senedd, which could have potentially enabled a live exports ban to be applied to Wales. However, with this LCM now redundant, we urge the Welsh Government to work with its UK counterparts to ensure that this legislation is applied to Wales.

Over the years, countless RSPCA supporters have joined our calls for a ban on live exports, demonstrating the public's increasing knowledge and interest in how food is produced. Another of the UK Government's recently abandoned promises includes the launch of consultation on mandatory method of production labelling. It was previously hoped that this would feature a joined-up approach with Wales. RSPCA Cymru has long called on the Welsh Government to consider how it can assist consumers make more informed choices about the meat, fish and dairy products they consume by strengthening statutory requirements on food labelling. Method-of-production and slaughter labelling would give renewed confidence and assurance to consumers and producers, and potentially revolutionise purchasing decisions in the same way 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. With the aforementioned Sustainable Farming Scheme having the potential to see farmers who utilise higher-welfare systems rewarded for their efforts, the introduction of mandatory labelling could give such produce a competitive advantage while signposting consumers to the ethical products they desire.

Questions to consider:

- 1. Can the Minister confirm if the Welsh Government will support the recently-announced UK Government's bill on banning the live export of farm animals through legislative consent?**
- 2. What is the Welsh Government's position on the prohibition of live exports to ensure that farm animals in Wales are protected from this practice in years to come?**
- 3. What consideration has the Welsh Government given towards the introduction of mandatory method of production labelling for animal-derived products in Wales?**

American Bully XL owners urged to prepare for ban

On November 14, the exemption process relevant to the upcoming ban on American Bully XL type dogs in Wales and England was launched by the UK Government. XL Bully owners in Wales now have until January 31 2024 to apply for a Certificate of Exemption for their pets. Firstly, owners are being advised to check if their dog is an XL Bully if they are unsure by using the [official definition](#) provided by the UK Government. This definition has been provided as the XL Bully is neither a recognised or established breed, with the RSPCA among the many animal welfare organisations concerned that this broad definition could see other dogs who share similar characteristics with the XL Bully typed too. According to the definition, a male dog would need to be over 20 inches at the withers and a female dog over 19 inches before potentially being classed as an XL Bully, with this being the only mandatory requirement.

For those who are certain that their dog is an XL Bully and want to keep them, there are a number of steps that must be completed before a Certificate of Exemption can be issued. These include obtaining third party public liability insurance, arranging for the dog to be neutered/spayed and paying a £92.40 fee. Owners will also be required to keep their dogs muzzled once a certificate has been obtained and will also need to ensure their dogs are microchipped. With veterinary services already experiencing high demand across Wales and the UK, and with there being no reliable data on the number of dogs affected, questions remain with regard to whether all owners who need services such as neutering will be able to be accommodated in time. As it stands, XL Bullies that are less than one year old on the 31st of January 2024 will need to be neutered by the 31st of December 2024 while those older than this must be neutered by the 30th of June 2024.

During the last round of questions to the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd, Members of the Senedd raised concerns around the pressure the incoming ban will place on public services and the rescue sector. According to the Association of Dog and Cat Homes (ADCH), there are at least six XL Bullies and 11 XL Bully crosses in rescue care in Wales as it stands. All will need to be euthanised after 31 December 2023 if they have not been rehomed by this date. Questions were also raised in the Senedd in terms of how the incoming ban will contribute to animal abandonments. We are among the many charities concerned that more XL Bullies will be abandoned in December, with kennelling space to put these dogs scarce. According to new statistics from RSPCA Cymru, reports of animal abandonments in Wales have recently reached a three-year high, with it expected that we will have received more than 1,600 of these types of reports before the end of 2023. With it expected that abandonments could increase further over the coming months as a result of the incoming ban, 2024 is likely to be a challenging year for both the rescue sectors and public services. While answering [questions from MSs](#) on November 8, the Minister confirmed that she was due to be meeting with the relevant Defra Minister at the beginning of December. An update on this meeting - if available - could help provide further information to the rescue and veterinary sectors, public services and dog owners in order to help them make the necessary preparations. With this being a worrying and confusing time for those who are impacted by the incoming ban, the Welsh Government could also promote the exemption process and relevant advice to those affected in Wales. By encouraging those who are in a position to keep their dogs to make the necessary provisions in time, this in turn could help reduce the number of XL Bullies that are either abandoned or handed over to rescues in the coming months.

Questions to consider:

- 1. With animal abandonments at a three-year high in Wales according to RSPCA Cymru, what action is the Welsh Government taking to reduce the number of such incidents?**
- 2. Is the Minister confident that there are enough kennelling spaces available in Wales for any XL Bullies that are abandoned or straying once the ban comes into place on 31st December 2023?**
- 3. Does the Welsh Government have any plans to promote the relevant information around what preparations XL Bully owners need to make if they intend to keep their dogs with the exemption process now live?**

Protecting pet welfare over Christmas

With the festive season underway, RSPCA Cymru is urging owners to ensure that their pets' welfare is not compromised this Christmas. While the festive season is full of food and fun, it is paramount that provisions are made for pets who may find this time of the year overwhelming. Christmas can prove stressful for pets as a result of a change in routine, in addition to visitors, loud music and unfamiliar decorations. However, planning ahead can help minimise anxiety and ensure that pets can enjoy a stress-free festive season. During the Christmas period, it is important to stick to both cats and dogs' regular routines as much as possible by keeping food, exercise and toilet break routines the same, as consistency may help pets feel more secure. It is also important to introduce new people to them carefully, and to allow cats and dogs to meet them at their own pace, while also providing a quiet place to retreat away from the excitement if needed. During this potentially stressful period for pets, it is also important for owners to ensure that they are not left on their own for prolonged periods of time.

Seasonal foods such as chocolate, mince pies, and christmas pudding can pose a significant health risk to our pets. While skinless and boneless meat such as turkey is safe for cats and dogs, provided they are not covered in fats, salt or gravy, the best and safest option is to stick to their normal food. Festive food is not the only hazard that pets are exposed to over Christmas. Seasonal objects such as festive plants like holly and ivy, as well as decorations and tinsel, can also pose a risk to pets if eaten. In terms of Christmas trees, it is important for owners to keep a close eye on their pets as hanging edible decorations such as chocolate are poisonous to dogs and can make them seriously ill.

With regard to outdoor animals such as horses, extra bedding will be required during the colder months while it is also important to ensure that their enclosures are kept clean as wet bedding could freeze and make them ill. Access to drinking water should always be a priority, and water supplies should be checked at least twice a day to ensure that they have not frozen. With regard to small furries such as hamsters, gerbils and guinea pigs, providing them with a space that they can rest - especially if they are nocturnal - and making sure that they aren't going to be disturbed during the day is highly important. If visitors are bringing their own pets, make sure that they are kept away from small furries, as this could frighten them. Small furries are also very sensitive to high-frequency sounds that we can't hear, so they need to be kept away from loud noise appliances such as televisions and stereos. We would always advise owners to keep the number of an emergency vet to hand in case of illness or if their pets consume something they shouldn't. If pets are on medication, owners should stock up prior to the holidays and if people are going away over Christmas, plans should be put in place for pets - whether they are travelling with their owners or not.

With some people in Wales also likely to receive pets as Christmas presents, it is important that responsible purchasing, selling and ownership is promoted as much as possible at this time of year. Careful consideration should always be made before purchasing a new companion animal as they are year-round commitments as opposed to throwaway presents. We'd also urge those who are planning on buying pets as Christmas presents to take extra care to ensure they are not facilitating the sale of illegally bred animals and to ensure that they are purchasing from high-welfare settings only. Any assistance for Members of the Senedd and the Welsh Government in terms of sharing the guidance above could go a long way towards reminding people of the need for responsible pet ownership at this time of year. More advice can be found via the RSPCA's online [Christmas hub](#).

Questions to consider:

- 1. With companion animals likely to be given as Christmas presents in Wales, what action is the Welsh Government taking to promote responsible pet ownership?**
- 2. Will the Minister make a statement on the importance of responsible pet ownership, purchasing and selling over Christmas?**
- 3. Does the Welsh Government have any plans to promote the need for animal owners and keepers to be extra cautious over the welfare of their pets over the festive season?**

RSPCA Cymru incidents September - November 2023

From September to November 2023, the RSPCA responded to 2,363 incidents across Wales - a 25% 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 | September 2022 - November 2022 | September 2023 - November 2023 |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Blaenau Gwent | 85 | 65 |
| Bridgend | 155 | 99 |
| Caerphilly | 144 | 142 |
| Cardiff | 288 | 232 |
| Carmarthenshire | 178 | 161 |
| Ceredigion | 70 | 44 |
| Conwy | 142 | 110 |
| Denbighshire | 151 | 92 |
| Flintshire | 140 | 92 |
| Gwynedd | 112 | 91 |
| Isle of Anglesey | 102 | 64 |
| Merthyr Tydfil | 72 | 45 |
| Monmouthshire | 66 | 52 |
| Neath Port Talbot | 166 | 132 |
| Newport | 172 | 103 |
| Pembrokeshire | 160 | 108 |
| Powys | 127 | 101 |
| Rhondda Cynon Taff | 197 | 177 |
| Swansea | 310 | 215 |
| The Vale of Glamorgan | 104 | 93 |
| Torfaen | 84 | 55 |
| Wrexham | 120 | 90 |
| TOTAL | 3,145 | 2,363 |

For more information on the contents of this briefing or any other matters relating to animal welfare in Wales, please contact:

- **Billie-Jade Thomas (Senior Public Affairs Manager):** billie-jade.thomas1@rspca.org.uk
- **Sioned Nikolic (Public Affairs Advisor):** sioned.nikolic@rspca.org.uk