



# Ending the live export of animals to improve animal welfare

*Ensuring animals have a good life by advocating on their behalf*

## Key facts...

- ★ The RSPCA wants to see an end to the practice of exporting live farm animals for slaughter or further fattening and we welcome the Government's consultation on this issue.
- ★ Farm animals should be slaughtered as close to the place where they are reared as possible. There should then be a carcass-only export trade.
- ★ We would like to see the end of the export of live animals achieved through a trade ban. However, as this may not be compatible with World Trade Organisation (WTO) trade rules, placing restrictions on export journey times could also achieve the same end goal.
- ★ There is clear precedent to show that restrictions on live exports could be crafted in such a way as to ensure that they are WTO compliant.

## Live exports: the current situation

Rules on the live export of animals date from 2005, and are implemented in the UK through devolved legislation in the separate countries. These rules set out the conditions for the commercial transport of animals and state that animals should not be injured or caused undue suffering whilst being transported. Specific limits on journey times for animals, on land and at sea, are also set out, alongside the authorisation process for transporters, vehicles and ships.

The maximum journey times permitted vary according to species and the conditions of the transporting vehicle. For example, 19 hours is allowed for calves, 24 hours for horses and pigs, and 29 hours for sheep and cattle. However, after these periods, if the animals are provided with a 24-hour rest period, the journey time is reset until the destination is reached.



The number of farm animals exported from the UK to the continent for slaughter, or further fattening, has slowly declined since 2000; falling from 752,000 to around 26,000 in 2017<sup>1</sup>. Since 2012 all were sheep, except for 5,500 calves, which were exported from Scotland to Spain and France.

However, the issue is more complex than it may at first appear, especially with regards to the island of Ireland. For example, 23,000 cattle were exported from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland in 2016, accounting for around 5% of its total beef production<sup>2</sup>. Over half of the cattle were from the

Republic of Ireland and sent to Northern Ireland for further fattening; which were then returned later for slaughter.

Since Brexit, the UK is no longer constrained by EU Regulations on the free movement of goods and live animals. In September 2019 the UK Government made a commitment to end the live export of animals for slaughter<sup>3</sup>. However, any change to the rules on exporting farm animals to the EU, including a ban, will have to be compatible with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules. These do not allow different rules to apply across the same border. As the UK-Republic of Ireland border on the island of Ireland will have no restrictions on the cross border trade in farm animals - the Northern Ireland protocol to the UK's EU withdrawal agreement means that Northern Ireland remains

<sup>1</sup> George Eustice MP, Defra Minister during [Westminster Hall debate](#) on live exports 26.02.18

<sup>2</sup> The Andersons Centre/Oxford Economics (2017) *Impact of WTO Trading on the Northern Ireland Beef and Sheep Meat Industry*

<sup>3</sup> See, for example [Sky news](#). 28 September 2019:

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subject to EU rules on the free movement of goods (including live animals) - a ban cannot be placed on any other UK border with an EU member state, including those at the French ports where live animal exports arrive.

### What are the animal welfare concerns about live exports?

- *The impact of long distance transport on animal welfare*

Animal welfare can be compromised during long distance live transport. Animals can experience a range of problems, including physical injury, hot or cold stress, hunger, dehydration and exhaustion, as a result of being transported for long periods in sub-optimal conditions; for example, at inappropriate stocking densities, with inadequate ventilation/ temperature control systems and with unsuitable feeding/watering facilities. Live exports involve a complex journey and can be associated with very long transport times, which is problematic as evidence indicates animal welfare gets worse as journey times increase. Some of the journey times for calves exported to Spain were over 96 hours. The RSPCA believes the legal maximum transport times should be reduced and be no longer than eight hours.



- *Enforcement*

The enforcement of existing live transport laws is insufficient in many EU member states leading to concerns about the welfare of animals once they leave the UK. The European Commission's own report into live exports states that effective enforcement remains a major challenge<sup>4</sup>. In 2012 the Commission decided not to review Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 but the European Parliament has now finally agreed to an enquiry into the live transportation of farm animals which it is hoped will prompt the Commission to review the EU rules.

- *Export to countries with lower animal welfare standards*

There is ongoing concern that animals are being exported to countries where they face conditions that would be illegal in the UK. For instance, the calves sent abroad in 2016 for further fattening were mainly destined for Spain, where standards for housing fell below UK legal requirements. We also have concerns about animals being exported to countries where they may be slaughtered without pre stunning. Scientific evidence indicates that slaughter without pre-stunning can cause unnecessary pain and suffering, and the RSPCA therefore strongly believes that all animals should be stunned before they are slaughtered.

### What are the options open to the UK?

Ideally, the UK could ban the live export of farm animals for slaughter and further fattening, but as the UK-Ireland border is open, a ban at any other UK-EU border would be WTO non compliant.

Alternatively, the UK could instead impose journey time limits on transport once the animals have left UK territory. The Government's scientific advisors, the Farm Animal Welfare Council, proposed this in 2019 but the Government has yet to publish or respond to their report (the Welsh and Scottish Governments have, which is how we know what FAWC recommended). This alternative option would not wholly address concerns regarding poor transport conditions, poorer legal requirements relating to the treatment of animals in other countries and insufficient enforcement of the law in other countries - so these aspects would need further consideration.

As the Calf Forum has shown<sup>5</sup>, it is economic reasons that drive the trade and huge progress can be gained by improving the market conditions in the UK to ensure the animals either remain in the UK to be reared or are only exported in a carcass form. Any changes to journey times or vehicle standards could make the trade uneconomic and result in an end to live exports.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission (2011) REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL on the impact of Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 on the [protection of animals during transport](#)

<sup>5</sup> RSPCA and Compassion in World Farming (2013) *The Modern Solution to the Exports of Calves: Working in Black and White*

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