

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT  
GENERAL COMMITTEES

## Public Bill Committee

# ANIMAL WELFARE (KEPT ANIMALS) BILL

*Sixth Sitting*

*Thursday 18 November 2021*

*(Afternoon)*

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New clauses considered.  
Title amended.  
Bill, as amended, to be reported.  
Written evidence reported to the House.

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**Monday 22 November 2021**

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**The Committee consisted of the following Members:**

*Chairs:* † GERAIN T DAVIES, ESTHER McVEY

† Begum, Apsana (*Poplar and Limehouse*) (Lab)

† Blake, Olivia (*Sheffield, Hallam*) (Lab)

† Daly, James (*Bury North*) (Con)

Doogan, Dave (*Angus*) (SNP)

† Evans, Dr Luke (*Bosworth*) (Con)

† Glindon, Mary (*North Tyneside*) (Lab)

† Grundy, James (*Leigh*) (Con)

† Hudson, Dr Neil (*Penrith and The Border*) (Con)

† Johnson, Kim (*Liverpool, Riverside*) (Lab)

† Lake, Ben (*Ceredigion*) (PC)

† Mackrory, Cheryl yn (*Truro and Falmouth*) (Con)

† Moore, Robbie (*Keighley*) (Con)

Nici, Lia (*Great Grimsby*) (Con)

† Prentis, Victoria (*Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*)

† Saxby, Selaine (*North Devon*) (Con)

† Wheeler, Mrs Heather (*South Derbyshire*) (Con)

† Zeichner, Daniel (*Cambridge*) (Lab)

Sarah Thatcher, Abi Samuels, *Committee Clerks*

† **attended the Committee**

## Public Bill Committee

Thursday 18 November 2021

(Afternoon)

[GERAINT DAVIES *in the Chair*]

### Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill

#### New Clause 18

##### PROHIBITION ON IMPORTATION OF CATS AND DOGS WITH FASHION-BASED MUTILATIONS

“(1) Cats and dogs with fashion-based mutilations may not be imported into the UK.

(2) For the purposes of this section, “fashion-based mutilations” include—

- (a) cropped ears,
- (b) docked tails, and
- (c) declawed paws.”—(*Olivia Blake.*)

*This new clause would prohibit dogs and cats that had been subjected to ‘fashion-based’ mutilations such as cropped ears, docked tails and declawed paws being imported into the UK.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

2 pm

*Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.*

*The Committee divided: Ayes 7, Noes 8.*

#### Division No. 14]

##### AYES

Begum, Apsana	Johnson, Kim
Blake, Olivia	Lake, Ben
Glendon, Mary	
Hudson, Dr Neil	Zeichner, Daniel

##### NOES

Daly, James	Moore, Robbie
Evans, Dr Luke	Prentis, Victoria
Grundy, James	Saxby, Selaine
Mackrory, Cherylyn	Wheeler, Mrs Heather

*Question accordingly negatived.*

#### New Clause 19

##### REVIEW OF THE KEEPING OF EXOTIC ANIMALS AS PETS

“(1) The Secretary of State must carry out of a review of the keeping of exotic animals as pets in England.

(2) In conducting this review the Secretary of State must—

- (a) consider whether it is appropriate to keep certain exotic animals as pets without a licence in England;
- (b) consider whether it is appropriate to establish a register for certain exotic animals kept as pets in England;
- (c) consider whether the keeping of certain exotic animals should be prohibited in England; and
- (d) consult the public and such persons as the Secretary of State considers appropriate on the keeping of exotic animals as pets.

(3) The Secretary of State must bring forward legislation based on the findings of the review within 12 months of the date of Royal Assent to this Act.

(4) For the purposes of this section exotic animals include—

- (a) racoon dogs;
- (b) meerkats;

(c) African pygmy hedgehogs; and

(d) other appropriate animals identified by the review.”—(*Daniel Zeichner.*)

*This new clause would require the Secretary of State to conduct a review into the keeping of exotic animals as pets in the England. The amendment would require the Secretary of State to bring forward legislation based on the findings of the review within 12 months of the Act being passed.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

New Clause 19 would require that the Secretary of State conducts a review of the keeping of exotic pets in England, including examining the need for prohibition, licencing or registration for certain exotic animals. Such a review cannot come quickly enough. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals reports that it is treating an increasing number of exotic pets each year. In 2020 alone it received 6,119 reports relating to exotic pets, which in total involved 22,865 animals. Because there is a lack of licencing or registration requirements for exotic animals, we do not have an accurate estimate of how many are present in the UK. However, given these lax regulations, their increased prevalence in the UK is a cause for concern.

Exotic animals are not cats or dogs; they are wild animals with often highly complex natural history and incompletely understood welfare needs. Caring for these animals requires a high level of expertise, which, sadly, is not possessed by all exotic pet owners. As a result, exotic animals kept in domestic settings too often experience pain and suffering. Many species have not evolved to survive in the UK and so require artificial light and heat to keep them healthy, but the necessary information and equipment is often variable in quality or unavailable to domestic owners. Diets are often poorly understood, with animals fed the wrong types of food, leading to malnutrition. Enclosures can be too small and do not allow animals to move around and explore, or express other normal behaviours. Some species need to be kept on their own, or with others of their own kind, but, again, this does not always happen, leading to behavioural problems.

The collection of live animals from the wild for the exotic pet trade has led to serious, and in some cases catastrophic, population declines in some species, in addition to the suffering that animals are put through. We feel it is a missed opportunity not to get the ball rolling with the Bill on a set of reforms that would significantly reduce the suffering of thousands of kept animals across the UK. I suspect the Minister will say that there are already provisions to regulate the keeping of exotic animals as pets in the Bill, in the form of the primate licensing system, as hinted at earlier in the discussion, and that there are measures that will allow the system to be expanded to other exotic animals at a later date. We have already touched on this in earlier debates.

New clause 19 would complement that approach, and I commend it to the Minister. It would allow a sensible and reasonable debate about which exotic pets could reasonably be kept with a licence, unlike primates, and which should not be kept as pets at all. We have helpfully added a list that could be considered, based on conversations with the organisations that have to deal

with these dilemmas on a daily basis. It is not right that when we have the opportunity to do so, we leave welfare organisations to deal with the problems and dodge our responsibilities. The Government should grasp the nettle.

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Victoria Prentis):** The welfare of exotic pets held in private residences is already protected by the Animal Welfare Act 2006. It is an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to a kept animal or to fail to provide for its needs. The Scottish Animal Welfare Commission is currently undertaking a review of exotic pets, and it published an interim report in September this year. The RSPCA and the Born Free Foundation have also recently published a report on this topic.

The Government would be interested in considering a review of exotic pets, but we do not want to duplicate the work that the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission is doing at the moment. We have had its interim report and we want to wait for the full report. We will look thoroughly at that work when deciding what further assessments are needed. We already have the provisions of the Animal Welfare Act and, as the hon. Member for Cambridge alluded to, the provisions in this Bill, so we will have the appropriate regulatory framework when the review concludes. Any future review will take into account all of the evidence, and further regulation might be needed. I urge the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the new clause.

**Daniel Zeichner:** I am grateful to the Minister for that response, which was pretty much as I anticipated. I do not understand why we always have to go so slowly on everything. I know she thinks she is going at pace—that is the current term—but it seems to us that we could go more quickly. However, I have heard what she says, which confirms what I said earlier in the debate: basically, a general licensing system is being developed. I think we have it the wrong way round, but we will not pursue it any further today. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

**The Chair:** May I thank those Members who are wearing masks? It is very kind of them.

### New Clause 20

#### REVIEW OF DANGEROUS DOGS ACT

“(1) The Secretary of State must carry out a review of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

(2) In conducting the review the Secretary of State must—

- (a) review the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991;
- (b) take into consideration the recommendations of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee’s 2018 report ‘Controlling dangerous dogs’;
- (c) examine the factors behind canine aggression, the determinants of risk and whether the canine breeds prohibited under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 pose an inherently greater threat than other breeds; and
- (d) consult the public and such persons as the Secretary of State considers appropriate on the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.

(3) The Secretary of State must, no later than three months from the date on which the review concludes, publish a statement on the future of canine policy.”—(*Olivia Blake.*)

*This new clause would require the Secretary of State to carry out a review of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Olivia Blake (Sheffield, Hallam) (Lab):** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I am both a lover of dogs and a firm believer in science-driven policy. Unfortunately, it is hard to see any credible scientific evidence to support the breed-specific legislation and breed-specific approach taken in the 1991 Act. We have to learn how we go on these issues, but it is clear now that the legislation has failed to deliver what it was designed to do. It has not reduced hospital admissions due to dog bites, has not improved public safety, and not reduced the types of breeds it legislates against.

Between March 2005 and February 2015, the number of hospital admissions in England due to dog bites increased by 76%, from 4,110 to 7,227. The figure rose yet again in 2016 to 7,719. The legislation has led to the euthanising of thousands of healthy dogs. The law does not currently permit prohibited dog types for new owners, regardless of the individual dog’s behaviour, so the only option permitted is euthanasia.

The new clause is in line with the findings of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee’s 2018 inquiry, which showed that the current dangerous dogs legislation fails to protect safety and can harm animal welfare. The EFRA report recommended instead “a comprehensive review of existing dog control legislation and policy,” and spoke of the need for an alternative dog control model “that focuses on prevention through education, early intervention, and consistently robust sanctions for offenders”.

I am therefore proposing that the Bill be adapted to ask the Secretary of State to undertake a review into the future of this canine policy, so that we might move on from breed-specific legislation to breed-neutral legislation, and have policies that improve public safety and reduce some dog bite incidents.

**Victoria Prentis:** I agree that we would benefit from improved data collection on dog attack incidents, and I can confirm that we are already discussing with the police how this can best be achieved. We also recognise that more could be done to support responsible dog ownership, which is why we commissioned a review by Middlesex University to look at responsible dog ownership across all breeds of dog. The Middlesex University research will be published very shortly, in December—in just a couple of weeks’ time—and will provide the basis for the consideration of further reforms in this area, alongside the EFRA Committee’s 2018 recommendations.

Turning to the breed-specific elements of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, since around 2005, about one in six fatal dog attacks have been by pit bull terriers, despite the prohibitions we have in place, which have significantly limited the number of pit bull terriers in the community. We saw the devastating consequences of a dog attack only last week, with the tragic death of 10-year-old Jack Lis in Caerphilly. We are still waiting for the police to confirm the breed of dog involved in this awful incident and, whatever the upshot of that conclusion, we firmly believe that these restrictions play an important part in our overall approach towards tackling dangerous dogs.

I understand the sincerity with which Members across the House have spoken many times, both privately and in debate, about this difficult issue. We take the issue very seriously. The Middlesex University report will move us further and, in those circumstances, I respectfully ask the hon. Lady to withdraw the new clause.

**Cherilyn Mackrory** (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I wanted to draw attention to my interest in this new clause, because when I was doing A-level politics, way back when, the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 was seen as a piece of legislation that had not worked very well. That was in the early to mid-1990s—I am showing my age now. I have paid close attention to it, and the reason it did not work very well was because it did not include cross breeds, which was where all the trouble first started.

Earlier this year, I was able to visit a dogs' home called K9 Crusaders, on the outskirts of Truro in my constituency. The amazing owner, Sue Smith, looks after typed dogs once they have been taken from their families. I learned a lot about how dogs are often seized from families in the middle of the night, which is quite distressing for the families. I met a dog named Eric, a pure-bred American pit bull—believed to be Cornwall's very first. He was an absolute beauty—an absolutely gorgeous dog. I was also on the other side of the bars from lots of Jack Russells, crosses and all sorts of other scary dogs, for want of a better phrase.

I am certain that the legislation needs huge reform. I welcome the research that is coming in December. I have huge sympathy for the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam and all of her comments. I hope that we can do something in the future, as we advance, but I do not think this Bill is the place to do it. However, I am pleased to hear that the Minister is thinking about it.

**Daniel Zeichner:** I wish briefly to make the point that we all agree that something needs to be done. We have had debates about it in Westminster Hall and so on, but if we do not do it through this process, it will be very hard to get a legislative slot, which is frequently the explanation given to us. My worry is that there will not be legislative slots for some time to allow this to be dealt with. That is why the new clause is relevant.

Through the extensive discussions we have already had in Committee, a pretty good system has been established for dealing with dogs under livestock worrying. That could quite easily be applied to other circumstances. The Bill goes a long way to dealing with a range of issues to do with dogs. It is a missed opportunity not to finish the piece.

2.15 pm

*Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.*

*The Committee divided: Ayes 6, Noes 9.*

#### **Division No. 15]**

#### **AYES**

Begum, Apsana	Johnson, Kim
Blake, Olivia	Lake, Ben
Glendon, Mary	Zeichner, Daniel

#### **NOES**

Daly, James	Moore, Robbie
Evans, Dr Luke	Prentis, Victoria
Grundy, James	Saxby, Selaine
Hudson, Dr Neil	Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Mackrory, Cherilyn	

*Question accordingly negatived.*

### **New Clause 21**

#### **COMPULSORY MICROCHIPPING OF CATS**

“The Secretary of State must, within six months of the date of Royal Assent to this act, make regulations requiring that cats in England over a certain age be microchipped.”—(*Olivia Blake.*)

*This new clause would require the Secretary of State to make regulations for the compulsory microchipping of cats within six months of the Act being passed.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Olivia Blake:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

New clause 21 deals with microchipping of cats. We heard about cattism earlier in the debate. We tabled the new clause because microchipping is the safe and permanent way to identify an owned cat. Cats Protection's “Cats and their Stats” report in 2021 found that there are 2.8 million owned cats without a microchip across the UK, which is more than a quarter of all owned cats.

We know there are a multitude of benefits to increasing the number of microchipped cats: it helps reunite more lost cats with their owners; it ensures owners are informed and able to be involved in decisions about their cat's veterinary care—for example, if they were hit by a car and taken to a vet by a member of the public, which sadly occurs often—it informs more owners and provides closure in the sad event that their cat is fatally injured and scanned for a microchip; it provides easier detection of cats in the event of theft; and it allows for better traceability of individual owned cats should there be a significant disease outbreak such as rabies.

The new clause would help ensure that more of the UK's cats are microchipped, registered and traceable in the event of an emergency. We have talked a lot about microchipping different animals, and I do not see why the situation with cats should be different from that with dogs.

**Victoria Prentis:** We absolutely share the hon. Lady's desire for all cats to be microchipped. My own cat, a former Purr Minister, is himself microchipped. The Government committed in our manifesto, and reaffirmed in our action plan for animal welfare, our intention to introduce compulsory cat microchipping. Around 75% of cats are microchipped, compared with around 90% of dogs.

Our consultation on microchipping ended earlier this year and we received 33,000 responses, which we have been analysing. We will be publishing a summary of the consultation responses and our response to the consultation, by which I mean our plans for the future, within the next couple of weeks—certainly by the end of the year. I am very pleased to confirm that there was overwhelming support for the principle of compulsory cat microchipping.

**Daniel Zeichner:** Given that we all agree, and that this is a consultation where it is overwhelmingly clear what people want, why do the Government not just do it?

**Victoria Prentis:** Well, may I carry on? Colleagues may be aware that we have also carried out a post-implementation review of the Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015, which we also intend to publish before the end of the year. The review highlights

key difficulties—I think Members across the House are aware of them—with the current microchipping regime, including the current operation of the databases, where improvements can definitely be made. We propose to take a little bit longer to get this right, to ensure that the problems that have beset the multiple databases for dogs do not reoccur.

Our intention is to make a new set of regulations next year that incorporate both compulsory cat microchipping and changes to the current problems in the dog microchipping regimes. These regulations will of course be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure, so it will be possible for Parliament to be involved. In these circumstances and with those assurances, I ask that the new clause be withdrawn.

**Olivia Blake:** I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

## New Clause 22

### REVIEW OF CAT BREEDING LICENCING

“(1) The Secretary of State must carry out a review of the appropriate licencing arrangements for cat breeders.

(2) In conducting this review the secretary of state must—

- (a) consider the appropriate licencing arrangements for cat breeders;
- (b) consider the maximum permitted litters per cat in a 12-month period;
- (c) consider the maximum permitted litters per cat across a cat’s lifetime;
- (d) consider restrictions on keeping cats for breeding, when it can reasonably be expected, on the basis of its genotype, conformation, behaviour or state of health, that breeding from a cat could have a detrimental effect on its health or welfare or the health or welfare of its offspring; and
- (e) consult the public and such persons as the Secretary of State considers appropriate on the licencing of cat breeding.

(3) The Secretary of State must bring forward legislation based on the findings of the review within 12 months of the date of Royal Assent to this Act.

(4) For the purposes of this section ‘cat breeders’ are individuals who have bred 2 or more litters of cats in a 12 month period.”—(*Olivia Blake.*)

*This new clause would require the Secretary of State to carry out a review of the appropriate licencing arrangements for cats.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Olivia Blake:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

We probably will not press this new clause to a vote, but I think it is important enough to discuss it in Committee. Despite regulations being in place for dog breeding, there are currently none governing cat breeding. That is not the case across the country; regulations on cat breeding came into force in Scotland in September 2021. It is inconsistent in terms of cat welfare for cats to be protected in that way in one part of the UK but not another. The Bill presents an opportunity to have alignment and to ensure that good breeding welfare is in place for cats and kittens in England.

Cats Protection has raised valid concerns that cats are being bred with conformations that could affect their health and welfare and that of their offspring. In cats such as the Scottish Fold and Munchkin, an inherited disorder is specifically bred for, with the breed’s characteristics being produced by a gene mutation. The inherited disorder is detrimental to the cat and negatively affects its quality of life. Other breeds rely on this too, such as flat-faced Persian cats and other brachycephalic cats, which often experience breathing difficulties, as we have discussed for dogs, as well as eye problems, skin infections and difficulty eating as a result of their skull conformation.

Reviewing the licensing arrangements for cat breeders, and bringing forward legislation to license cat breeding, is the only way we can ensure better enforcement of the welfare of cats across the UK from birth. To be clear, we will not push this new clause to a vote.

**Victoria Prentis:** I thank the hon. Lady for her comments on this important issue and for confirming that she will not push the new clause to a vote. That is sensible. There are significant issues that we need to look at, which I intend to do in our review of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018. We will review and report on those issues fully before 1 October 2023. We are already collecting evidence to inform that review. I encourage the hon. Lady and others, if they have evidence, to please send it to us. We are proactively working with partners, including local authorities. The scope of this exercise very much includes cat breeding. We will consider the case for extending the breeding regulations more widely during the review. We will then be in a position to assess the case for introducing new legislation.

**Olivia Blake:** I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

## New Clause 23

### LOCAL ABATTOIR NETWORKS

“The Secretary of State must ensure a network of local abattoirs exists to provide the services required to support the UK’s diverse livestock farming sector and to deliver livestock welfare benefits through minimising distance to slaughter.”—(*Daniel Zeichner.*)

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Daniel Zeichner:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

We have touched on this issue already. Many are concerned about it, with the notable exception of the Secretary of State, who sparked incredulity across the sector earlier this year with comments suggesting that all is fine in the world of abattoirs. Opposition Members do not think that the lack of local abattoirs is fine, and we want to find ways to address the problem, which is what new clause 23 is about. I will focus specifically on the animal welfare benefits that building up such a network would achieve.

Through the Bill, the Government are rightly trying to end the export of certain livestock for slaughter. This practice can have seriously negative impacts on livestock

[*Daniel Zeichner*]

as a result of extensive journey times, as we have discussed. However, we do not think that the problem will be resolved simply by banning overseas exports. In the UK, there has been a rapid decline in the number of local abattoirs. A report by National Craft Butchers stated that there are only 62 local slaughterhouses left, and prospects for the future are fairly bleak. Seven in 10 abattoir owners were aged over 51, with 11% still working beyond the normal retirement age. More than half had no plan for someone younger to take over. That decline is down to a host of reasons, including staff shortages, vet shortages, centralisation of supply chains and, inevitably, regulatory changes and bureaucracy.

However, the consequence of the lack of a local network of abattoirs is that animals are often transported over long distances for slaughter, which poses much the same welfare concerns as shipping animals overseas, as animals still spend long periods being transported. I appreciate that the Government are consulting on these issues, but I think I am correct in saying that that is largely about improving transport. That is fine, but it does not alter the fact that long distances remain long distances. As I said, some of this is inevitably linked to significant changes in the way supply chains operate and to consolidation within sectors; the old days of local markets have largely gone, and while vertical integration may have benefits, there are, as ever, wider consequences that are less beneficial.

In September, the EFRA Committee published a report on moving animals across borders, saying:

“The consolidation of abattoir services means that the spread of services is not uniform across the UK, so many animals have to travel long journeys prior to slaughter. This undermines the ambition of the Government’s consultation on ‘Improvements to animal welfare in transport’ to reduce unnecessarily long journey times”.

I have spoken about this before. It is quite clear that the lack of local slaughterhouses also means that smaller farmers are unable to keep certain types of animals, due to the welfare concerns associated with transporting them over long distances for slaughter, which in turn reduces the likelihood of the return to mixed farming, which many would like.

Put simply, the market may be delivering what works for some retailers, but it is not delivering the wider public goods that we were discussing in this very Committee room almost two years ago in the Agriculture Bill Committee. We warned about these problems then, and today we give the Government the opportunity to do something about them.

**Dr Neil Hudson** (Penrith and The Border) (Con): I echo some of the comments of the hon. Member for Cambridge. I am glad that he referred to the EFRA Committee report. I am a member of that Committee. Based on our findings on the movement of animals across borders, one of our key recommendations was that the UK local abattoir network needed supporting and bolstering, and we recommended that the Government look at that. If we improve the local abattoir network it will actually mitigate a lot of the animal welfare issues related to long-distance transport, because distances will be shorter and animals will be reared locally and slaughtered locally and the food will be purchased and

eaten locally—something that we are all pushing for. I know that Ministers agree with me that that is a positive thing that we should try to move towards.

2.30 pm

I support the thrust of the new clause from the hon. Member for Cambridge, and I very much hope the Government will listen to him and to the EFRA Committee’s recommendations. I would welcome it if the Minister could give us some assurances that the Government will look at this issue to support and bolster the abattoir network. As the hon. Member mentioned, the situation is becoming acute, and I mentioned the pig situation in the Chamber. We need to make sure that the abattoir system is functioning, both for our food security and for animal welfare. That includes both veterinary and butcher capacity. This is a chance for the Government to give us some assurances and specifics on how they will look at this moving forward.

**Victoria Prentis:** The Government acknowledge the importance of local abattoirs to improving animal welfare through shorter journey times. We are committed to working with the industry to ensure that the UK maintains its high-quality slaughtering facilities. We need to find innovative solutions to address funding issues for small abattoirs.

I am pleased to report that the rural development programme is supporting a mobile abattoir project. The project is currently being trialled at two sites. One is at Fir Farm in Gloucestershire, which I had the pleasure of visiting with the chairman of the EFRA Committee and Lord Benyon earlier this summer; the other is at M.C. Kelly Farm in Devon. It was a very interesting pilot and I would be happy to discuss it with Members outside the Committee; it has thrown up issues that we will have to work through and resolve—that is the purpose of a pilot of course. We really do believe that this project will act as a model for future mobile abattoir sites.

We at DEFRA also chair the small abattoirs working group, which brings together industry representatives. We have initiated a series of smaller sub-groups to go into detailed discussions on how to reduce the regulatory burdens on smaller abattoirs. So far issues discussed include the new livestock information programme, the potential for streamlining the administrative and regulatory burden on small abattoirs and ways of ensuring greater co-ordination across Government agencies and abattoirs. I am looking at how a new group—for which I have two excellent chairs in mind—can oversee all this work and drive through the changes that we need in this area. I will continue to update Members as we progress through this work. Given those circumstances, I would ask that we do not vote on new clause 23.

**Daniel Zeichner:** I am grateful for the Minister’s response. I think we are on the same page on this. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

### **New Clause 27**

#### REARING OF NON-NATIVE GAME BIRDS: REVIEW AND CONSULTATION

“(1) The Secretary of State must—

- (a) undertake a review of the welfare impacts of the rearing and keeping of non-native gamebirds,



- (b) examine the use of cages in the rearing and keeping of non-native gamebirds, and
- (c) consult on regulation of rearing and keeping of non-native gamebirds.

(2) The Secretary of State must publish a summary of responses to the consultation under sub-section (1)(b).

(3) The Secretary of State must, no later than three months from the day on which the consultation under subsection (2) closes, publish a statement of future policy on the rearing and keeping of non-native game birds.”—(*Daniel Zeichner.*)

*This new clause would require the Secretary of State to conduct a review of the welfare impacts of the rearing and keeping of non-native gamebirds.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Daniel Zeichner:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

You will be glad to hear, Mr Davies, that this is our final new clause. I return to an issue that has long been a focus of Labour’s work on animal welfare as part of ending the cage age. New clause 27 seeks to establish a review of the rearing of non-native game birds, with a particular focus on the welfare of the birds and the use of cages.

I am advised that around 50 million pheasants and partridges are mass produced in the UK every year to be used for sporting purposes. I am grateful to the Labour Animal Welfare Society for commissioning its recent report from Professor Stephen Harris—it makes for fairly grim reading. Animal Aid estimates that tens of thousands of partridges and pheasants are confined in cages in England. It argues that the birds inside these cages suffer from feather loss, scalping and injuries inflicted by their stressed cage mates. It also reports that birds may have masks and other devices fitted to try to stop them inflicting injuries, and that large numbers of breeding birds are confined for most of their lives in so-called raised laying cages, which are left outside and exposed to the elements.

Such practices clearly pose significant welfare concerns for the game birds involved. The current code of practice for the welfare of game birds reared for sporting purposes is not legally binding. I am told that the code was due to be reviewed in 2016, but apparently that did not take place. The Minister has indicated in responses to parliamentary questions, however, that the Government are examining the use of cages for the breeding of partridges and pheasants—a lot of examining is going on in the Department. I am in no doubt that every member of the Committee wants to ensure that we end the suffering of kept animals. It really is time to end the cage age.

**Victoria Prentis:** It is true that a lot of examining of evidence is going on, but that cannot be portrayed as a bad thing. I share the enthusiasm of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam for science-led policy making. We want action as well. That is why I said slightly tongue in cheek earlier that we get criticised when the hon. Member for Cambridge feels we are going too quickly, but then we get criticised when he feels we are going too slowly.

**Daniel Zeichner:** The Minister should hand over to us.

**Victoria Prentis:** Well, I believe in democracy—I do not know about you.

**The Chair:** I do.

**Victoria Prentis:** I know you do, Mr Davies. You are quite right—I do not know about the hon. Member for Cambridge.

As we are coming to the end of these proceedings—I hope, pleasurable though they have been—it is right that we accept that, yes, there is a lot to do in the area of animal welfare, but, yes, a lot is being done. We should take this opportunity to step back and to think of the poor people working in the animal welfare team in DEFRA, who are doing all this work, as well as those in the Public Gallery from the Bill team and those offline who drafted the Bill. Yes, animal welfare legislation is difficult. It requires evidence and it requires us to work out what would help and where, and what can be done in other ways through guidance or whatever.

Turning to the new clause, we are already reviewing how to improve game bird welfare, including examining the evidence on the use of cages for breeding pheasants and partridges. As the hon. Member for Cambridge said, we have a statutory code, in section 6 of which are set out the standards, including that enriched cages are a minimum. Breaches of the code may be used in a prosecution under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. It is right that we review the situation periodically, and the plan is to do just that. We already have the power to make regulations in this area when we have the scientific evidence to inform future policy. I therefore ask that the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the new clause.

**Daniel Zeichner:** I am grateful to the Minister, and delighted to get her cross at last—it is hard to make her cross. I hear what she said but, equally, I hope she heard what I said. We are moving to a different age, a different world, and while I absolutely want it to be evidence-based, there is a feeling in many parts of this country that we ought to move more quickly on these issues. In the interests of getting this done, we will not press the new clause to a vote. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

**Victoria Prentis:** I beg to move amendment 82, title, line 2, at end insert “; and for connected purposes.”

The amendment updates the long title of the Bill.

I thank you, Mr Davies, all Members who have taken part in the Committee, and the Clerks’ team and others who have worked so hard to get us to this stage of this important legislation.

**Daniel Zeichner:** On a point of order, Mr Davies. I echo those thanks. I also thank Government and Opposition Members. It has been a constructive and helpful discussion, conducted in good spirits. I, too, thank the Clerks, who often have the impossible task of translating our ideas into appropriate and acceptable parliamentary language. I thank all the organisations we have heard from, the witnesses and my team—particularly George Williams, who has had to do all this pretty much on his own.

**The Chair:** That is not a point of order, but it was a point of thanks.

*Amendment 82 agreed to.*

*Bill, as amended, to be reported.*

2.40 pm

*Committee rose.*

**Written evidence reported to the House**

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