

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT

Eighth Delegated Legislation Committee

WELFARE OF ANIMALS AT THE TIME OF  
KILLING (ENGLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND)  
(AMENDMENT) (EU EXIT) REGULATIONS 2019

*Tuesday 29 October 2019*

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**Saturday 2 November 2019**

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

*Chair:* PHILIP DAVIES

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| † Afolami, Bim ( <i>Hitchin and Harpenden</i> ) (Con)   | † Jones, Ruth ( <i>Newport West</i> ) (Lab)          |
| † Bowie, Andrew ( <i>West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine</i> ) (Con)                                | † Prentis, Victoria ( <i>Banbury</i> ) (Con)         |
| † Brereton, Jack ( <i>Stoke-on-Trent South</i> ) (Con)  | † Slaughter, Andy ( <i>Hammersmith</i> ) (Lab)       |
| † Cooper, Rosie ( <i>West Lancashire</i> ) (Lab)  | Sobel, Alex ( <i>Leeds North West</i> ) (Lab/Co-op)  |
| † Crouch, Tracey ( <i>Chatham and Aylesford</i> ) (Con)   | † Stewart, Iain ( <i>Milton Keynes South</i> ) (Con) |
| † Debbonaire, Thangam ( <i>Bristol West</i> ) (Lab)   | † Tracey, Craig ( <i>North Warwickshire</i> ) (Con)  |
| † Drew, Dr David ( <i>Stroud</i> ) (Lab/Co-op)  | † Tredinnick, David ( <i>Bosworth</i> ) (Con)        |
| Farrelly, Paul ( <i>Newcastle-under-Lyme</i> ) (Lab)  |  |
| Flint, Caroline ( <i>Don Valley</i> ) (Lab)   | Yohanna Sallberg, <i>Committee Clerk</i>             |
| † Goldsmith, Zac ( <i>Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs</i> ) |  |
|   | † <b>attended the Committee</b>                      |

## Eighth Delegated Legislation Committee

Tuesday 29 October 2019

[PHILIP DAVIES *in the Chair*]

### Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England and Northern Ireland) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

8.55 am

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Zac Goldsmith):** I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England and Northern Ireland) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (S.I. 2019, No. 1308).

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. This statutory instrument, which was laid before the House on 7 October, makes simple and technical amendments to domestic legislation so that we meet our obligations under the UK-Ireland common travel area with regards to certificates of competence for slaughterers upon exit.

After exit day, a slaughterer will have to hold a certificate of competence issued by a UK-competent authority in order to work in the UK. This will ensure that any future changes we make will apply equally to all slaughterers operating in the UK. It will also ensure that we can take effective enforcement action, as currently only the member state that issued a certificate of competence can suspend or revoke it.

It is, however, the case that we continue to have reciprocal arrangements with the Republic of Ireland under the UK-Ireland common travel area, which provide a right for Irish citizens to work in the UK and have qualifications recognised, and vice versa. This instrument ensures that we will continue to recognise training and examination carried out in the Republic of Ireland after we leave. It does this by amending the definition of “evidence of training and examination”

contained in regulations 3(1) of the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2014 and the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) Regulations 2015.

This means that when applying for a certificate of competence from the competent authority in England and Northern Ireland, the applicant may refer to training and examination undertaken in the Republic of Ireland to support their application. The applicant will not need to undergo further training or take an exam if they have passed the relevant modules in the Republic of Ireland.

The Foods Standards Agency and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, which are the competent authorities in England and Northern Ireland respectively, consider that very few applications are likely to rely on evidence of training or examination from the Republic of Ireland, estimated at around two applications a year. Any impact would be positive, as the applicant would not be required to undergo additional training or examination and would not incur additional costs, which would be approximately £225.

Animal welfare is a devolved issue. Each devolved Administration is responsible for its own regulations in this area, but I can inform the Committee that the Scottish and Welsh Governments have made similar amendments. We have decided that in the interest of legal certainty in Northern Ireland, the UK Government may take through the necessary secondary legislation for Northern Ireland in some circumstances, in close consultation with the Northern Ireland Departments. This is one such instrument.

The Government have taken care to avoid using the urgency procedure under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, but we considered its use be appropriate in this instance to ensure the continued application of our obligations under the common travel area at the point of EU exit. I hope colleagues across the Committee will join me in supporting these regulations. I commend them to the Committee.

8.58 am

**Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op):** I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I welcome the Minister to his place. It is nice to have someone else in the Government to respond to; I usually respond to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and I used to respond to his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill).

This is an incredible narrow statutory instrument; we are talking about two cases a year. What about the 95% of vets who come from elsewhere in the EU and who keep our abattoirs going? Without those vets being in place, the line stops. If this is a precedent for the Republic of Ireland, it would be useful to know what is going to happen with all the other vets. We need to be clear where we are going to get our supply of vets if they are not going to come from elsewhere in the EU.

We will not oppose this statutory instrument, because it is common sense that we recognise the competences of other countries. Given the fact that vets from the Republic can work in the north, and vets in the north can work in the Republic, two seems a very low number. I imagine there is much more transferability on the island of Ireland. It would be interesting to know whether this is just the people who do not have the qualifications, and whether there are many more who have common qualifications, because as far as I know, veterinary schools recruit both north and south. How many people would be affected anyway? As I said, slaughterhouses are entirely dependent on people from outside the UK in the main, Ireland being slightly different.

It is important to bear in mind that this is part of a wider debate—I will not stray too far, you will be pleased to know, Mr Davies. The British Veterinary Association, in which I declare an interest as an associate, is very clear about the need to introduce stunning of all animals killed at slaughter. It would be worth while exploring where we are on this whole issue. We had a petition debate, and it is something that some of us feel very strongly about. I know about halal and shechita religious exemptions, but it important that we have some way of knowing that the Government have in hand the direction of travel that the general public want us to take, which is that only animals that are stunned are slaughtered, and that they are willing to talk to the Jewish community and the Muslim community to see if there is at least some compromise.

Another important point is that we discussed and passed measures on CCTV in slaughterhouses in previous SI Committees. I submitted a written question about how far we are from making sure that all slaughterhouses have CCTV and that someone is examining it to make sure that the practice is in place. I know that that is slightly away from the issue of competences, but we need to discuss how the operation of slaughterhouses can be as transparent as possible. It is no good having competences in place if we do not expect the highest standards from people. The most difficult bit of the meat trade is that animals are slaughtered, and we would hope they are slaughtered as humanely as possible. That is common across all those vets who supervise the process, but more particularly, those foreign vets on whom we rely to a very great extent. The question from the Opposition will always be: where is the alternative? As far as I can see, unless those vets seek settlement, we will have a serious problem.

9.3 am

**Zac Goldsmith:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments and all hon. Members for attending the Committee. I will try to answer his questions. First, this statutory instrument is about slaughter and not about veterinary surgeons, but I take his point. The Government have already made operability amendments to Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 so that, after exit, we can recognise equivalent qualifications from anywhere in the world. There should not be a barrier to the recruitment of vets who come to work in the UK as long as their training is recognised by us or the standards are considered to be as good.

In terms of numbers, my understanding from DEFRA research is that if and when this SI is passed, there will be on average only two people a year from the Republic of Ireland who will benefit. It matters to them for the sake of tidiness, and as the hon. Gentleman, it is common sense and needs to happen, but it is not a particularly cumbersome regulation. It is a straightforward and, as he said, narrow SI.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the quality of animal welfare standards applied within slaughterhouses. He is right about that. We have done several things, including mandating the use of CCTV in all slaughterhouses. It

is hard to imagine that that has not had a significant impact on the behaviour of slaughtermen in those establishments.

We are also, as the hon. Gentleman knows, taking steps to deal with—I must be careful what I say, because we are in consultation—the live export of animals for fattening and slaughter. One reason for that is that we do not believe it is possible to send animals on very long journeys while simultaneously respecting the need for good animal husbandry: 30, 40 or, in some cases, 50 hours is not compatible with animal welfare. The other reason is that we are not convinced that the quality and standards in slaughterhouses in many other countries, to which animals are often exported, are anywhere close to the standards that we expect and apply in this country. We are taking steps to improve things at the point of slaughter.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the more complicated issue of stunning pre-slaughter. He finished by saying that we should try to find a mechanism to bring the stakeholders together to see if we can find a solution that respects religious freedom and has an eye to animal welfare. The previous Secretary of State initiated a series of roundtables with stakeholders from across the board. Those discussions continue and I am now involved in them. I have had some very good meetings with stakeholders in the last month. It is not the right time to pre-empt what we will deliver as a consequence of that, but we will deliver steps that I think will satisfy the stakeholders' concerns and improve animal welfare at the point of slaughter. I hope the hon. Gentleman will bear with me on that and I hope to talk more about it should I still be in this place in a few weeks' time—who knows about that?—but we are making progress.

I think I have answered the hon. Gentleman's questions. I thank hon. Members for their attendance and my counterpart for his contributions. I hope that hon. Members are reassured on these points. To reiterate, this regulation does no more than meet our existing obligations under the common travel area.

*Question put and agreed to.*

9.7 am

*Committee rose.*





