

Comprehensive animal protection reform



A proposal for  Labour

Introduction

"I very much welcome this initiative. It is vital that Labour proposes a range of positive and appealing ideas in the next election, and a comprehensive animal protection strategy will be an excellent part of that."

- **Rachael Maskell**
Shadow Secretary of State
for the Environment



Britain is traditionally a country which cares for animals, with millions of homes including a dog or a cat and support for some of the most progressive animal protection legislation in the world. Yet, this rests uneasily alongside suffering in factory farms, laboratories, and 'sporting' environments. It is traditionally seen by some as a difficult area, often perceived as balancing important human needs with consideration of animal protection.

Labour believes that all animals have a right to live in as good a home or habitat as possible, with a culture of responsible ownership, promotion of good care, minimisation of distress and suffering and the search for alternatives where suffering occurs. We recognise the role of animals in the food chain but seek to promote responsible, compassionate farming.

Labour's approach to animal protection is linked closely with our wider environmental agenda, in which we seek to encourage a move to more biodiversity, lower air pollution, sustainable habitats and a reduction on dependence on intensive farming.

In 1997, the incoming Labour Government launched a comprehensive manifesto for animal protection, "New Life for Animals", which led to an end to fur farming in Britain, significant improvements in the protection of farm animals, the ban on using animals to test cosmetics, the Animal Welfare Act and the Hunting Act.

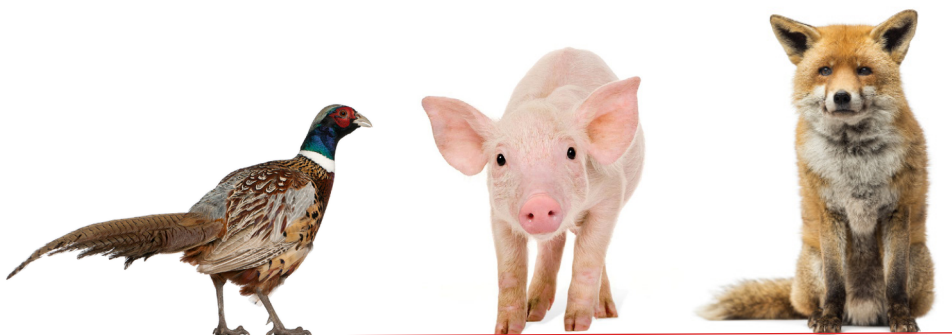
It is time for a fresh initiative to look at the protection of animals across the board. The authors have been involved in both animal protection and the Labour movement for all their adult lives, and were delighted to be commissioned by the Leader and Shadow Secretary of State for the Environment to review the prospect for improvements in consultation with a wide range of animal protection organisations. We are particularly grateful for the encouragement from Rachael Maskell, Shadow Secretary of state for the Environment and Sarah Champion, Shadow Home Office Minister with responsibility for animal experiment regulation, and for the help of the Labour Animal Welfare Society (LAWS), who have pursued this issue with determination and commitment for many years.

We received extensive input from the animal welfare organisations in the Annex and we hope that they will feel that their participation in the exercise has been rewarded. Some organisations have mapped out further steps to be taken, but in building consensus we have sought to identify initial major advances across the animal protection sector that can command wide-ranging support.

We will be launching these proposals during the Labour Conference, and will be proud to submit the proposals to the policy-making process. We should welcome comments and the endorsement of MPs, CLPs and non-partisan NGOs for the proposals, individually or as a whole. In particular, we request delegates at Conference to seek the support of their CLPs and to let us know of any resolutions passed.

Please send your comments and endorsements to

animalslabour@aol.com



We note that many of these issues are not necessarily partisan matters, even though we associate concern for animals with the concern for people which has motivated to join the Labour Party. If our proposals encourage other parties to take similar initiatives, so much the better.

Michelle Thew

Nick Palmer



Factory farming & slaughterhouses

We will introduce mandatory labelling of meat to show country of origin, method of production and method of slaughter, so that consumers are fully informed about the choice available, an approach which has transformed egg production to benefit free-range production. In the coming negotiations with the European Union, we will seek agreement that Britain is not restricted in this by the agreement on trade relations with the EU. Similarly, we will require full labelling of all products using fur, analogous to US legislation.

We will introduce new guidance to end routine use of antibiotics to facilitate factory farming, a particularly important measure as mega-dairies threaten to reverse the progress made in recent years. We do not see massive antibiotic use as an acceptable solution to the problems of factory farming. We will end live exports.

We will establish a Commission with animal protection representatives, slaughterhouse owners and representatives of religious communities to recommend standards to minimise suffering in slaughterhouses. This should not only make pre-stunning the normal practice (as is already the case in 84% of halal slaughterhouses) but to mitigate the period between unloading and slaughter. The use of CCTV in all slaughterhouses – already standard practice in the larger establishments and recommended by the Food Standards

Agency and the 10 leading supermarkets – will be made mandatory, and the CCTV recordings will be open to FSA inspection and available under Freedom of Information rules. We will ensure a safe channel for whistleblowers to report malpractice, which can then be checked through the CCTV recordings.

Improved protection for cats, dogs and other domestic pets

Following the successful introduction of mandatory microchipping for dogs, Labour will extend this to cats, addressing the issue of lost and abandoned animals. We will introduce standards to improve breeding conditions for animals. Consumers can be sold illegally imported puppies with no information on vaccination or breeding conditions. An estimated third of all animals are sold over the essentially unregulated internet, often by third parties without responsibility for breeding.

In particular, Labour will end the puppy and kitten trade in animals bred without proper controls, by ending third party sales and requiring the mother to be present when the puppy or kitten is sold, and we will limit the breeding age and number of litters permitted per year to crack down on intensive puppy-farming. We will make it illegal to sell as domestic pets animals such as primates requiring professional care.



Young people

As part of our wider citizenship agenda, we will work through schools to encourage understanding by young people of animal welfare issues and responsible ownership.

Respect for the pets of elderly people

The next Labour Government will recognise the needs of people with cats or other companion animals in rented housing and care homes and will work to allow people to keep their pets wherever possible and avoid heart-breaking separations of pets from their owners. Labour will encourage local authorities, social housing associations and private landlords having pet friendly tenancy clauses, and will update guidance on assessments and personalised care plans include consideration of any companion animals that form part of the individual's household and contribute to an individual's wellbeing.



End cruel practices on shooting estates

We will introduce a licensing requirement for shooting estates. We confirm our commitment in the 2015 manifesto to reviewing cruel practices, with a particular focus on illegal killing of protected birds of prey and use of illegal poisons, as well as the intensive breeding of birds for slaughter. In 2010, the incoming Conservative/LibDem Government withdrew an Animal Welfare Act (AWA) Code of Practice for 'gamebird' production that had been introduced by the Labour Government and which would have outlawed battery cages for breeding pheasants. Labour will restore the ban, and we will end the use of snares (including free-running snares), wire traps that kill around 1.7 million animals a year in what is often a lingering death. Restrictions on shooting seasons and tighter permit rules will form part of the review.

As part of our wider environmental priorities, we will no longer allow drainage of land to facilitate grouse shooting and landowners will have obligations to restore land to its natural environment.

Cruel sports

We will protect the Hunting Act, which was arrived at after exhaustive debate and has broad support from the public. We will also move to make this a reportable offence, eliminate loopholes and ensure that the ban is taken seriously; legislation that is not observed in practice is both bad in this particular case and as a general principle. We will also seek to level up the ban in Scotland to the same level as England.

We will raise the penalty for dog-fighting to 3 years, matching the current practice in Northern Ireland, and crack down on badger-baiting.

Ending the Badger Cull

We confirm our commitment to ending this counter-productive approach and adopt the approach of the Welsh Labour Government to a vaccine-led approach. We will take a science-led approach based on an understanding of pathogen transmission, promoting biosecurity, testing, cattle vaccination and development on new approaches to combat the disease.

Ending the use of wild animals in travelling circuses

This long-promised measure has been approved by a Parliamentary vote but the Government is still failing to implement it. Labour will move swiftly to end this archaic practice.

Taking wildlife crime seriously

Labour will make wildlife crime a reportable offence and guarantee the continued funding of the National Wildlife Crime Unit, whose future beyond 2020 is threatened by Conservative cuts.





Cooperation across agencies

We will promote active cooperation across agencies, such as between the RSPCA and NSPCC, to reflect the increasing recognition of the links between animal cruelty and violence towards people.

Stricter legislation on weaponry

Labour will introduce stricter legislation on airgun and crossbow ownership, prohibiting possession under the age of 21, to prevent their use for vandalism and shooting of cats, birds and other animals.

We will charge the cost price for processing applications for shotguns (estimated at £200 instead of the current subsidised £50), projected to raise £19 million, and will limit possession of firearms to farms and clubs with proper security measures.

Fireworks

We will reduce maximum private firework noise to 96 db (currently 120), reserving noisier fireworks for public displays whose time and location has been announced in advance. This will enable pet owners to avoid locations with the louder fireworks and will also limit the distress to vulnerable people from very loud domestic firework displays in their neighbourhoods.

Cleaning up horse & greyhound racing

The British Horseracing Authority sanctions the use of the whip by jockeys for two purposes: to keep rider and mount safe, and for “encouragement”. We will prohibit the second purpose and consult on whether use for safety is essential. This measure maintains a level playing field since it will apply to all horses equally.

For greyhounds, we will implement the Parliamentary EFRA Committee report of 2010 including the recommendation of a centralised database to track what happens to greyhounds after they are no longer fit to race and we will introduce conditions on the treatment of greyhounds after they are retired.



Animal experiments

Despite numerous promises by Ministers during 2010-2016, details of experiment project licences remain largely secret, inhibiting a sensible public debate. We will apply the Freedom of Information Act to allow details of what is done in experiments to be published, after redaction of personal and commercially confidential information, facilitating an honest and open debate.

Although there is a widespread consensus that animal experiments should be reduced over time, there is currently no mechanism for achieving this. We will investigate the establishment of a target, common in other areas of public policy, to reduce the number of animal experiments over a 5-year period, progressively ending approval for the experiments with the lowest assessed benefit-cost ratios, so that research funding is increasingly concentrated on medical research seen as highest-priority and on alternatives not causing suffering.

Over 5 years, we will phase out approval for the 8% of experiments classified by the Government as “severe”, which include the most extreme suffering, affecting 150,000 animals, in particular towards primates, and we will end licencing of experiments on dogs and cats, ending the dichotomy between their status as family pets and subjects for painful research.



Access to veterinary services

Both the cost and the availability of local veterinary services are issues which we will address with means-tested support for essential care, neutering and vaccination.

The international agenda

We will seek to ensure that all animal welfare legislation in place in the UK at the moment that originates in the European Union is kept and we would take the opportunity to review this legislation and make improvements where necessary. Examples include bans on the import of whale products, commercial seal products and cat and dog fur as well as the use of battery cages in egg production.

In addition, we will ensure that the recognition that animals are 'sentient beings' contained in the Lisbon Treaty and its application to future legislative measures is also implemented in the UK.

Labour will lead international dialogue to set higher international standards of animal welfare, so that better practice in Britain is spread abroad as well. We will maintain a strong stance against whaling and the ivory trade and work to end long-distance transport of live animals for farming or use in experiments.

Appointment of an Animal Welfare Commissioner

In conclusion, new issues will arise and Labour wants to ensure that they are identified quickly. Animal protection is an issue which has traditionally had only limited political attention, partly because the issue affects many different government departments. In 2004, the Labour Government established the post of Children's Commissioner, to ensure that the interests of children are considered in legislation across government. The next Labour Government will appoint an independent Animal Welfare Commissioner with a similar mission statement: the objective will be to ensure that animals' interests are always considered as legislation is introduced and Britain's position in international bodies like the International Whaling Commission is prepared.

Annex 1: About the authors



Dr Palmer was MP for Broxtowe for 1997-2010, and worked on a wide range of animal protection issues throughout his time in Parliament. Dr Palmer's career includes 16 years in industry management; in Parliament, he was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the late Malcolm Wicks, Minister for Science and Energy, and member of the Treasury, European Affairs and Justice Select Committees. He was Director of Policy for Cruelty Free International from 2010 to 2016.

Michelle Thew is Chief Executive Officer of Cruelty Free International and is one of the leading figures in the animal protection movement, where she has worked professionally for almost 20 years. Michelle was Labour's candidate for Bexhill and Battle in 2015 and has a long history in the Labour movement holding various offices since the 1980s. Prior to joining Cruelty Free International, Michelle worked in a number of social justice organisations and local government, leading services and campaigns for children and people with disabilities. She has worked as an adviser to Governments and companies worldwide and is a respected voice in national and international media on animal protection issues.

Annex 2: Contributing organisations

The organisations below (listed alphabetically) sent proposals for inclusion, in many cases with very extensive background material which will be very helpful in developing the case for each proposals. We should like to acknowledge their assistance with gratitude and we hope for their support for the proposals put forward here.

Animal Aid

Born Free

Cats Protection

Compassion in World Farming

Cruelty Free International

IFAW

League Against Cruel Sports

Network for Animals

Respect for Animals

RSPCA

The Badger Trust

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endorsements to
animalslabour@aol.com

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