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Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 26 October on behalf of a number of your constituents about the transport of animals to slaughter.

The Government's position is that we would prefer animals to be slaughtered as close as practicable to their point of production. A trade in meat and meat products is preferable to the long distance transport of animals to slaughter. However, the live export trade is a lawful one. If animals are exported live, their transportation should comply fully with the legal requirements laid down in EU and national law.

Whilst we cannot currently introduce national welfare legislation because there is already directly applicable EU legislation on the protection of animals during transport (Council Regulation (EC) 1/2005), this is an issue we are considering in the context of the UK's exit from the EU.

The Government is committed to improving the welfare of animals.

I hope that this reply is helpful.

Best wishes,

Andrea Leadsom MP
Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Enc: Briefing Note



Export of live animals

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Why doesn't the Government ban the export of live animals?

The Government would prefer animals to be slaughtered as close as practicable to their point of production. A trade in meat and meat products is preferable to the long distance transport of animals to slaughter. However, the trade in live animals for slaughter is a legal one but it is now very small, compared to twenty years ago, when every year nearly two million animals were exported. Last year about 31,000 animals were exported, 3000 of those were exported for slaughter, all of which were sheep. This compares to approximately 14 million sheep slaughtered in the UK in the same period.

The unilateral banning of the trade would be illegal and undermine the principle of the free movement of goods in the European Union. Introduction of national welfare legislation is not currently possible as there is already legally binding EU legislation on the protection of animals during transport in existence.

The Government is committed to improving the welfare of all animals. For this reason, we expect animals exported live, to be transported in conditions that comply fully with the legal welfare requirements. In addition, we expect any slaughterhouse used to meet high welfare standards, whether it is here or abroad.

The British people have voted to leave the European Union and Defra is focused on implementing that decision. There is no immediate change to our position following the result. We are currently still a member of the EU, and we will continue to engage with EU business as normal and be engaged in EU decision-making in the usual way. Once Article 50 is invoked, we will remain bound by EU law until the withdrawal agreement comes into force.

This Government supports improvements being made to enforcement across the EU of existing rules on the long distance transport of livestock.

What inspections are performed by the APHA? Are these sufficient?

Defra Ministers are satisfied that the way in which the APHA inspect consignments and the way in which they issue approvals to transporters are within the requirements of the regulations covering live exports.

Every vehicle is currently subject to inspection at loading by APHA inspectors. This is supplemented by visual checks by APHA inspectors at the port. These inspections/checks are proportionate to the risk involved and are fully consistent with EU legal requirements. This has been demonstrated in the High Court.

Inspections at loading are intended to assess and ensure compliance with the welfare during transport requirements and include the following: an assessment of the animals to ensure that they are fit for the intended journey; an assessment of the vehicle to ensure that it is suitable, in a satisfactory state of repair and that all essential and mandatory facilities are fully functional; and also checks to ensure that the transporter, vehicles and drivers/attendants possess the necessary certificates of authorisation, approval or competence.

In addition to the inspections referred to above, APHA also has inspectors present at Dover/Ramsgate port whose function is to check that there are no overt signs of welfare problems that may have occurred during the journey to the port and to ensure that mandatory systems (e.g. ventilation and water delivery systems) remain functional. These inspectors do not check all of the vehicles and neither do they routinely inspect (as described above) any vehicles. To do so would not be proportionate, given that they have been subject to a supervised inspection at loading at the departure premises.

Why doesn't the Government allow RSPCA personnel to inspect vehicles carrying animals at ports?

The Government has had no role to play in the decision by the Dover Harbour Board not to allow RSPCA staff into the port of Dover. Nor does it have a part to play in the decision by Thanet District Council to allow RSPCA inspectors to be present during sailings from Ramsgate port. However, it must be made clear that those working for the RSPCA have no statutory powers to inspect vehicles/vessels carrying animals.

Furthermore, it would not be possible for the Government to grant such powers of inspection to RSPCA personnel. Under the relevant EU legislation on the conduct of official controls in relation to food and feed law (Council Regulation 882/2004) inspectors must be impartial and free from any conflict of interest. Given that the RSPCA is publicly committed to achieving a ban on the trade in live exports, their personnel would not be able to demonstrate that they comply with these important legal requirements.

What is the Government doing to protect these animals in extreme weather?

The requirements for protecting the welfare of animals during transport are set out in Council Regulation EC 1/2005. The Regulation specifies a number of measures intended to protect animals from extremes of temperature.

Farm livestock and horses being transported over long journeys (journeys exceeding eight hours) must be transported in vehicles which are capable of maintaining a range of temperatures from 5 degrees Centigrade to 30 degrees Centigrade within the vehicle (with a tolerance of +/- 5 degrees Centigrade), at any time during a journey, whether the vehicle is stationary or moving.

Vehicles must be fitted with a temperature monitoring system (as well as the means of recording temperature data) and a warning system to alert the driver when the temperature in the compartments where the animals are located reaches the maximum or minimum limits.

Additionally, vehicles must be fitted with a ventilation system capable of operating independently from the vehicle's engine for up to four hours and delivering a specified volume of air, they must be equipped with water tanks that are capable of carrying a capacity at least equal to 1.5% of the vehicle's maximum payload and they must be equipped with a light coloured and insulated roof.

These vehicles must be inspected and approved to establish that, amongst others, the above requirements are met. In Great Britain, these inspections are undertaken by designated approval bodies.

In addition to the legal requirements, the APHA issued guidance to transporters in relation to transporting animals in hot weather between 1 July and 30 September. This guidance includes a number of measures to mitigate the effects of increased temperatures such as:

- inspecting animals more frequently for signs of heat stress;
- providing water or electrolyte solutions more frequently;
- avoid penning animals in the hotter parts of the vehicle, which are located at the front end and higher levels of the vehicle;
- increasing the space allowance for the animals by up to 30%;
- increasing headroom above animals to maximise air movement and increase the potential for heat exchange; remove tiers and folding decks where possible;
- avoid travelling in the hotter parts of the day by scheduling the journey or planning to take advantage of cooler conditions at night; and
- parking in the shade whenever possible, ideally with the vehicle positioned perpendicular to any prevailing wind.

APHA undertakes risk-based checks to monitor for compliance with all aspects of the Regulation.

Next steps

If after reading this briefing note you still have unanswered questions, please contact Defra on 03459 33 55 77, at helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk or at:

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Please note the title and publication date of the briefing note you have received in any future correspondence on this issue.