



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
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Rt Hon George Howarth MP
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JA

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George Howarth

Thank you for your email of 21 November on behalf of a number of your constituents about the EU (Withdrawal) Bill and the recognition of animals as sentient beings in UK law after we leave the EU.

As I set out in my Written Ministerial Statement on 23 November, the government is committed to the very highest standards of animal welfare as we leave the EU.

The recent vote in the House of Commons was not a vote against animal sentience. As was made clear during the debate preceding the vote, this government's policies on animal welfare are driven by our recognition that animals are indeed sentient beings and we are acting energetically to reduce the risk of harm to animals – whether on farms or in the wild. The vote was the rejection of a faulty amendment that would not have provided appropriate protection for animals.

The Prime Minister has made clear that we will strengthen our animal welfare rules. This government will ensure that any necessary changes required to UK law are made in a rigorous and comprehensive way to ensure animal sentience is recognised after we leave the EU and we are considering the right legislative vehicle for this.

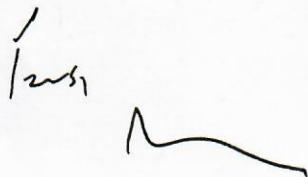
Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) has not delivered the progress we want to see. It does not have direct effect in UK law and only applies to six specific areas, ranging from agriculture to space policy. It only applies to EU policy, which will no longer be implemented in the UK after we leave. It also contains an imprecisely-defined qualification for member states' customs. Ultimately, Article 13 has failed to prevent practices across the EU which are cruel and painful to animals.

In contrast, here in the UK, we are improving animal welfare standards without EU input and beyond the scope of Article 13. We are making CCTV mandatory in all slaughterhouses – a requirement which goes above and beyond any EU rule. We will consult on draft legislation to jail animal abusers for up to five years – more than almost every other European nation. We propose combatting elephant poaching with a ban on the ivory trade which is more comprehensive than anywhere else in Europe. Our ban on microbeads which harm marine animals has been welcomed by Greenpeace as “the strongest in the world”, and is certainly the strongest in Europe.

This government will continue to promote and enhance animal welfare, both now and after we have left the EU.

Thank you again for your letter.

With every good wish,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gove', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Gove