

News & Reports

Labour unveils its vision for animal welfare

By Josh Loeb

LABOUR has published an animal welfare manifesto, the party's first wide-ranging review of the issue.

The document sets out 50 action points, including a pledge to appoint a dedicated animal welfare commissioner to ensure government policy is 'continually informed' by animal sentience and best animal welfare practice.

Among other commitments, the party says it will enshrine the principle of animal sentience in law, end live exports, introduce a ban on the 'use of cages' on British farms as well as a 'phased' ban on the use of sow farrowing crates (see box).

The manifesto is based on work carried last year and is informed by 6000 submissions to a consultation.

Sue Haman, shadow Defra secretary, said: 'Our vision is one where no animal is made to suffer unnecessary pain and degradation and where we continue to drive up standards.'

Perhaps most controversially, Labour's manifesto includes a long-term pledge to entirely abolish animal testing.

The party says it will review the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and will commit 'within an achievable timeframe' to ending experiments classified as most 'severe' in terms of suffering caused.

Under the proposal, the UK would first eliminate 'avoidable tests' before gradually phasing out all animal testing. As an alternative, the party says it would commission the development of 'non-animal research methods and technologies'.

The party says it is concerned about a 'no-deal' Brexit leading to a deterioration in animal welfare standards. It also wants to set higher welfare standards; for example, banning fur products and the importation of foie gras products – actions that are currently impossible under EU law due to it undermining the principle of the free movement of goods.

In a sign that senior opposition politicians are gearing up for the post-Brexit era, Labour has also announced that it would introduce a new system of farm subsidies – as an alternative to the current



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EU-wide system – and improve animal welfare in farming as the UK leaves the EU. The Conservatives have already announced similar changes to the system post-Brexit.

The issue of non-stun slaughter went without mention in Labour's manifesto.

The BVA welcomed the manifesto. President Simon Doherty said he was 'pleased that the Labour Party echoes many of BVA's concerns and campaigning priorities in other points of this extensive document.'

Doherty continued: 'It's good to see sentience near the top of Labour's very wide-ranging list of animal welfare priorities for government...We will continue to engage closely with parties and stakeholders to keep momentum up at this crucial time on the issues that matter most to our members.'

The current Conservative government is also committed to enshrining animal sentience into British law (Article 13 of the Lisbon Treaty stipulates that animals are sentient) – but Defra has put such plans on ice until after Brexit.

Theresa Villiers, the environment secretary, responded to the release of the manifesto by saying that Labour was 'playing catch up' with the government on issues of animal welfare. ●

OTHER KEY POLICIES OUTLINED IN LABOUR'S MANIFESTO INCLUDE:

- Banning the keeping of and trade in pet primates
- Introducing mandatory microchipping of cats
- Ensuring that private tenants can keep pets 'as a default' unless there is evidence that the animal is causing a nuisance or its welfare is compromised
- Working with care homes to explore the potential for allowing elderly, disabled and homeless people who move into sheltered accommodation to keep their pets
- Appointing an animal welfare commissioner to ensure government policy is 'continually informed' by animal sentience and best practice on welfare
- Working with relevant agencies to provide 'safe houses' for pets of people escaping from domestic violence
- Expanding the legal definition of 'animal' to include decapod crustaceans and cephalopods – thereby ending the practise of boiling lobsters alive
- Banning the importation of foie gras
- Banning badger culling
- Banning fur imports