

Backbench BUSINESS



Laura Sandys calls on Parliament to lead the way on improving animal welfare standards across Europe

Exporting live animals to slaughter is a cruel trade that is totally unnecessary. I am frankly embarrassed that we are continuing to allow live animals to be shipped overseas in cramped lorries for what at times seem like endless journeys, only for them to then be slaughtered. At the very centre of this issue is a struggle over our own sovereignty with European Single Market legislation taking precedence over the UK's desire to lead the way in ensuring the very highest standards of welfare legislation.

This battle has become more important over the last few months since a cold and wet night in September when 47 animals had to be put to death in what can only be described as a bloody massacre. The whole incident was completely unnecessary with just two sheep originally being slaughtered after they were found to be injured. The death toll rose after the lorry had been declared unfit for purpose and the animals needed to be unloaded. With no lairage facilities, the sheep were put in an area where the floor then collapsed. Two

drowned and after an inspection of all the remaining sheep, 41 had to be shot dead after being found to be lame.

The Council stopped the exports on the grounds that they were not set up to adequately protect animal welfare but a legal challenge has since been posed by the operators of the trade and the shipments have resumed on the grounds that it is a legal trade, despite no appropriate facilities for animals being available. I am astounded at how we can possibly allow EU free trade legislation to take precedence over animal welfare and this is something that we desperately need to review.

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Even in the UK, The Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA) has been widely criticised locally for failing to inspect animals thoroughly with reports of cursory glances over hundreds of animals packed into tiered lorries. AHVLA has representatives present at the time of boarding (at the tax payer's expense) to ensure the welfare of the animals. The RSPCA also attend voluntarily but rely

on the goodwill of the driver as they have no statutory powers allowing them to inspect the animals. I have small, struggling businesses in my constituency that have to pay to comply with health and safety regulations. Why should the operators of this trade not be paying for a thorough, gold standard veterinary inspection to ensure their compliance with animal welfare legislation?

There is much support across the country for changes to legislation and I believe there is so much more that Parliament can do. As a professed nation of animal lovers, we should be pursuing the very highest animal welfare standards, yet we appear to be saying that it is legal for these animals to be put at risk. I will be presenting a petition on this issue in the House and am urging as many of my colleagues as possible to join me. I am also hoping that there will be a Westminster Hall debate in the near future to highlight the issue.

This trade brings shame on our well deserved record on animal welfare and without addressing the serious failings in our system we will not be able to lead the way in upholding and improving animal welfare standards across Europe. 🇬🇧

Laura Sandys is Conservative MP for South Thanet

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