

Animal welfare to be strengthened in Wales

Maximum animal cruelty sentences in Wales are set to increase to five years and the Cabinet Secretary has written to Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) on the issue of introducing legislation on an England and Wales basis.

Currently the maximum sentence in England and Wales for an offence under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 is six months, in addition to unlimited fine and ban.

Officials from England and Wales will now work together on the introduction of the Bill. The UK Government today submitted a draft Bill for the consideration of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee and intends to introduce the Bill as soon as Parliamentary time permits.

Cabinet Secretary said:

“We have always been clear the way we treat animals is an important reflection of the values of our society. Animals should be protected from pain, injury, fear and distress, and those who commit the worst acts of animal cruelty should face tough punishments.

“That is why I have written to the Secretary of State on the issue of introducing legislation on an England and Wales basis. Increasing the sentence to five years imprisonment will maintain a comparative sentencing regime across England and Wales and will bring clarity for enforcement agencies, the Courts and the public alike.

“It will also bring the maximum sentences for animal cruelty in England and Wales in line with Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the Scottish Government’s plans in this important area.”

The draft Bill published today sets out the government “must have regard to the welfare needs of animals as sentient beings in formulating and implementing government policy”.

Cabinet Secretary added:

“Our position on sentience has been very clear. We fully agree that animals are sentient beings and we will continue to promote and enhance animal welfare, both now and after we have left the EU.

“The issue of sentience not being on the face of any UK Bill was a concern for us and our stakeholders, particularly the British Veterinary Association. Therefore the inclusion of this sensitive element in this UK Bill will provide confidence and regularise the position.

“I will be meeting with the Secretary of State later this week and am pleased he is now backing up his messages on the importance of animal welfare and animal sentience with decisive action. I look forward to these discussions.”