

Gove delivers new bill to punish animal abusers

Environment Secretary Michael Gove has announced a new bill to enable tougher prison sentences for the worst animal abusers which will be introduced to Parliament today (Wednesday 26 June).

The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill means that animal abusers could face up to five years in prison, a significant increase from the current maximum sentence of six months.

This will make it one of the toughest sanctions in Europe, strengthening the UK's position as a global leader on animal welfare.

The Bill follows a [public consultation last year](#), in which more than 70% of people supported the proposals for tougher prison sentences. It means the courts will be able to take a tougher approach to cases such as dog fighting, abuse of puppies and kittens, or gross neglect of farm animals.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

There is no place in this country for animal cruelty. That is why I want to make sure that those who abuse animals are met with the full force of the law. Our new Bill sends a clear message that this behaviour will not be tolerated, with the maximum five-year sentence one of the toughest punishments in Europe.

I am committed to making our country the best place in the world for the care and protection of animals.

The RSPCA received 1,175,193 calls to their 24-hour cruelty hotline in 2018 with a call every 27 seconds.

There have also been a number of cases in the last few years in which the courts said they would have handed down longer sentences had they been available.

Recent examples include a case when a man trained dogs to ruthlessly torture other animals, including trapping a fox and a terrier dog in a cage to brutally attack each other.

Animal Welfare Minister, David Rutley, said:

These increased maximum sentences will act as a serious deterrent against cruelty and neglect in the future. This step builds on recent positive action we have taken to protect animals, including plans to ban third party puppy and kitten sales and banning the use

of wild animals in circuses.

Claire Horton, Chief Executive of Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, said:

The introduction of this bill is a landmark achievement, which will make a profound difference to dogs and cats in England and Wales.

We, and many other rescue centres, see shocking cases of cruelty and neglect come through our gates and there are many more animals that are dumped and don't even make it off the streets. Research shows that tougher prison sentences act as a deterrent to would-be criminals, so today's announcement should prevent the suffering of many animals in the future.

Chief Executive for the RSPCA, Chris Sherwood, said:

This reform is long overdue. Those responsible for extreme cruelty towards animals or those criminal gangs involved in organised animal crime will now face the tough justice they deserve.

We need to better protect our animals and the RSPCA hopes that this new Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill will give courts the powers they need to punish those responsible for the most unimaginable cruelty to animals.

We also believe this will act as a much stronger deterrent to others and help us stamp out animal cruelty once and for all.

Today's announcement complements [Finn's Law](#), which came into effect earlier this month and provides increased protection for service dogs and horses. It was named after a German shepherd named Finn, a police dog stabbed in the head and chest in 2016 while trying to catch a man suspected of robbing a taxi driver at gunpoint.

If passed into law, today's Bill means that that someone who attacks a police dog could face a sentence of five years in prison.

PC David Wardell, Finn's handler said:

I've always been hugely supportive of animal welfare. Hence my campaign for #FinnsLaw after our incident. I was also keen to support the government's call for increased sentencing for all animal welfare cases so that we can send out the important message that our animals matter.

To hear the announcement today that the government is set to increase maximum sentences, #FinnsLawPart2, tenfold is fantastic news and will of course ensure that all animals, including our

amazing service animals, will have the best protections available in law.

I thank the public for their amazing support with this second and vital part of our #Finnslaw campaigns. It has been refreshing to see people get involved, politely, in politics and bring real and positive change.

The Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill will be introduced into the House of Commons, before moving through to the House of Lords. If passed, it will come into effect in two months after it receives Royal Assent.

[Video content of a case study of a dog from Battersea which suffered abuse is available for download](#) and publication by media outlets.