

News story: Animal cruelty maximum sentences will be increased government confirms

Animal abusers who commit the most heinous crimes will face up to five years in jail after draft legislation set out by Environment Secretary Michael Gove gained strong support from welfare groups and the public.

Currently the maximum sentence is six months but following a consultation the Government has today confirmed it will legislate to increase that tenfold for serious offences, sending a clear sign there is no place for animal cruelty in England.

The draft Animal Welfare (Sentencing and Recognition of Sentience) Bill was put out to consultation in December 2017.

The consultation also set out proposals to ensure animal sentience is reflected in domestic law when we leave the EU. [A summary of responses](#) has been published today and work on this will continue.

But in line with the recommendation from the EFRA Committee, [earlier this year](#), legislation on sentencing will be brought forward separately so courts have the powers available to them.

Animal Welfare Minister, Lord Gardiner said:

This Government is making good on our commitment to make the UK a world leader in the care and protection of animals as we leave the EU.

Our proposals to raise maximum sentences for animal abusers attracted strong support. We will now legislate so courts have the power to punish offenders properly.

We will also continue to work with welfare organisations to ensure that animal sentience is properly recognised in our legislation once we have left the EU.

The Government also supported the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Bill, introduced to Parliament by Sir Oliver Heald MP. The Bill, which passed its second reading in July, will ensure service animals such as police dogs and horses will be offered greater protection. The proposed legislation will remove a section of the current law of self-defence, often used by those who harm a service animal in the process of committing a crime.

The plans to increase maximum sentences follow a number of shocking cases where courts have said they would have handed down longer sentences had they

been available.

These include a case last year 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.

The move has been strongly welcomed by animal welfare groups and follows dedicated campaigning from Battersea Dogs & Cats Home.

Battersea's Chief Executive Claire Horton said:

Battersea welcomes the results of today's consultation as they confirm the nation is no longer prepared to put up with a six month sentence for shocking cases of cruelty to animals.

We believe a five year maximum sentence is far more appropriate and to the credit of the Government they have listened. We look forward to seeing the Bill laid before Parliament this year.

These plans are part of wider programme of reform to cement the UK's position as a global leader on animal welfare. This includes making CCTV mandatory in all English slaughterhouses and taking steps to control the export of live farm animals for slaughter as we leave the EU.