

# Animals to be formally recognised as sentient beings in domestic law

Introduction of the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill as part of the Government's Action Plan for Animal Welfare

Press release from: [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#) and [The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith](#)

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- Government introduces Bill to formally recognise animals as sentient beings
- Animal Sentience Committee will put animal sentience at heart of government policy
- Bill introduced as part of government's first of a kind [Action Plan for Animal Welfare](#)

Vertebrate animals will be recognised as sentient beings for the first time in UK law thanks to the introduction of the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill, introduced in Parliament today.

The legislation will also ensure that animal sentience is taken into account when developing policy across Government through the creation of a Animal Sentience Committee which will be made up of animal experts from within the field.

By enshrining sentience in domestic law in this way, any new legislation will have to take into account the fact that animals can experience feelings such as pain or joy. The Bill will underpin the Government's [Action Plan for Animal Welfare](#), which launched yesterday and sets out the government's plans to improve standards and eradicate cruel practices for animals both domestically and internationally.

The Bill's introduction, fulfilling a key Manifesto commitment, will further the UK's position as a world-leader on animal welfare. Now that we have left the EU we have the opportunity to remake laws and go further to promote animal welfare by making sure that all Government departments properly consider animal sentience when designing policy, covering all vertebrate animals from farm to forest.

## **The Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill will:**

- formally recognise animals as sentient beings in domestic law
- establish an Animal Sentience Committee made up of experts to ensure cross departmental government policy considers animal sentience
- ensure Government Ministers update parliament on recommendations made by the Animal Sentience Committee

## **Launching the Bill, Animal Welfare minister Lord Goldsmith said:**

The UK has always led the way on animal welfare and now that we've left the EU we are free to drive for the highest standards of animal welfare anywhere in the world.

Formally recognising in law that animals are sentient and experience feelings in the same way humans do is just the first step in our flagship Action Plan for Animal Welfare which will further transform the lives of animals in this country and strengthen our position as a global leader.

**Claire Bass, Executive Director of Humane Society International/UK said:**

45 of the UK's most respected animal protection organisations have been united in calling for this Bill, which recognises that animals have the ability to experience feelings, including pain, joy and fear, and that their emotions and welfare deserve consideration and protection when laws are made.

The formation of an Animal Sentience Committee is a very welcome step; it must though be designed with the right expertise, independence, resourcing and access to information to enable it to provide robust and constructive scrutiny. We hope that it will support government's delivery of a progressive welfare strategy built on respect for the needs of sentient animals, who enrich and improve our lives in so many ways.

**James West, Senior Policy Manager, Compassion in World Farming, said:**

Compassion in World Farming warmly welcome today's publication of legislation that recognises animals as sentient beings – capable of experiencing joy, pain and suffering. We applaud this initiative that will apply to policies being developed across all UK Government departments.

We look forward to the newly established Committee being effective in ensuring that Ministers pay all due regard to animal sentience when formulating and implementing policy. As a nation of animal lovers, we should not expect anything less than granting sentient beings the legal recognition they unequivocally deserve.

The UK has a long history of improving the lives of animals, being the first country in the world to pass legislation to protect animals in 1822 with the Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act and later the landmark Protection of Animals Act in 1911.

The Government has continued to uphold this tradition of high welfare standards over the years through many reforms, ranging from banning the use of battery cages for laying hens and introducing compulsory CCTV in slaughter houses and most recently [raising the maximum sentence](#) for animal cruelty from six months to five years.