

P-05-1097 Ban game bird cages

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 26 Ionawr 2020
Petitions Committee | 26 January 2020

Reference: RS20/14886-1

Petition Number: P-05-1097

Petition title: Ban game bird cages

Text of petition: Millions of pheasants and partridges are estimated to be factory farmed in Wales each year so that they can be shot for 'sport'. To breed them, tens of thousands of parent birds are confined to cages, often for much of their breeding lives. Cages are cruel and cause animals to suffer. The Welsh Government has previously indicated support for Wales to become a cage-free nation. We call for the Welsh Government to ban the use of cages to produce game birds.

Additional Information provided:

Life in a cage can lead to distress and injury, and doesn't fully allow for birds' needs or natural behaviour. Their suffering can include painful open foot sores, stress-induced attacks and injury from repeated attempts to escape. To reduce problem behaviours linked to their captivity, such as pecking other birds, devices such as plastic bits forced into their nostrils can also be used.

Pheasants and partridges are semi-wild by nature, making the impact of cages all the greater. Yet they're not even covered by the basic regulations granted to other farmed animals or routinely inspected. Investigations have revealed breaches of guidance such as repeated use of barren cages and dead pheasants left long enough in cages to be cannibalised. Even in cages described as 'enriched', there could be as little as a single shared perch, a plastic curtain and some astroturf.

Whether confined to barren or 'enriched' cages, game birds suffer. The Welsh Government has the power to end this practice.



This petition was submitted by The League Against Cruel Sports having collected a total of 5,287 signatures.

1. Background

There is no specific legislation regulating the breeding and rearing of birds for sporting purposes.

However, all gamebird breeders must comply with the relevant laws relating to their operation. In particular, the keeping of live birds in captivity falls within the scope of, and protection conferred by, the [Animal Welfare Act 2006](#) (the 2006 Act). The 2006 Act contains several provisions which are of particular relevance:

- Section 4 provides that animals must be protected from unnecessary suffering; and
- Section 9 requires that if a person is responsible for an animal that the animal's needs are met. This includes its need:
 - for a suitable environment;
 - for a suitable diet;
 - to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns;
 - to be housed with, or apart from, other animals (as required); and
 - to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

The Welsh Government published a [Code of Practice for the Welfare of Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes](#) (2011) ('the Code of Practice' hereafter). It provides guidance in relation to Section 9 of the 2006 Act (discussed below).

Concerns about a specific gamebird rearing premises can be reported to the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) or the relevant Local Authority as they are responsible for the delivery and enforcement of animal health and welfare provisions on behalf of the Welsh Government. A [freedom of information request](#) showed the number of APHA visits to pheasant shooting premises in Wales: 1 in 2014; 0 in 2015; and 0 in 2016 (out of 359, 167 and 190 registered pheasant premises in the respective years).

Other laws, including those relating to planning, registration, medicine controls, disposal of animal by-products and animal transport also apply and are outlined in Annex 1 of the Code of Practice.

The Welsh Government could legislate to regulate the breeding of birds for sporting purposes, if the purpose of such legislation was the promotion of animal welfare.

2. Welsh Government action

Code of Practice

The Welsh Government published its Code of Practice for the Welfare of Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes in 2011. The Welsh Government's letter to the Committee on this petition states that the Code of Practice was developed in consultation with stakeholders including representatives from the shooting industry and welfare organisations.

The Code of Practice states that when birds are housed or penned, the accommodation should be well constructed and managed, and of sufficient size to ensure good health and welfare. It also states that barren raised cages for breeding pheasants and small barren cages for breeding partridges should not be used. All laying systems used for the housing of birds should be designed and managed to ensure the welfare of the birds and any system should be appropriately enriched.

The Welsh Government's paper to the Committee states that any future changes made to the Code of Practice or welfare legislation will be made with due consideration given to all stakeholder feedback, along with relevant research, analysis and evidence.

Natural Resources Wales review of shooting activity

In 2016 Natural Resources Wales (NRW) began a review of shooting activity on its land. The (then) Minister for Environment, Hannah Blythyn MS, wrote to NRW in 2018 stating that the Welsh Government does not support pheasant shooting, the breeding of gamebirds, or the birds being kept in holding pens, on the Welsh Government Estate. NRW took the decision to stop the leasing of pheasant shooting rights on the Welsh Government Woodland Estate (WGWE) with effect from March 2019, when the existing leases expired.

In terms of rearing the birds NRW concluded:

The evidence indicates that the rearing and release in pens of gamebirds can, if not well managed, impact on the welfare of the birds. The WG [Welsh Government] Code of Practice provides a statement of best practice to address the issue.

3. Welsh Parliament action

The Petitions Committee has previously considered petition [P-05-816 'Say NO to pheasant shooting on Welsh public land.'](#)

The League Against Cruel Sports provided a [letter to the Committee](#) during its consideration of that petition in 2018. It referred to the rearing of game birds for shooting and the Welsh Government's Code of Practice:

...there are no independent checks undertaken to assess whether the Code is being followed by game bird breeders, so in practice, compliance with the Code is voluntary. There are no inspections of game bird rearing sites carried out by the Animal and Plant Health Agency. Any inspection of a game bird rearing site would only be carried out in response to a welfare concern raised directly with APHA or the local authority but given that game bird rearing facilities are private businesses, it is highly unlikely that any welfare breaches would be detected and reported.

In addition, the Code itself is eight years old and is insufficient to guarantee the welfare of the birds as it lacks even a basic minimum space requirement per bird. Animal Aid's investigations over a number of years have revealed that this Code is often disregarded with no consequences for the game bird producer.

This petition was closed in January 2019 in light of the NRW Board's decision not to offer any extension to the leases for pheasant shooting rights once they expired in March 2019, following the Welsh Government's intervention.

In June 2018 Bethan Sayed, MS, [raised the question in Plenary](#) (para 332) as to when the Code of Practice might be reviewed saying 'in conversations that I've had with the League Against Cruel Sports, this is not monitored at the moment.'

The Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths MS, responded (para 337) that she had agreed with the UK Department for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the other devolved administrations that they will work together to review and revise the Code of Practice. A timeline was not given.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.