

**P-05-1097 Ban game bird cages¹: Correspondence – Petitioner to Petitions Committee – 23
November 2021**

The League Against Cruel Sports (the “League”) is grateful for the opportunity to submit its views on correspondence relating to Petition P-05-1097 (the “Petition”) in advance of the Petitions Committee (the “Committee”) meeting on 29 November 2021.

This note is ordered so as to respond to each point of the document attached to the Committee’s email dated 18 November 2021 (namely, a letter from Lesley Griffiths (the “Minister”) dated 16 November 2021) in the order in which they are dealt with in the letter.

Animal Welfare Plan

Thank you for drawing the League’s attention to the Animal Welfare Plan (the “Plan”) for Wales 2021-2026. We welcome the explicit reference to an examination of the use of cages for gamebirds as part of a commitment to “*restrict the use of cages for Farmed Animals*” (the “Key Commitment”). Whilst this is a positive development in the consideration of the welfare of breeding game birds, it does not answer the Petition’s ask and consequently the Petition is still a live issue for the Committee.

We note that the annex to the Plan sets out in broad terms the planned timescale for the delivery of each commitment: the Key Commitment is set to be delivered by the year 2022/2023, having started in the year 2021/2022.

As well as setting out the timescales for delivery, we note that the annex to the Plan seeks to break down the individual component actions to each commitment. However, contrary to the other commitments included, the Key Commitment has no such breakdown and accordingly we do not have the benefit of monitoring the Key Commitment’s progress in the same way that it is possible to monitor the others. For this reason, we would appreciate a more explicit breakdown of the action planned to address the Key Commitment and the associated timetable. To the extent that actions in relation to the Key Commitment have already been progressed, the League would be grateful for an indication of the action taken to date.

Code of Practice

The League is aware of the collaboration with stakeholders behind the development of the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes (the “Code”) and the purpose of the Code. The Minister clearly explained this in her letter to the Committee dated 23 February 2021. The latest letter from the Minister dated 16 November 2021 repeats this explanation.

As set out in the League’s letter to the Committee dated 18 January 2021, the existence of the Code, either standalone or combined with the Animal Welfare Act 2006, does not sufficiently address the cruelty of the use of cages for game birds. The League believes that the draft, revised Code² is equally insufficient and that a clear commitment to ban the use of cages for the breeding of game birds is reasonable and the best way to protect game birds from this suffering.

¹ This petition was submitted by LACS having collected a total of 5,287 signatures.

² We are not aware of the current status of the draft, revised Code and refer to our note dated 8 March 2021.

To the extent that the Minister is minded to consider acting to prohibit cage breeding of game birds, the League suggests that an opportune time to address this would be as part of the upcoming Agriculture (Wales) Bill³.

Covid situation and transition out of the European Union

The League appreciates that Covid-19 has presented new short-term priorities for the government and that this, combined with the transition out of the European Union, has significantly impacted timescales for consideration of issues such as this. However, nine months have passed since the letter from the Minister dated 23 February 2021, which cited “*ongoing pressures of the Covid situation and following transition out of the European Union*”. Given that the Minister’s latest letter explains that these pressures are the reasons that the review into the Code is on hold, the League would be grateful for:

- (a) an update on the current stage the review of the Code is considered to have reached – as a stakeholder, the League participated in the review which commenced in 2019 but we have not received an update since that time;
- (b) an indication of what the next steps will be in relation to the review of the Code – as set out in our letter to the Committee dated 18 January 2021, the League considered the review of the Code to date to be too narrow in scope and a “*wasted opportunity to address many of its [the Code’s] weaknesses and improve welfare requirements*”. We would welcome further opportunity for stakeholder conversations around and suggested amendments to the revised, draft Code. Accordingly, we would appreciate confirmation that further consultation with stakeholders is going to be sought prior to approving a new code and whether the review as part of the Key Commitment will interact with the ongoing review of the Code; and
- (c) an indication of the overall anticipated delay bearing in mind the timescale change due to Covid-19 and Brexit transition pressures.

The game bird shooting season is again in progress, a significant number of breeding game birds used to supply the shooting industry are at risk of great suffering and it would reassure the League to hear that definite progress is being made to address this issue. This is an issue for which opinion polling at least as far back as 2018 revealed massive public support: 82% of the Welsh public opposed the use of cages for breeding game birds⁴.

Reporting concerns

The League is aware of the reporting procedure for concerns about specific gamebird rearing premises. This was also brought to our attention in the Minister’s letter to the Committee dated 23 February 2021. The latest letter from the Minister dated 16 November 2021 repeats this explanation.

³ The Consultation for this Bill sought proposals for, amongst other issues, improving animal health and welfare.

⁴ YouGov/League Against Cruel Sports (2018).

https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/1qaemiv24u/YG-Archive-230418-League%20AgainstCruelSports.pdf

The League maintains its belief that it is extremely unlikely that concerns relating to specific gamebird rearing premises will be reported to the Animal and Plant Health Agency considering that these premises are usually located on private land and the evidence required to support such concerns may be difficult, if not impossible, to collect without trespass. This, combined with the lack of system for routine or unannounced independent inspections⁵ of these types of premises, gives us little faith that breaches of welfare requirements for game birds are discovered and/or reported.

Additional Information

The Committee's email of 18 November 2021 invited the League to include any additional information which it would like to bring to the Committee's attention at this stage.

We do not believe that the Committee's minuted agreement at its 26 January 2021 meeting to "*seek clarification as to why the Minister is not minded to act to move further to prohibit the practice of caging birds for this purpose*"⁶ has yet been addressed by the Minister. The League would appreciate such clarification, with reference to the our note dated 8 March 2021.

Overall, it is the League's view that the letter dated 16 November 2021 does not sufficiently address the issues raised by the petition or the previous correspondence from the League and the Committee. We would be grateful for a substantive response from the Minister addressing questions raised in this note in due course. The League thanks the Committee for the consideration of this note. We are keen to assist and remain at the Committee's disposal as a key stakeholder in this matter.

⁵ We refer to our letter dated 18 January 2021.

⁶ <https://business.senedd.wales/ielssueDetails.aspx?IId=35017&Opt=3>