

**P-06-1202 Ban the killing of day old chicks in Wales, Correspondence –
Petitioner to Committee, 27.01.22**

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Mr Jack Sargeant, M.S.

Chair of the Petitions Committee

Welsh Parliament

27th January 2022

Dear Mr Sargeant

Re Petition 06-1202: Ban the killing of day-old chicks in Wales.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to correspondence you have received from the RSPCA and the Humane Slaughter Association (HSA) in connection with the above petition.

I think it is first important to emphasise that irrespective of the method used to kill chicks in the egg industry, the process inherently involves the destruction of sentient individuals. The chicks involved (about 40 million in the U.K.) hatch, are fully aware and are sentient and are concerned to live. It is surely better that the necessity for this to occur, treating the animals as by-products in their millions, is avoided.

With respect to the methods used, both the HSA and the RSPCA, are of the view that instantaneous maceration is potentially 'humane', in the sense of avoiding suffering, though the HSA emphasises that this can be assumed only where 'best practice' is followed. However, the egg industry has indicated that maceration is not used in the U.K. The alternative is the use of gas, by which most, if not all, male chicks in the U.K. are destroyed.

Gas combinations that may be used include high concentration carbon dioxide, carbon dioxide mixed with argon, or high concentration argon. There is much evidence that stunning of any animal with carbon dioxide causes significant distress and this is likely to be the case if used to kill male chicks. However, the egg industry has asserted that high concentration argon, not carbon dioxide, is almost exclusively used. The RSPCA response states that, 'As argon gas is inert there is no aversive reaction from the chicks to this killing method'. There is no basis for this statement, and the HSA (who have greater expertise on the matter) report evidence that suggests that use of argon may not only be aversive but may even induce more stress than the use of carbon dioxide. Moreover, with respect to the use of gas to kill chicks, the HAS states in its response, '...the welfare risks of gas killing are inherent and so it may not be possible to avoid them by employing best practice'.

It is also important to note that the welfare harms associated with the killing of male chicks are not limited to the slaughter process itself. When chicks (both male and female) are hatched in the large-

scale operations where this occurs, chicks are placed in their thousands on conveyor belts and jostled roughly, before hand 'sexers' unceremoniously grab the chicks and place them at high speed in either the 'male' (to be destroyed) or 'female' (to be reared on) lines of the conveyor belt. These processes hardly respect the welfare of the animals.

The RSPCA response seeks to justify the continued killing of male chicks in the egg industry on the grounds that the chicks are used to feed 'birds of prey, exotic pets and captive animals in zoos', and that, were these chicks not to be available, food sources (potentially rats and mice) might be used which involve greater welfare harms because of the unregulated sources that would potentially be used. This kind of argument is one that the egg industry itself uses—it wants to avoid change and also benefits commercially from the sale of dead male chicks. However, this is a justification in terms of meeting human interests and not the welfare of animals. The private keeping of birds of prey and exotic pets in itself creates major welfare harms with animals often kept in inappropriate conditions. Captive animals in zoos are also very often kept in inappropriate conditions and the justifications for doing so ('education' or 'conservation') are seldom in practice realized. We should not be justifying the unnecessary killing of tens of millions of male chicks in order to support the inappropriate keeping of animals for selfish purposes, or to support the egg industry's reluctance to change.

As my previous correspondence has indicated, there are now commercially viable, rapid and effective means of 'in-ovo' sexing, i.e., finding out the sex of an egg before it hatches. This is the basis for the newly introduced laws in France and Germany (from 1st January) of this year that prohibit the killing of male chicks as a by-product. The HSA clearly states in its response, 'We do not envisage any animal welfare downsides to the adoption of this method'. There have, moreover, as the HSA comments, been recent reports that suggest gene editing will also, in future, be able to provide a method of preventing male eggs developing as an alternative means of preventing the need for the destruction of male chicks.

Currently, about 3 million laying hens are kept in Wales. For every one of these produced, a male chick will have hatched and been destroyed. There is some uncertainty at the moment as to the extent to which laying hen eggs are hatched in Wales—the egg industry asserts that this does not occur to any substantial extent. The chicks that will grow into egg-laying hens here are most likely to be hatched in England, and the male chicks will be being destroyed in hatcheries there.

There is a need to end the production and killing of male chicks across the U.K. It would be positive, in my view, if the Petitions Committee were to clearly recommend that means should be found to end the unnecessary killing of male chicks. This might be achieved by dialogue between the Welsh and U.K. administrations to identify compatible legislative solutions to prevent the killing of male chicks in both England and Wales.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours,

David Grimsell

Welsh citizen.