



TRANSFORMING WILDLIFE PROTECTION IN THE UK

UK Wildlife Conservation and Animal Welfare Manifesto

February 2023













INTRODUCTION

THE WORLD'S WILDLIFE IS IN CRISIS.

According to the 2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, at least one million species are currently under threat of extinction, extinction rates are 'accelerating'. Nature's decline is described as 'unprecedented', and 'transformative changes' are needed to protect nature.¹

The UK is among the 93 signatory countries to the Leaders' Pledge for Nature signed in September 2020.² In addition, the government has pledged to "continue to raise the bar on animal welfare", and to "take the rest of the world with us."³ In spite of this and other high-level commitments, the UK remains one of the world's most nature depleted countries, having seen more than a 50% decline in its biodiversity since the beginning of the industrial revolution.⁴

Far too little is being done to effectively protect and restore our natural fauna and flora. Wildlife management practices such as the culling of badgers, the control of nuisance animals, and legally permissible wildlife-related activities such as trail hunting and the management of huge tracts of land for the shooting of game birds and hares for sport, continue to result in animal destruction and suffering on a massive scale. Wildlife crime continues to have devastating impacts on individual animals, wildlife habitats, and wider society.

The government has a moral imperative to protect wildlife for future generations, and to reduce the negative impacts we have on wild species and the welfare of individual animals. Protecting biodiversity is also critical in order that we maintain and improve the ecosystem services it provides such as clean air, potable water, secure food provision and defence against flooding. Thriving wildlife and biodiversity also helps limit global warming, mitigates risks to animal and human health by reducing the spread of pathogens, and provides vital benefits for our mental and physical well-being. The British public consistently appeals to our parliamentarians to improve animal welfare provisions and protect and restore our depleted fauna and flora and the diverse habitats on which they depend.

Born Free therefore calls on all political parties to recognise the importance of protecting and restoring wildlife and wild habitats and eliminating the negative impacts we have on the welfare of individual animals, by placing nature protection and animal welfare improvements front and centre of their manifesto commitments, and by following through with those commitments in the parliamentary sessions that will follow.

- ¹ <u>https://ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment</u>
- ² https://www.leaderspledgefornature.org
- ³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/985332/Action_Plan_for_Animal_Welfare.pdf
- ⁴ https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/news/2020/september/uk-has-led-the-world-in-destroying-the-natural-environment.html

IMMUTABLE PRINCIPLES

WE CALL ON ALL POLITICAL PARTIES AND PARLIAMENTARIANS TO:

- Adopt clear, ambitious targets for nature's protection and recovery, and commit to providing the resources necessary to ensure those targets are met;
- Adopt a precautionary approach favouring the protection of wild animals, plants, and the habitats on which they depend;
- Adopt an *all of government* and *all of society* approach to wildlife protection, ensuring that the protection of nature is always given primary consideration throughout policy making;
- Apply *One Health* and *One Welfare* principles and approaches across legislation and policy making relating to wildlife and wild animals;
- Identify and eliminate perverse funding and incentives that are harmful to nature and wildlife;
- Prioritise tackling wildlife crime by making all wildlife crimes notifiable and recordable, developing and implementing a clear wildlife crime policing strategy, strengthening associated prosecutorial and judicial processes, and establishing truly deterrent punitive measures;
- Ensure and improve the welfare of wild animals, both free living and captive, taking full account of their individual, social, behavioural and cultural requirements, through the robust implementation of the Sentience Act, the strengthening of relevant domestic legislation and policy, and the adoption and full implementation of relevant international agreements.

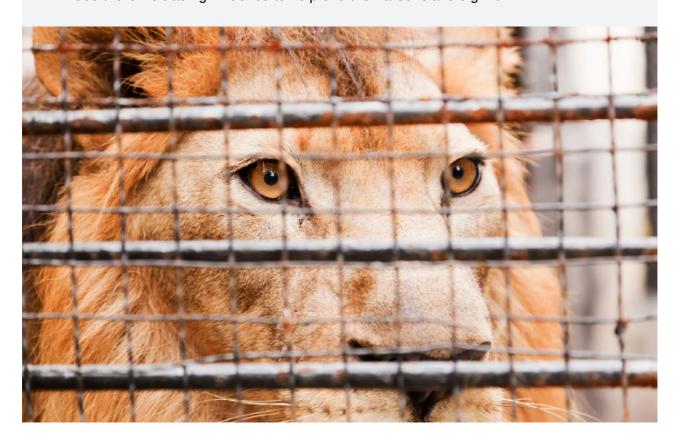
These principles should be applied to both the UK's domestic arrangements and its international policy positions, including the positions taken at international agreements, trade deals with other countries or regions, and the provision of development aid and other funding.



SUMMARY OF BORN FREE'S PRIORITIES

BORN FREE IS CALLING ON ALL POLITICAL PARTIES TO:

- Undertake a thorough review of the UK's wildlife legislation
- · Strengthen the rules that protect our most important wildlife and habitats
- Raise the ambition to achieve the protection of 30% of UK land and sea and halt the decline of wildlife by 2030
- Strengthen the implementation of the Ivory Act and include additional ivory-bearing species
- Ban the import of hunting trophies
- Ban the advertising of low welfare animal tourism activities abroad
- Improve the protection of wild animals used in exhibition and performance
- · Strengthen the Hunting Act
- Protect wild animals from the exotic pet trade
- Review and update the Dangerous Wild Animals Act
- Improve the regulation of zoos, and phase out the keeping of wild animals unsuited to captivity
- Protect hares in England and Wales from shooting during their breeding season
- Eliminate the use of cruel snares and traps
- End the import and sale of animal fur in the UK, including for military use
- End the cruel and ineffective badger cull
- Reform the UK's approach to wildlife crime
- · Use the UK's trading influence to help end the Faroe Island's grind



LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

UNDERTAKE A THOROUGH REVIEW OF WILDLIFE LEGISLATION

In November 2015, the Law Commission published its report on Wildlife Law in England and Wales, the culmination of more than four years' extensive consultation.⁵ It concluded that the UK's legal framework for wildlife management is overly complicated and frequently contradictory, and recommended replacing the patchwork of existing legislation with a single statute that would maintain existing provisions while facilitating the addition of further protections.

After seven years, the Commission's key recommendations have still not been taken forward. Since its final report and recommendations were published, the UK has left the European Union and is therefore in a stronger position to update and strengthen its own legal provisions.

Born Free urges all political parties to commit to re-examining the Law Commission's report and recommendations, with a view to simplifying and strengthening legal protections for wildlife.

MAINTAIN AND INCREASE THE PROTECTION AND RESTORATION OF THE UK'S NATURAL HABITATS

The UK is one of the world's most nature-depleted countries. 41% of UK species have declined since the 1970s and there has been a 13% decline in average abundance of wildlife in the UK. More than one in ten wildlife species in England is on the brink of extinction. 40% of bee species studied in the UK have suffered extensive local extinctions. One in eight bird species worldwide is facing extinction and half of all bird species are in decline.

The UK landscape is increasingly damaged by climate change – as seen by the increasing incidences of wildfires, drought and flooding – and protecting and restoring wild spaces is our best option for protecting lives and livelihoods from these extremes.

The abolition of EU-retained laws, including hundreds of environmental protections, the 'deregulation' of crucial laws that protect 18.8m ha of key UK habitats (Habitats Regulations), lifting the ban on hydraulic fracking, and the new planning and infrastructure law which will open up precious habitats and wildlife sites to be bulldozed and concreted over for development, will all be hugely damaging to our natural environment. In addition, the nature-friendly farming pledges (via Environmental and Land Management schemes) whereby farmers are incentivised to protect nature in order to avoid soil degradation and loss of water quality, are under serious threat.

Born Free urges political parties to urgently develop a coherent plan for nature's recovery, by retaining and strengthening the rules that protect our most important wildlife and habitats. The ambition to achieve the protection of 30% of land by 2030 and increase the abundance of wildlife by 20% by 2042 compared to current levels must be achieved. Without ensuring these protections, nature will struggle to secure us against the impacts of climate change, prevent flooding, and provide people with wellbeing benefits.

⁵ https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/wildlife-law/



ENDING THE COMMERCIAL IVORY TRADE

Born Free was closely involved in the consultation process which led to the passing of the Ivory Act in December 2018, and we welcomed its implementation when it finally came about in June 2022. However, we remain concerned about significant weaknesses which undermine the Act's intent, particularly the lack of requirement for online sites advertising exempt ivory items to display the related registration references in the adverts, and the lack of an easily accessible database by which auction houses, retail outlets or buyers can check on the validity of exemption claims. We are also concerned about the potential impact of displacement on other ivory-bearing species, particularly hippopotamus, walrus, warthog and some marine mammal species.

Born Free urges all political parties to commit to an early review of the Act's implementation, with a particular focus on online sales, and to adding other ivory-bearing species to the definition of ivory within the Act at the earliest opportunity.

BANNING HUNTING TROPHY IMPORTS

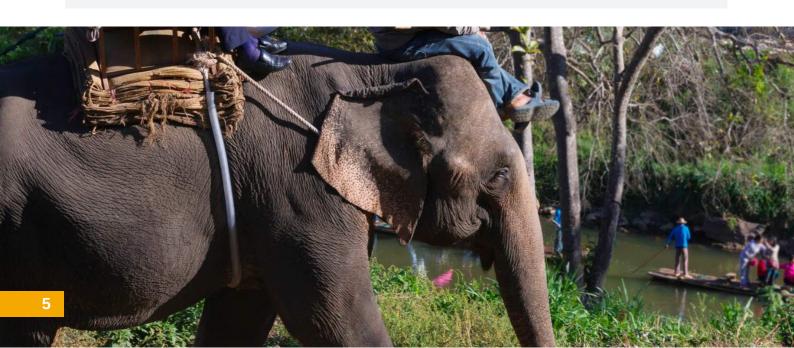
Trophy hunting can damage the conservation of wild animal populations and causes immense individual animal suffering, while providing little if any benefits for local communities or wildlife authorities. Yet UK-based hunters continue to travel overseas to target individuals of often threatened species and bring their trophies home. The UK Government has repeatedly promised to introduce a ban on the import of hunting trophies derived from threatened species. However, thus far, government has failed to introduce the associated legislation, relying instead on Private Members Bills which have limited chance of succeeding. This issue carries a consistently high level of public support and would provide a clear precedent for other countries, including those with larger markets, to follow.

Born Free urges all political parties to commit to the introduction of a comprehensive ban on the importation of hunting trophies without delay.

PROTECTING ANIMALS USED IN TOURISM OVERSEAS

The UK considers itself to be a global leader in promoting high animal welfare standards. To fulfil that ambition, a comprehensive ban on the advertising and selling of activities overseas that do not meet UK animal welfare standards should be introduced. UK businesses should not be permitted to benefit from selling attractions, activities or experiences to tourists involving the unacceptable treatment of animals.

Born Free urges political parties to commit to introducing legislation banning the advertising of low-welfare activities overseas.



PROTECTING WILD ANIMALS USED IN EXHIBITION AND PERFORMANCE

In 2018, the Government passed the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations, which introduced an updated licensing system and associated guidance on welfare standards for animals used in exhibition and performance in England. However, Born Free's report 'Exhibition or Exploitation', released in November 2021, highlighted the sheer number of wild animals of all kinds of species that are being used under licence, and how the legislation is failing to effectively protect the welfare of animals or the health and safety of people.⁶

Within Scotland and Wales, legislation governing this area is almost 100 years old.

The low-welfare practice of keeping and training wild animals for exhibition and performance has serious negative impacts on the lives of many thousands of wild animals and should have no place in modern society.

Born Free is calling on political parties to commit to reviewing the Regulations for England and across devolved administrations, with a view to introducing a prohibition on the use of wild animals for exhibition or performance, or at the very least to strengthen licensing requirements, inspection procedures and associated penalties.

STRENGTHENING THE HUNTING ACT

The Hunting Act 2004 banned the hunting of wild mammals with dogs in England and Wales. However, the Act suffers from serious enforcement inadequacies, with many allegations of illegal hunting failing to be thoroughly investigated and far too many perpetrators escaping punishment.

The Act also contains exemptions which were designed to prevent the ban affecting activities which Parliament did not intend to prohibit. However, these are being widely exploited by hunts to justify continued hunting activities. For example, stag hunts use the 'Research and Observation' exemption that was designed for researchers, and fox hunts carry birds of prey to claim they are using the 'falconry exemption'. Trail Hunting seeks to mimic traditional hunting by following a scent trail which has been laid in areas where foxes are likely to be; however trail hunts often end up pursuing and killing live foxes and other wild animals.

Born Free urges all political parties to commit to strengthening the Hunting Act:

- 1. Any use of dogs below ground should be prohibited;
- 2. Trail hunting should be banned;
- 3. A 'reckless' provision should be included in the Act;
- 4. Sentencing powers should be increased;
- 5. The Observation and Research exemption should be removed;
- 6. The available time to charge suspects with breaching the Act should be extended;
- 7.A 'vicarious liability' clause should be added to enable prosecution of employers of those in breach of the Act.

⁶ https://www.bornfree.org.uk/news/exhibition-or-exploitation



PROTECTING ANIMALS FROM THE EXOTIC PET TRADE

Many exotic species imported for the pet trade are not suited for a life in captivity. For many, it is impossible to provide them with a captive environment that meets their welfare needs, resulting in considerable suffering. Some also present significant risks to human, animal and environmental health and safety.

The true scale of exotic pet keeping in the UK is unknown. While many countries in Europe and beyond have adopted legislation to regulate this trade, the UK remains among the more permissive countries, and it is currently legal within the UK for private individuals to keep almost any wild animal as a pet. A very small proportion of species are banned, and some additional species require a licence. **Current legislation is reactionary, woefully out of date and unable to keep up** with emerging animal welfare and conservation science; nor can it adequately mitigate the risk of human injury or infection, or wider environmental consequences.

Born Free calls on all political parties to commit to a comprehensive review of the trade in and keeping of exotic pets in the UK. Consideration should be given to a Positive List system based on criteria designed to determine whether welfare needs can be met, whether there are any conservation concerns, and whether the trade presents a risk to humans, other species or the environment. Due consideration should be given to recognised best practice systems in place or in development in other countries.

ADDRESSING THE KEEPING OF DANGEROUS WILD ANIMALS

The Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 is currently unfit for purpose. Many species which are clearly 'dangerous', such as large constrictor snakes, some varanid lizards and birds of prey, are not currently included in the Schedule. The Schedule also requires updating to **ensure the taxonomy of species remains current**, and the Act is legally enforceable.

Born Free urges all political parties to commit to an urgent review of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act, with consideration given to a **central licensing system**, the need for keepers to possess a licence prior to acquiring a dangerous wild animal, an increase in inspection frequency, and mechanisms to ensure that licence holders comply with all relevant animal welfare legislation.

IMPROVING THE REGULATION OF ZOOS

Born Free welcomes the intention to improve the required contribution of zoos to **conservation**, **education and research**. The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill proposes that these requirements be moved from Section 1A of the Zoo Licensing Act to the proposed revised Standards of Modern Zoo Practice, and that compliance with the Standards should become a licensing requirement, enabling future revisions without the necessity of amending the Act itself. The Bill in its current format also revokes Section 16B(1) of the Act. We encourage the introduction of an amendment where reference to conservation measures in section 1A of the Act is replaced by the new conservation measures contained within the revised zoo standards. This will ensure the continued requirement of Local Authorities to issue a mandatory Zoo Closure Direction if zoos fail to meet their conservation requirements.

The last dolphinarium in the UK closed in 1993. However, it remains legal to keep these sentient and highly intelligent animals in captivity in the UK. While current standards are relatively prohibitive, the lack of an outright ban continues to keep the door open for dolphinaria to return to the UK.

Born Free encourages all political parties to support the proposed amendments to the Zoo Licensing Act within the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill, and to introduce these measures as a priority should they fail to progress during the current parliamentary session. The keeping of cetaceans in captivity for display purposes should also be banned.



PROTECTING HARES DURING THEIR BREEDING SEASON

Britain's hare populations are in substantial decline with spring brown hare numbers reported to have plummeted by around 80% in the past century. Species Action Plan targets to recover populations have been consistently missed. The shooting of large numbers of hares for sport during their early breeding season greatly reduces the chances of population recovery and has severe welfare implications for orphaned dependent young. Hares are the only 'game' species in England and Wales that are not currently protected during their breeding season. Scotland and most of the rest of Europe have introduced such protections. Industry-led best practice guidelines have failed to prevent the shooting of hares during their breeding season. A close season would help England and Wales meet national and international commitments to conserve hare populations and allay serious animal welfare concerns.

Born Free urges all political parties to commit to introducing a strict closed season for hares across England and Wales to cover the entire breeding period from February to September (inclusive).

ELIMINATING THE USE OF CRUEL SNARES AND TRAPS

Snares are used extensively by gamekeepers and others to 'protect' game animals. A 2012 government study estimated that as many as 1.7 million animals are trapped in snares in the UK every year, and there is no indication that this number has since reduced. Snares are indiscriminate and result in immense animal suffering to both target animals, such as foxes and rabbits, and wild and domestic non-target animals. The government study found only around a quarter of the animals caught in snares were the intended targets. Many snared animals endure a prolonged and agonising death through blood loss, dehydration or predation, or suffer permanent and ultimately life-threatening injuries.

Current legislation relating to the use of snares is vague and snares that have the capacity to be self-locking are still legal. Snares can also be set or placed in ways that increase the potential to cause further unnecessary animal suffering.

There is strong support for the banning of snares amongst the British public. In an Ipsos MORI poll undertaken in 2014, 77% of the British public believed snares should be illegal.

Born Free urges all political parties to commit to introducing a total ban on the use of snares across the UK. A comprehensive ban will facilitate enforcement and could encourage uptake of alternative, more humane animal management practices.



ENDING THE FUR TRADE IN BRITAIN

The fur trade is one of the most exploitative and cruel industries in the world today. Approximately 85% of the fur used in the fashion and clothing industry comes from animals raised on fur farms, around half in the European Union, in conditions that cannot meet their welfare needs. Fur farms are also a major source of environmental pollution, and risk spreading pathogens to humans. The remaining 15% is supplied from the trapping of wild animals, predominantly in the United States, Canada, and Russia, many of which are caught using methods that would be illegal in the UK. Despite the ban on fur farming introduced in Britain in 2003, we have outsourced our cruelty, with over £75 million of fur imported to this country every year, helping to maintain a global industry that causes immense, and in some cases extreme, suffering to both farmed and wild trapped animals.

The majority of the British public consistently support a complete ban on the importation and sale of fur in the UK. Several high-profile fashion brands have committed to ending the use of fur.

Born Free urges all political parties to follow the example of Israel and California and introduce a comprehensive ban on the importation and sale of fur in the UK.

ENDING THE USE OF LEAD AMMUNITION AND FISHING WEIGHTS

Lead poisoning is one of the most serious causes of anthropogenic harm to wild animals in Europe, both in terms of direct toxicity and secondary effects, negatively impacting significant numbers of individual animals and species. The continued use of lead in ammunition for recreational and commercial shooting, its use in fishing weights, and its accumulation in the environment and concentration along the food chain, causes immense animal suffering and mortality, particularly among waterfowl and predatory animals. A range of effective, safe non-toxic alternatives to lead shot are available including steel, bismuth, and tungsten. These have been used successfully for many years in areas where lead shot is already banned. Banning the use of lead ammunition and fishing weights is a win for wildlife and the wider environment and will have a relatively small impact on the shooting and fishing industries. The current restrictions on the use of lead shot over wetlands do not effectively prevent the deposition of lead across the UK countryside, resulting in continued lead poisoning.

Born Free urges all political parties to commit to introducing a comprehensive ban on the sale and use of lead ammunition and fishing weights.

POLICY PRIORITIES

REFORM OF ZOO STANDARDS INCLUDING CONSERVATION CONTRIBUTION

A consultation on proposed revised zoo standards within Britain closed on 21st June 2022. We broadly welcomed and encouraged many of the proposals including the phasing out of tethering birds of prey and the use of touch pools, an end to free-contact with elephants and the use of the bullhook, and increased safety requirements for a number of high-risk species. Defra should be encouraged to proceed with the next stages of the process without delay to ensure timely implementation. Improvements in relation to conservation, education and research requirements of zoos is currently tied to the fate of the Zoo Licensing Act 1981 amendments within the Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill. Should this Bill fail to pass, the Zoo Licensing Act will require amending to ensure improved conservation, education and research measures are introduced.

Finalising and implementing the **reform of modern zoo standards**, including conservation, education and research requirements of zoos, should be a policy priority.

THE PHASE-OUT OF UNSUITABLE SPECIES IN ZOOS

Statements made by zoos that they significantly contribute to species conservation and public education require careful scrutiny and cannot be taken at face value to justify the keeping and breeding of wild animals – especially those that do not thrive in captivity. The keeping of such species, which include elephants, giraffe and polar bears, should be phased out. More than 20 years of scientific evidence has highlighted how elephant welfare is compromised in captivity. Any attempts at improving their situation have been delivered at glacial pace and have not resulted in substantive improvements to their welfare. A phase-out is the only humane solution, beginning with an immediate end to the breeding and importation of further individuals into UK zoos, with remaining individuals being returned where possible to wild or near wild environments within their historic range, managed in sanctuaries, or consolidated at the most suitable captive facilities available globally for the remainder of their lives.

ENDING THE CULLING OF BADGERS

Since 2013, around 200,000 badgers, a protected species under UK law, have been killed under licence as part of successive governments' efforts to control the spread of bovine TB in cattle. This could result in the disappearance of badgers from areas they have occupied for millennia. More than 75% of these animals have been killed using 'controlled shooting', a method rejected by both the government's own Independent Expert Panel and the British Veterinary Association because of animal welfare concerns. Contrary to government claims, the most recent peer-reviewed analysis published in March 2022 found no evidence that badger culling has been successful in reducing bovine TB among cattle herds. The culling of badgers is unscientific, ineffective, inhumane and unnecessary, and should be brought to an immediate and permanent end.



THE UK'S RESPONSE TO WILDLIFE CRIME

Wildlife crimes encompass a large range of illegal activities, including poaching, the persecution of badgers, hares and other animals for 'sport', the killing of birds of prey to protect shooting interests, and the international trafficking of wild animals and wildlife products for profit. Such crimes can have devastating impacts on the welfare of individual animals and can severely disrupt and diminish some populations of wildlife, as well as presenting biosecurity risks. Perpetrators may be members of international criminal networks, may also be involved in other criminal activities including theft, corruption, money laundering and violent crime, and may represent a national security risk. The UK is a significant destination for illegally traded wildlife products. Wildlife crimes need to be taken seriously yet are often viewed as 'victimless' or low-grade crimes resulting in a lack of prioritisation, poor conviction rates, and inadequate sentencing.

All wildlife crimes should be made notifiable and recordable, with the data being regularly evaluated in order to inform enforcement policy. Sufficient long-term funding should be provided to the UK's National Wildlife Crime Unit and Border Force CITES team. Every police force should be required to develop a wildlife crime policing strategy, with specialised wildlife crime officers trained to coordinate response. The Crown Prosecution Service should be encouraged to further develop its network of specialist wildlife prosecutors and the support it provides to duty prosecutors. The Sentencing Council should also be instructed to produce comprehensive sentencing guidance for wildlife crimes in order to better equip judges and magistrates to hand out truly deterrent penalties.

The UK government should support the development and implementation of an international agreement to tackle wildlife trafficking through an additional protocol under the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, or other appropriate mechanism.

ENDING IMPORTS OF FUR FOR MILITARY CEREMONIAL USE

At a significant cost to the taxpayer, the UK's Ministry of Defence (MoD) has for many years been procuring furs from American black bears killed in Canada, to produce ceremonial bearskin hats for military use. Despite high-profile campaigns and the offer of faux fur alternatives at zero cost to the taxpayer that are virtually indistinguishable, the MoD has resisted calls for a change to its procurement policy.

In Canada, bears are baited, ensnared and shot by hunters. Some of these skins are then procured by the MoD. It currently takes the fur of at least one bear to make a single ceremonial bearskin cap. Many of these animals endure a slow death from blood loss or starvation, and female bears may be targeted emerging from their winter dens when their fur is thickest, leading to the orphaning of dependent cubs. The hunting of black bears has serious animal welfare implications and could well have negative impacts at a local population level.

A Government e-petition calling for the replacement of real bearskins used for the Queen's Guard's caps with faux fur reached 100,000 signatures in Spring 2022.

A change in procurement policy by the MoD would end the UK's culpability in this cruel trade. It would also be consistent with efforts to end the import of all fur to the UK and ban the import of hunting trophies.



MAKING ENDING THE GRIND A CONDITION OF TRADE AGREEMENT WITH FAROES

The brutal slaughter of over 1,400 white sided dolphins on the Faroe Islands in September 2021 triggered anger and revulsion around the world and brought global attention back to the long and bloody history of whale and dolphin killing in these islands. At present over 2,000 Islanders are licensed to kill whales or dolphins, which is carried out by driving pods of animals into the shore, securing a hook and rope into their blow holes to drag them onto the beach, and driving a steel lance to sever the spinal cord and the blood supply to the brain, following which the animals are bled out.

Although traditionally an activity designed to procure meat from the animals to feed the islanders, these days little of the meat is ever consumed because of concerns over its safety.

In March 2019 the UK Government entered into a Free Trade Agreement with the Faroe Islands which now accounts for over 25% of the Faroes' global trade, mainly through exports of cod, shellfish and farmed salmon which is sold in UK supermarkets. The UK is therefore in a strong position to influence the Faroese Government.

A Government e-petition calling on the Government to use its influence to help bring an end to the 'grinds' reached 100,000 signatures in March 2022.

The UK Government should suspend the Free Trade Agreement with the Faroe Islands until it receives a legally binding agreement from the Faroese Government that it will cease all further whale and dolphin hunts on the Islands.





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