

British Veterinary Association Westminster Tea 2022

Wednesday 2 November 2022

BVA President Malcolm Morley speech

As delivered

- **Welcome** and thank you to everyone for joining us this afternoon. It's fantastic to see such a strong cross-party turnout to hear about the animal welfare and workforce issues that matter most to the British Veterinary Association's 19,000 members.
- We're all too aware of what a busy and unpredictable time is playing out in the world of Westminster, so it means a great deal that so many of you have taken the time to join us this afternoon.
- A **big thank you** too to Dr Neil Hudson MP for kindly hosting the event. As a veterinary surgeon himself, we are delighted to have Neil's ongoing support and interest across many of our key issues and concerns.
- Around the room today you'll find BVA Officers as well as colleagues with a comprehensive array of experience in small animal, equine and farm practice, veterinary nursing and public health. We're on hand all afternoon to answer any questions you may have on animal welfare and any other matters related to veterinary practice. Please to welcome President of BVNA.
- And as if that wasn't enough, there is also tea and cake! Please do help yourselves.

Kept Animals Bill

It has been a time of great change recently, both in Westminster and for the nation. Understandably, these events have altered the parliamentary schedule and delayed some of the Bills going through Parliament.

One example of this is the crucial and long-awaited Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill, which was due to have its remaining stages heard in September, after being carried through from the previous parliamentary session. This vital Bill will address some of the most pressing animal health and welfare issues of our times, and we are urging the Government to deliver on its commitment by ensuring the Bill's continuation through Parliament.

BVA has campaigned for many years on some of the issues included in this Bill, and it is essential, as it continues through Parliament, that it retains vital measures, such as those designed to tackle puppy smuggling, prohibit the import of dogs with cropped ears, review zoo standards, impose a ban on keeping primates as pets and introduce mandatory, reliable pre-import testing for dogs with unknown health statuses.

Our briefing sets out our position on the Bill in more detail, so please do take a copy and talk to us if you have any questions. However, for now, I just want to touch briefly on some key points:

- Recently, vets and animal welfare charities in the UK have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of **dogs with cropped ears**, marking an extremely worrying trend towards the normalisation in society of this illegal mutilation. What's happening is that Unscrupulous breeders are importing dogs with cropped ears from outside the UK where the procedure is still legal, sending UK-bred dogs overseas for ear cropping or more concerningly, using these loopholes as a smokescreen to illegally crop dogs' ears in the UK. It's essential that this is stopped, and we believe that provisions within the Bill, which will enable the Government to bring in further restrictions on the movement of pets on welfare grounds, will be an important step in achieving this.

- In relation to keeping **primates as pets**, we are keen to see the best protections possible for these long-lived, intelligent and socially complex animals and we therefore welcome the current proposals. However, as part of this, we would like to see licensing standards be as rigorous as possible, so that ownership under a licence is seen as an exception rather than the norm. With this in mind, we would welcome your support in ensuring that local authorities get the funding and resource they need to adjust to and effectively enforce the proposed legislation. We all recognise that legislation without enforcement is purposeless.
- Finally, please help to keep our native dog population healthy by pushing for the **introduction of mandatory, pre-import testing for dogs from countries that have endemic diseases which have not—until very recently—been seen in the UK**. Stray dogs with unknown histories may currently be moved to the UK while they are still incubating pathogens such as *Brucella canis*, *Babesia* and *Leishmania*. *Brucella* is a serious zoonotic threat to anyone handling infected animals – animal owners, vets and veterinary staff - and *Babesia* has shown that it could become endemic in the UK.

Given its vital importance to animal welfare, we would welcome your support on the Kept Animals Bill. There are two ways you can do this, the first is to write to the Defra Secretary of State, Therese Coffey, urging her to prioritise this key piece of legislation, the second is to help us raise awareness of the issue by having your photograph taken with our “I support the Kept Animals Bill” board and sharing this widely on your social media.

NI Veterinary Medicines

This is a very key and current topic. We are extremely concerned about the current cliff edge facing the availability of veterinary medicines in Northern Ireland, with up to 51% of medicines at risk of being discontinued at the end of the grace period in December. Unless action is taken soon it risks an animal welfare crisis in all key sectors.

EU rules require that veterinary medicines must be batch tested and released to move from Great Britain (GB) to NI along with having a marketing authorisation holder (MAH) based in NI or the EU, and not Great Britain (GB) from January 2023, which will cause short-term issues with supply. About 51% of medicines are threatened. Longer term, the scale and costs of the changes needed to implement the EU medicines requirements mean that companies are likely to withdraw products from the NI market as it is too small for a viable commercial solution to be found.

The UK government and EU must not let this deadline lapse without a workable solution in place. It is not just an animal health issue but a public health issue, particularly if salmonella vaccines become unavailable to poultry vets. Such public health risks would also jeopardise access to markets outside Northern Ireland for eggs. Thus is a multi-faceted problem.

We believe a path forward can be found. We've seen that it's possible to navigate the same issue for human medicines and adopting a similar approach for animals seems like a clear way forward. We're working on this really hard and It was great to see UK and EU Commission negotiations restart recently and we need this issue to be top of their agenda.

Our briefing sets out the issue in more detail. Given the potential public health risks, we ask for your support in pushing this issue to the top of the UK Government's agenda in relation to its ongoing negotiations with the EU Commission.

Non-stun slaughter

Welfare at slaughter is another issue that remains a top concern for BVA members, particularly non-stun slaughter. We continue to push ahead with our campaign for clear and relevant labelling of products by slaughter method to help customers make informed choices about the meat that they buy and eat.

We continue our overarching call for an end to non-stun slaughter in the UK, however in the meantime we acknowledge that our pragmatic asks is where we have the biggest scope for movement. These include pushing for a ban on exports of non-stun meat from the UK. We would appreciate your continued support with this important campaign and our briefing details the most effective ways you can do this, such as urging Defra to review the regulations on the Welfare of Animals at Slaughter to reduce the use of non-stun slaughter. Please also encourage public bodies in your constituencies to tailor their use of halal and shechita meat products to genuine need rather than using these across the board because they feel they need to.

Legislative reform

We are also seeking your support in pushing forward the plans by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons to reform the current veterinary legislation – The Veterinary Surgeons' Act - which has been in place since 1966.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to secure new primary legislation which will modernise the regulatory framework for the veterinary professions, ensuring it is fit for purpose.

Alongside our colleagues from the RCVS and the British Veterinary Nursing Association, we consider this is also a golden opportunity to more formally recognise the veterinary nursing profession. We have long called for the protection of the title 'veterinary nurse', in order to prevent its use by unqualified, unregulated individuals. As such, we ask that protection of the veterinary nurse title forms part of any new legislation, alongside moves to regulate other allied professions.

The regulation of allied professionals will further improve standards of animal health and welfare, bringing professional recognition to valued members of the vet-led team. It will also make better use of veterinary skills, by allowing vets to focus on the functions that only they can undertake. We're trying to support a much more vet led team approach.

The proposed reform will also address the current lack of practice regulation in the UK, which sits at odds with the reasonable expectation from the public that all practices are assessed to ensure they at least meet the basic minimum requirements. The introduction of practice regulation will not only drive standards up, it will also increase public confidence in veterinary professionals.

Changes such as these will create a modern and effective system, which will better protect animal health and welfare and retain good vets in the profession, at a time when the veterinary workforce is under significant strain. With this in mind, your support in urging the Secretary of State to prioritise the progression of a 'Veterinary Services Bill' would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you

- I appreciate we are all tight on time, so we have prepared **briefing packs** for you today, which can be found on the table near the door, and I'd encourage you to pick up a copy if you haven't already. In there, in addition to the topics I have mentioned, you will also find briefings on bovine TB, trade, canine fertility clinics and gene editing.
- **Cross-party collaboration on animal welfare** is going to be absolutely crucial in the months ahead. We will be engaging closely with you as well as key government departments, agencies and decision makers in the devolved nations on matters relating to animal health, animal welfare and trade. Please do engage with us and help to spread the word about these crucial issues.

- I'd also encourage you to **get to know your local veterinary practices** and see them as a way to get positive messages about animal health and welfare out to your constituents.
- Please speak to the vets and vet nurses in the room today and remember that you can **call on BVA for advice at any time, on any and all matters of animal health and welfare.**

Thank you.