

Is Brexit the End of Live Exports?

[Published on 08. September 2017](#) by [Keith Taylor](#)

Live exports are barbaric and I'm so pleased to see the strength of opposition in my constituency where hundreds have turned out in Kent to [protest against a late flurry of live animal export sailings](#) this summer. Live exports treat beautiful and sentient animals as 'goods', as if they're no different from a bottle of whiskey or bar of chocolate. Greens want to see it banned outright.

Animals exported live for slaughter and breeding often travel great distances, for days at a time, in confined spaces, creating and exacerbating health issues. Animals suffer great distress, dehydration, disease, fatigue and injury.

These animals include chickens, pigs, cows and sheep. The number of animals that go through this process is staggering: [every year](#), around 4 million cows, 28 million pigs, 4 million sheep, 243 million poultry and 150 thousand horses are transported across the EU; over [10,000 sheep](#) leave the UK, in particular, every year.

Current EU legislation provides protection to animals in transit. This, however, becomes problematic when the destination is outside of the European Union. EU regulations, for example, make it illegal for pigs to be kept in confined sow stalls when travelling in Europe, but this may not be the case once they cross EU borders.

All this suffering is entirely unnecessary. And, following the tumultuous EU referendum last year, there has been a buzz of excitement amongst British animal welfare activists that leaving the EU might finally offer an opportunity to ban live exports outright. And, despite fighting passionately for a Remain vote in the referendum, Greens are the first to acknowledge that the rules of the Single Market are a barrier to banning the industry outright.

With the UK set to leave the EU, then, do we now have a 'golden opportunity' to stop live exports, once and for all?

In theory, by leaving the European Union and the Single Market, we are free to ban live animal exports. The government, the argument continues, would have to listen to the overwhelming majority of British people who support the ban.

It's a tempting scenario, but let's not get ahead of ourselves. The government is pursuing an extreme Brexit with Britain outside of the Single Market. Ignoring the disastrous economic consequences and the loss of vital environmental, workers' rights and even animal welfare protections — if that comes to pass — Britain will become an independent member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

As a member of the WTO, it's as likely — if not more likely — that live animal exports will increase rather than decrease. The WTO governs the conditions, rules, and regulation of trade between countries and governments. There are currently no grounds to restrict trade, as a member of the WTO, based on animal welfare objections. Much like the EU's Single Market, WTO membership enshrines the principles of free movement of trade — including, perversely, live animals.

Any attempts to erect barriers to trade can be swept aside by the WTO. It is the WTO that stops the EU from banning the import of eggs from barren battery cages, despite the cruel farming practice being banned across the European Union. Other WTO member states, particularly those that profit from live exports, can challenge any proposed UK ban if they see it as a barrier to trade.

Complicating this further is that it is entirely down to the UK government to explicitly include animal welfare standards in the language of future Free Trade Agreements (FTA). It's instructive, therefore, that in the Great Repeal Bill, published earlier this year, the Tories had [failed to maintain](#) a key plank of EU animal welfare protections: the recognition that animals

are sentient beings. By failing to include text that would protect animals in the Great Repeal Bill and future FTAs, the UK, outside the Single Market, sends a signal to its future trading partners: we're desperate for FTAs and willing to sacrifice animal welfare to get them.

So, what do we do? We resist! In this period of turbulence and uncertainty, the best thing that we, as passionate, animal-loving Brits, can do is to continue fighting to strengthen animal welfare standards as members of the EU. Article 13 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union requires the EU and its Member States to pay 'full regard to the welfare requirements of animals' in formulating and implementing EU agriculture policy. We already have the necessary legislative tools at our disposal to help us fight – they were a gift from the EU, afforded to us by membership. We must make the best of our membership; as part of the EU bloc, we have a stronger voice, and, therefore, a better chance of ensuring the best protection that we can for animals.

Brexit does not mean having to sever our ties with our other friends. CIWF and the Eurogroup for Animals are just two of the many organisations that have worked tirelessly at the national and EU level for years to fight for better animal welfare standards. The former is currently working on the #StopTheTrucks campaign, calling on the EU Commission to review and update transport regulations. Notably, the campaign asks that the trade in live animals be replaced with a trade in meat. Until that happens, they are calling for the duration of any live transports to be capped at eight hours. Austria, Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands have all submitted an official request in support of the campaign and, so far, the campaign's [online petition](#) has garnered the signatures of over 700,000 EU citizens.

I will continue fighting, tooth and nail, for a blanket ban on live exports. And I will keep pushing for an improvement of animal welfare conditions in the interim. [I have joined](#) and will continue to support campaigners in Kent and across the South East of England.

Whether in or out of the EU, the UK is bound by WTO rules and regulations. Brexit is, therefore, unlikely to be the silver bullet that halts live exports. EU legislation has significantly improved on-farm conditions for millions of animals, from banning veal crates and sow stalls to stopping the use of barren battery cages; we can't afford to lose these protections.

We are stronger working with our friends and neighbours, and we can – and should – continue to fight as part of the EU with the strength that our membership brings.