

ETRA Committee Inquiry into the Animal Welfare
(Livestock Exports) Bill

Written Evidence from the Farmers' Union of Wales

January 2024

1. The Farmers' Union of Wales was established in 1955 to protect and advance the interests of Welsh families who derive an income from agriculture. The Union has eleven offices distributed around Wales which provide a broad range of services for members. The FUW is a democratic organisation, with policies being formulated following consultation with its twelve County Executive Committees and nine Standing Committees.
2. The FUW is well aware of the commitment within the Conservative Party manifesto to ban live exports for slaughter and further fattening and the subsequent and imminent Legislative Consent Motion on the Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Bill. The FUW would reiterate that current transport regulations – which are underpinned by robust welfare science - are more than sufficient to ensure high standards of welfare during transit.
3. Rather than a blunt and overly prescriptive ban, the FUW would have preferred further discussion on measures such as the use of an evidence based exporter Code of Practice with a set of verifiable standards for the export of live animals for slaughter or fattening. The FUW continues to stress that the industry remains at the forefront of global animal health and welfare and the development of further practices to ensure high welfare standards in transit – whilst allowing the live animal trade to continue – would have been a more pragmatic approach.
4. Although live animal trade is an accepted and highly regulated practice, there have been no exports of live animals for fattening or slaughter since December 2020 because the relevant border control facilities which would be necessary post-Brexit are not in place. However, the UK remains a net exporter of lamb; with around 30% of UK lamb exported to the EU in 2019. The FUW remains extremely concerned about the retention of lambs within the UK market that would otherwise have been exported. Indeed, it is worthy of note that, due to ongoing demand for sheep in the EU, the government does not expect exports to stop permanently without the imposition of an export ban via a legislative procedure. Whilst it must be recognised that the UK sector is a low exporter of live animals - with around 0.2% of sheep and 0.02% of livestock and horses being exported to the EU - the trade in live animals remains a beneficial and important mechanism by which to showcase our domestic produce to an international market and it is essential that such doors are not closed to domestic producers operating in a global marketplace.
5. Live exports are an alternative to the export of whole and part carcasses and provide a method of meeting specific consumer demands, additional marketing options and provide an outlet for product at times of high domestic supply. Whilst the overwhelming preference of FUW members is for livestock

to be slaughtered within the UK, and branded accordingly, it is accepted that other countries and cultures offer an increased market demand for slightly different specifications. Moreover, due to UK farmers being predominantly grass-based livestock rearers, there is a natural post-summer 'glut' of stock ready for slaughter. Being able to export to European Countries such as France and Germany during this time, and during Religious Festivals, helps balance supply and demand dynamics.

6. Impact Assessment modelling conducted by Defra in 2021 for the UK Kept Animals Bill suggested losses for live exporters amounting to more than 50 million pounds over a 10 year period; with the impact largely expected to fall on sheep enterprises. The FUW believes such costings to be an underestimate of the actual financial burden imposed upon the sector. The FUW believes that further work is needed to identify the full costs of the ban and its consequence for the sector in order to more fully account for the additional administration, the loss of markets and the likelihood of costs disproportionately falling on small enterprises.
7. In addition to the above, the FUW continues to express concerns that the bill may cause oversupply in UK markets, resulting in lower demand and therefore lower prices for farmers.
8. The FUW also continues to stress that a government genuine in its commitment to improving the welfare of animals in transport should prioritise shortening the journey times between point of production and slaughter at a domestic level. Over the past three decades around 90% of slaughterhouses have been lost in Wales. Increases in Government imposed regulations and charges – such as increased charges for disposal of Animal By-Products - have generally accelerated the loss, leading not only to longer journeys for animals, but also a reduction in competition in the marketplace, less choice for producers and consumers and greater exposure to potential losses of Welsh levy - as seen following the closure of Welsh Country Foods at Gaerwen in 2013. The ethos around the Conservative manifesto pledge to reduce journey times is accepted, but there should equally be a full and earnest commitment to support more small and local abattoirs.
9. Given the above, it is worthy of note that the government has recently made provisions of around £4 million in capital grant funding to support smaller abattoirs in England to improve productivity and welfare standards and encourage the adoption of new technologies. Such funding recognises the pivotal role played by such businesses in shortening journey times and providing a route to market for rare and native breeds. The FUW would

welcome discussions on how such support could be provided in a Welsh context.

10. The FUW would use this opportunity to strongly assert that any moves to ban UK live animal exports must ensure equivalent standards in trade deals to protect UK farmers from an asymmetric and unfair playing field. Indeed closing the door to domestic exportation whilst simultaneously opening the door to live animal exports from far flung trading partners is the epitome of hypocrisy and must be avoided. Furthermore, it must be fully recognised that the UK - Australia trade deal will now allow the importation of vast volumes of food produced from animals that are moved in conditions that would already be deemed illegal within the UK. The 2019 Conservative manifesto promised that *'in all of our trade negotiations, we will not compromise on our high environmental protection, animal welfare and food standards'*, however the UK Government chose not to enshrine those standards in the Agriculture Act 2020, nor in the recent Australia trade deal negotiations which agreed to massively increase tariff free access for Australian beef and lamb with negligible guarantees on welfare standards. Nearly half of Australia's cattle and sheep live exports will be travelling over 9000 miles by sea, under far lower welfare standards than applied domestically. By tilting the playing field in favour of our competitors the government is off-shoring its responsibility with regards to animal welfare.
11. The FUW remains against excessively long journeys for livestock but remains confident that our current welfare standards, coupled with the fact we have relatively close export markets, cements our place as world leaders when it comes to animal movement welfare standards. This is evidenced by the fact the UK is currently the highest ranked G7 country in the World Animal's Protection Index.
12. The FUW notes that an overarching ethos of the bill is to prevent the export of live animals to unknown and 'likely lower' welfare slaughterhouse conditions. The FUW is yet to see the production of any real evidentiary support relating to this claim. It is worthy of note that the vast majority of live exports from the UK are destined for the EU or Ireland. For example, in 2018, 96% of sheep and 86% of pigs were 'exported' to Ireland. The FUW believes that the proposed ban is therefore rooted in politics and is simply symbolic, as opposed to being founded in evidence which would lead to real and demonstrable improvements in welfare.