

# BVA response to EFRA Committee inquiry: Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill

## Who we are

1. The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom. With over 18,000 members, our primary aim is to represent, support and champion the interests of the United Kingdom's veterinary profession. We, therefore, take a keen interest in all issues affecting the profession, including animal health and welfare, public health, regulatory issues and employment matters.
2. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this inquiry into the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill.

## Why legislating for animal sentience matters

3. Recognising animals as sentient beings provides the basis for our moral concern for animals. Animals are living beings with the capacity to have feelings, including pain and pleasure, so they should be legally protected.
4. This is an important issue for the veterinary profession. BVA led a long campaign for the principle of animal sentience to be embedded in law, which saw over 1,200 veterinary professionals signing an open letter of support.
5. The primacy of animal welfare for veterinary surgeons is conveyed in the declaration that each makes upon admission to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, as a One Health minded profession, vets understand that the wellbeing of animals is interconnected with the wellbeing of human beings and the environment.
6. Enacting legislation that recognises that animals are sentient beings is important. This is because the determination that certain animals hold the capacity to have feelings, including pain and pleasure, means that they must be brought "directly under the purview of the law"<sup>2</sup> and afforded protection.
7. As a member of the European Union (EU), the recognition of animals as sentient beings had been recognised in UK law through Article 13 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which reads as follows:

"In formulating and implementing the Union's agriculture, fisheries, transport, internal market, research and technological development and space policies, the Union and the Member States shall, since animals are sentient beings, pay full regard to the welfare requirements of animals, while respecting the legislative or administrative provisions and customs of the Member States relating in particular to religious rites, cultural traditions and regional heritage."

8. The UK has left the EU. Throughout this process, BVA has called for existing animal welfare standards to be maintained at the same level, or a level equivalent to current EU standards, while seizing the opportunity to improve standards in accordance with evidence. This call is underpinned and supported by the legal recognition, and full regard, of sentience in the development of all relevant government policy in the UK.

The protection of animal welfare is an international concern, and enshrining animal sentience in legislation is an international marker of the significance of animal welfare. The Animal Protection Index uses recognition of sentience as the first indicator in its methodology to rank countries according to their animal

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/>

<sup>2</sup> C(stratdts.98 reW\*Tm0 G[-])TJET@.000008866 0 595.02 841.98 reW\*nBT/F3 10.02 Tf1 0 0 1 432/F322/. Bla2/tner(all 10



supports rural proofing by working with policymaker

### **3. Are the proposed requirements on the Government to respond to an**

27. The relevant Secretary of State must

lobsters, crabs) are sentient, and are capable of experiencing pain and distress<sup>5,6,7,8,9,10,11</sup>. Already the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 Amendment Regulations 2012 (administered by the Home Office),<sup>12</sup> includes “any living cephalopod” within the category of protected animals.

37. We are aware that an independent report, a Review of the Evidence for Sentience in Decapod Crustaceans and Cephalopod Molluscs,<sup>13</sup> was commissioned by government and conducted by LSE Enterprise last year, accompanied by a Seafish report on the welfare risks to such nBT/F3 10.02 35q1 26USy a Se