



Animal Sentience Committee

News Bulletin

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A General Election and a New Government

The timing of the announcement of a general election on 22nd May took many by surprise and ushered in a period of pre-election sensitivity (the so-called “purdah” period) during which the ASC paused many of its activities.

The election of the new government on 4th July 2024 has reset the dial and the ASC is ready to engage with the new scrutiny schedule. Within Defra we expect initiatives on animal welfare are likely to be developed over the next 12 months, and the ASC is now well-placed to interrogate and comment on those aspects within its remit. The wider government implementation programme may also have welfare aspects that we will engage with.

The Labour manifesto stated a commitment to improving animal welfare through bans on trail hunting, puppy farming and snare traps, and an intention to work towards phasing out animal testing. The ASC looks forward to commenting on the extent to which due regard is paid to animal welfare as these commitments are brought into being.

Before the election, the previous government was progressing various policies relevant to animal welfare and the ASC had been formulating its views on the Genetic Technology (Precision Breeding) Act 2023, the stalled Enriched Cage consultation and proposals relating to bovine TB and badger control. Time will tell whether any of these will be taken forward in an original or amended form, but the scrutiny already undertaken by the ASC in these areas is unlikely to be wasted. The ASC can continue to

examine the policy implementation of previous governments where they have a bearing on welfare. In addition, ASC engagement with policy teams has had a positive effect in fostering a greater awareness of animal welfare in formulation and implementation activities.

Stakeholder Day

The general election resulted in the postponement of our Stakeholder Day, which will now be held on 22nd October. Invitations to representatives from many different sectors and backgrounds will be going out soon.

In the Meantime

The ASC met in person on 23rd July 2024 and heard from Pamela Thompson, Deputy Director at Defra, who updated the members on progress from her wide brief including the transformation of farm animal health and welfare through the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway.

Over the summer, members of the ASC will be considering animal welfare policy implementation and enforcement and whether an evidence-based approach has been used by government in this area. Effective delivery and monitoring of policy effects is an essential component of paying due regard to animal welfare.

An ASC report on the Online Safety (2023) Act is being finalised for publication.

The Animal Welfare (Live Exports) Act (2024) received Royal Assent on 20th May and came into force on 22nd July. An ASC Report with implications for secondary legislation is being prepared.



Image 1 description: Image of two male vets in a barn examining cattle

FAQs

The ASC is a new entity and we thought an FAQ section might be useful and informative! We can all learn from some of the challenging things we have been asked over the past year. Please let us know if you have other questions that we could feature here next time.

1 Is the ASC developing new scientific or philosophical views on animal sentience?

No – Members of the ASC have thought deeply about the complex concepts involved, and engage with researchers to stay abreast of the field, but this is not their primary role. The ASC was established to scrutinise government policies that could have adverse effects on animals that are currently considered sentient within the Animal Sentience Act 2022. These are vertebrate animals, other than humans, cephalopod molluscs (e.g. octopus, squid, cuttlefish) and decapod crustaceans (e.g. crabs, lobsters, shrimps). ASC Reports have highlighted inconsistencies where policies

protect only some subsets of sentient animals. For example, any new policy that refers to animals protected by the Animal Welfare (2006) Act will (inadvertently) exclude sentient invertebrates. By highlighting such anomalies, the ASC aims to ensure that all sentient animals are covered in new policy developments.



Image 2 description: Image of Curled Octopus (*Eledone cirrhosa*) on circalittoral rock

2. Why is the ASC not proposing new policies that could have substantive animal welfare benefits?

We are unable to do this - In the past 12 months stakeholders have occasionally requested that the ASC should propose new policies that could reduce the range or severity of adverse harms experienced by sentient animals. Suggestions have included bans on inhumane methods of rodent control, a consideration of public procurement policy (to avoid purchasing foods from certain farming systems), or a total ban on the use of the whip in equestrian activities. While each of these ideas (and many others) may have some merit, the ASC cannot lobby government in this way. It is the prerogative of the government to conceive its own policies, informed by input from

NGOs, pressure groups, thinktanks and others. The Statutory duty of the ASC starts from the moment a government policy is being or has been formulated or implemented.

3 How does the ASC communicate its views?

The ASC produces Statutory reports on government policies. It also produces short letters or other forms of correspondence on matters of current relevance to the welfare of sentient animals. These can be found on the link below.

The ASC is also able, within its terms of reference, to provide general or bespoke advice to policy decision makers.

[Link to the Animal Sentience Committee's gov.uk webpage](#)

Communication

As always, this newsletter is open to all, so please forward freely. New stakeholders and interest groups are welcome to contact the Secretariat if they would like to be added as direct recipients.

The Animal Sentience Committee



To sign up to our mailing list, please contact: sentiencesecretariat@defra.gov.uk