

Sentience & Enforcement

The Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill: A missed welfare opportunity

By Crustacean Compassion

"Explicitly recognising and enshrining animals as sentient beings in law will be at the very heart of central government decision making going forward.... We have commissioned research into the sentience of decapod crustaceans and cephalopods, and, in light of the findings, we will consider further protections."

- DEFRA Action Plan for Animal Welfare, p.8

As an animal welfare organisation, we eagerly awaited the long-promised Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill and welcomed its arrival. However, at the First Reading in the House of Lords, we were disappointed to find that the definition of 'animal' only extended to vertebrate animals (except humans) and did not include cephalopods molluscs and decapod crustaceans, like we and the Better Deal for Animals coalition called for in our joint proposed [Animal Welfare Strategy](#). Based on strong scientific evidence that decapods are sentient and can experience pain, we urgently call for their inclusion in the Sentience Bill during its passage to becoming law in this parliamentary session.

In 2005, the European Food Safety Authority categorised [decapods as sentient beings](#) and

since then [empirical evidence](#) has grown considerably, as has concerns for the welfare of these vulnerable animals and espousal for their legal protection - shown by robust support for [our campaign](#). Most recently, notable animal welfare organisations such as the [BVA](#) and [RSP-CA](#) have called for legal recognition of their sentience, as did the [Scottish Animal Welfare Commission](#) earlier this year.

Decapods suffer significantly in the food industry and are subjected to practices which would be considered unacceptable in vertebrate animals. They are frequently [crammed together in brightly lit tanks](#) or kept alive on ice, [a practice illegal in other countries](#). They are sold live to consumers for amateur home storage and killing, and are even posted [using couriers like Amazon](#), transported in the post or in a van amongst other packages. Decapods do receive minimal legal protections from injury and unnecessary suffering under the Welfare of Animals Transport (England) Order. However, this is rarely enforced and needs updating with appropriate codes of practice to ensure suitable transit conditions that do not lead to stress, injury or suffocation.

The most obvious cause of cruel treatment is inhumane slaughter methods, yet they are not adequately protected by the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing legislation. Decapods are routinely boiled alive (a situation in which an [edible crab may remain conscious for three minutes](#)), undergo freshwater drowning (a long and distressing process), and dismembered alive; yet there is no economic or culinary reason why decapods cannot be humanely dispatched through available [electrical stunning methods](#).

The Sentience Bill has provision for the addition of invertebrate animals and the Government's [Action Plan for Animal Welfare](#), published with the Bill, states that they will consider further protection based on the findings of commissioned research into the sentience of decapod



crustaceans and cephalopods. This [commissioned research](#) was conducted of the back off our campaign in 2018. It was commissioned and completed by LSE Enterprise in 2020 but the results have still not been published.

We believe the welfare issues faced by these animals are so severe that it would be inappropriate to delay their inclusion, particularly since there is ample evidence of their sentience. We need Defra to promptly release the LSE report so that its findings can underpin inclusion of these animals in the Sentience Bill, and other animal welfare legislation.

This is a pivotal time for animal welfare legislation and if the UK truly wants to establish itself as an authoritative global leader in animal welfare, it must be led by scientific evidence, not by presumption or political convenience.

About Crustacean Compassion

At Crustacean Compassion we campaign for the humane treatment of decapod crustaceans

and lobby for their inclusion in the definition of 'animal' in *all* relevant animal welfare legislation, including the diverse Animal Welfare Acts of the UK, the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing legislation, and the Animals in Scientific Procedures Act and of course the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill. The Sentience Bill is a key opportunity get these vulnerable animals legally recognised as sentient beings.