

2021: The year the UK finally bans foie gras?

By Jenny Canham, Campaigns and Public Affairs Specialist, Animal Equality UK

"The production of foie gras by force feeding is already illegal in the UK. Now the [Brexit] transition period has finished, we are committed to building a clear evidence base to inform decisions on banning the import or sale of foie gras and other products derived from low-welfare systems."

- DEFRA Action Plan for Animal Welfare, p.10

Animal Equality has tirelessly campaigned to ban the import and sale of foie gras in the UK for years, along with other animal protection organisations. In March 2021, Defra announced plans to implement a ban on foie gras 'in the next few months'. While delighted by the news, we want actions, not words. In response, Animal Equality coordinated an open letter signed by cross-party MPs, urging George Eustice MP and Lord Zac Goldsmith to share a concrete roadmap, publicly outlining when and how the ban will be written into law¹. This garnered high profile media coverage, including in The Observer and The Guardian, and even prompted a response from France's foie gras producer's association².

Defra has since launched its Action Plan for Animal Welfare - in which it notes that it is 'exploring a ban on the sale of foie gras'³. Animal Equality again celebrates this positive progress, while remaining determined to hold Defra to its word.

1 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/28/mps-unite-to-call-for-total-ban-on-wicked-foie-gras-in-the-uk>

2 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/apr/17/we-love-foie-gras-french-outrage-uk-plan-import-ban-delicacy>

3 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-lead-the-way-on-animal-welfare-through-flagship-new-action-plan>

We continue to meet monthly with Government officials personally to discuss this important issue, in order to ensure that the UK finally ends its support of the cruel and torturous practice of force-feeding.

The production of foie gras in the UK is illegal, on animal cruelty grounds, but we still import around 200 tonnes of the product each year.⁴ The product is then sold by a select number of high-end retailers and delis throughout Great Britain. After years of campaigning, we remain cautiously optimistic, and are aware that more must still be done to ensure that this ban is implemented as soon as possible. Until then, ducks and geese will continue to endure agonising treatment while the UK market supports production of this vile 'delicacy'.

The UK public strongly backs the call to ban foie gras in the UK; Animal Equality is currently celebrating surpassing the milestone of 200,000 signatures on the relevant petition.⁵ It's clear that the public wants foie gras banned. Celebrities are also keen to show their support for the campaign, with endorsements from Thandiwe Newton, Ricky Gervais, and Alan Carr. Peter Egan even joined Animal Equality to witness the cruelty that takes place on foie gras farms first-hand.⁶

The public's desire to see a ban enacted soon is understandable given the cruelty involved in the production of foie gras. The force-feeding process (known as gavage) involves forcing a tube down the throats of ducks and geese, to funnel inside of them larger amounts of food than they would ever willingly ingest. An abundance of scientific evidence, including a study conducted by the University of Cambridge in 2015,⁷ shows that foie gras production by force-feeding generates severe physical and psychological pain for the animals involved, and not only when the tube is down their throats. The production pro-

4 <https://www.franceagrimer.fr/fam/content/download/34895/document/STA-VBL-FOIE%20GRAS-2014-11-18.pdf?version=3>

5 <https://animalequality.org.uk/act/ban-force-feeding>

6 <https://animalequality.org.uk/news/breaking-harrowing-scenes-of-ducks-and-geese-being-ruthlessly-force-fed-filmed-on-a-farm-in-france/>

7 <https://bit.ly/3sybw7l> Professor D.M. Broom – Dr. I. Rochlitz – "The Welfare of Ducks in Foie Gras Production"

cess causes their livers to swell up to 10 times their natural size, before the animal's diseased liver is sold and marketed as foie gras.

The process of gavage is considered incompatible with the provisions of the Animal Welfare Act (2006), as well as The Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations (across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales). Domestic legislation states that: 'Animals shall be fed a wholesome diet which is appropriate to their age and species and which is fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health, to satisfy their nutritional needs and to promote a positive state of well-being.' And: 'No animals shall be provided with food or liquid in a manner, nor shall such food or liquid contain any substance, which may cause them unnecessary suffering or injury.'

Countless UK companies have already turned their backs on foie gras. In February, Fortnum and Mason made the decision to stop selling it, following years of protests from fellow animal protection organisations.⁸ In response, Lord Zac Goldsmith (Minister of State and Animal Welfare Minister) tweeted, 'Foie gras is unbearably barbaric. It's hard to imagine anyone could watch the process and still enjoy eating it.' Also, thanks to Animal Equality's investigations showing the harsh realities behind foie gras production, the Tate Modern museum dropped foie gras from its menu too.⁹

Many MPs have also been keen to speak out on this topic, with Sir Mike Penning MP currently leading an Early Day Motion. Also, with the help of Henry Smith MP, Animal Equality previously hosted a reception in the House of Commons, prompting an adjournment debate in Parliament on the proposed ban. Dr Lisa Cameron MP, another avid supporter of Animal Equality's campaign, said, "This is very welcome news and I am pleased to see that action is being taken. Foie gras is an immensely cruel product which causes a huge amount of animal suffering. We cannot rightly think of ourselves as a nation of animal lovers whilst still

selling foie gras, which is why I am joining Animal Equality's call to implement a ban on foie gras imports and sales as soon as possible!"

Foie gras has no place in our society. While we are optimistic about this historic legislation finally coming into place, it is critical that the Government responds to demands from both the public and politicians by committing to a ban publicly, identifying when this will be introduced into Parliament. Every day this is delayed is another day that the UK is supporting a practice it deems too cruel to be carried out on its shores. 2021 must see the end of foie gras made by force-feeding in the UK.

To join the campaign, as the UK moves closer to a ban on foie gras imports and sales, sign Animal Equality's petition calling for this landmark win for animals to finally be confirmed: www.animalequality.org.uk/act/ban-force-feeding.

⁸ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-g248741/Fortnum-Mason-axes-sale-torture-tin-foie-gras-decades-pressure.html>

⁹ <https://animalequality.org.uk/news/victory-tate-modern-drops-cruel-foie-gras-from-its-menu/>