



Consultation Response: Fireworks and Pyrotechnics in the UK

Introduction

The UK Centre for Animal Law (A-LAW) exists to promote knowledge and education about the law relating to animal protection, and to encourage more effective enforcement of legislation relating to animals. We seek to be a source of objective, independent legal analysis on animal protection law issues. Whilst legal topics are often complex, we see it as our job to explain them as clearly as possible, so as to increase the effectiveness of UK animal protection organisations and to promote informed public debate. We are registered as a charity in England and Wales (1113462) and are politically neutral. In addition to publishing legal analyses and resources to inform public debates, we provide animal protection organisations with access to high quality legal support to assist their work. We also promote the teaching of animal law in UK universities. For further information about us, visit alaw.org.uk or email info@alaw.org.uk.

We welcome the Government's recognition that fireworks cause distress and injury to companion, farmed and wild animals, and that the existing framework has not fully addressed these concerns.

Our response focuses on the matters on which a legal charity is best placed to assist: the statutory basis for regulating fireworks in the interests of animals, the adequacy of the noise control measurement standard, the enforceability of the proposed restrictions, and the transitional arrangements.

We draw attention at the outset to section 2(2)(b) of the Fireworks Act 2003. Among the consequences that fireworks regulations may be made to prevent or reduce, Parliament expressly included "death of animals or injury or distress to animals". Parliament has therefore already determined that the protection of animals, specifically their distress, not merely their death or injury, is a legitimate object of fireworks regulation. That disposes of any suggestion that animal welfare is an extraneous or disproportionate consideration in regulating these products.

Question 1: Are there any other particular F2 and F3 fireworks products that you think the general public should not be allowed to buy?

A-LAW's response to this question is set out in Question 3 below, in relation to fireworks comprising more than one shot tube.

A-LAW does not, at this stage, propose any additional named products. We invite the Government to approach the regulation 33 list by reference to the characteristics that generate animal-welfare harm, namely peak impulse noise, repeated or sustained discharge from a single ignition, and aerial burst, rather than by product name alone, so that the list does not require repeated amendment as product designs change.

Question 2: If more products are added to the regulation 33 banned list, what consequences might there be for consumers, industry, enforcement authorities, professional users, and others?

Adding products to the Regulation 33 list would affect each identified group. A-LAW considers this manageable and proportionate.

Consumers: The principal consequence is reduced choice within a specific product class. It does not prohibit celebrating with fireworks: F1 products, lower-noise F2 and F3 products, and professionally organised displays remain available.

Industry: Reformulation and stock-management costs would apply. These are addressed in Questions 8 and 9 below.

Enforcement authorities: A-LAW considers the consequence here to be positive and draws it to the Government's attention as an argument in favour of the proposal. A restriction defined by product characteristics is materially easier to enforce at the point of sale than one based on acoustic output. A Trading Standards officer can identify a multi-tube device by inspection; verifying compliance with a decibel limit requires test data. A-LAW therefore encourages the Government to treat product-list restrictions and the noise ceiling as complementary measures rather than alternatives, since each compensates for the other's enforcement weakness.

Professional users: There are no practical consequences. Products listed in regulation 33 remain available to those with specialist knowledge.

Displacement: A-LAW recognises the risk that restrictions displace demand towards illegally imported or homemade products. That risk is real, but it is an argument for enforcement resources and duties on online marketplaces, not for inaction. The European Commission's 2025 evaluation of Directive 2013/29/EU identified mail-order circumvention as a weakness of the current framework, which applies irrespective of whether these proposals are adopted.

Question 3: Do you agree that regulation 33(1)(g) should be amended to make explicit that a firework comprising more than one shot tube is banned from sale to the general public?

Agree.

Fireworks comprising multiple shot tubes can produce repeated or sustained explosive discharge from a single ignition. For the reasons given at Question 7, the welfare harm to companion, farmed and wild animals arises not only from peak noise but also from the duration and repetition of discharge. Restricting public access to such products would therefore deliver a welfare benefit distinct from and additional to a reduction in the permitted decibel level.

A-LAW notes that the Government presents this amendment as clarifying an existing restriction rather than as a new prohibition. We invite the Government to state expressly, in the amending instrument and its explanatory material, whether the amendment is intended to change the lawful scope of sale or merely to confirm the existing position.

That clarity matters for two reasons. If the effect is to remove from sale a product class currently sold lawfully, that should be acknowledged so the transitional arrangements at Question 9 can be calibrated accordingly. And an amendment that, in substance, introduces a new restriction under the guise of a clarification is more vulnerable to challenge than one that is openly identified as a restriction and justified as such.

Question 4: Do you agree that the age limit for purchasing Christmas crackers should be removed?

A-LAW does not express a view on this question, as it does not engage animal-welfare considerations.

Question 5: Are there any other specific F1 and P1 pyrotechnics that should have their regulatory requirements increased or decreased?

A-LAW does not currently have sufficient evidence to recommend a specific regulatory change for smoke-emitting P1 products. However, given the Government's own evidence of panic and distress associated with their use, we invite the Government to consider whether the review should also examine potential welfare impacts when such products are used near animals.

Question 6: Do you agree the decibel level of fireworks consumers use should be lowered?

Yes, to 90 dB (A,imp) (reducing perceived loudness by approximately seven-eighths).

Question 7: What might be the positive impacts of reducing the maximum decibel level of fireworks available to the general public?

Reducing the maximum decibel level for consumer fireworks to 90 dB (A,imp) would have significant positive impacts on animal welfare. The key change would be to reduce the intensity and likely spatial reach of sudden explosive noise from consumer fireworks, which animal welfare and veterinary organisations repeatedly identify as a key threat to animals, while still allowing members of the public to purchase quieter celebratory alternatives.

Animals generally

The RSPCA states that fireworks can cause fear and distress in many animals, with sudden loud noises prompting them to run or hide, and sometimes to injure themselves. The RSPCA has prepared evidence estimating that 45% of dogs show signs of fear when they hear fireworks, and records that horses, farm animals, and wildlife can also experience fear, distress, or injury from loud bangs, bright flashes, and debris.

Peer-reviewed literature corroborates stakeholder evidence. Blackwell, Bradshaw and Casey combined a postal survey of 3,897 dog owners with structured interviews of 383 and found that almost half of interviewed owners reported at least one behaviour typical of fear in response to noise, with fireworks the most commonly reported trigger; fewer than one third had sought professional advice. Storengen and Lingaas reported comparable findings across 17 breeds, Salonen and others reported similar findings in a dataset of 13,715 dogs, and Riemer found that some affected dogs needed days or weeks to return to normal behaviour.

The British Veterinary Association states that animals have more acute hearing than humans and that loud, high-pitched fireworks currently available to consumers can cause stress, fear or phobic responses in companion animals, wildlife, horses and livestock. The BVA has stated that existing controls do not go far enough to protect animal health and welfare and has called for lower noise limits for fireworks available to the public.

Companion animals

For companion animals, particularly dogs, cats, rabbits and other small pets, reducing consumer fireworks to 90 dB would be expected to reduce fear, panic and the risk of escape, injury or stress-related behavioural problems. Dogs Trust describes fireworks as a deeply distressing experience for many dogs, with unpredictable bangs and booms causing anxiety, disruption, long-term behavioural issues and physical harm. It supports further noise restrictions.

The Blue Cross reports that 60% of Britain's pets are left shaking in fear when fireworks are set off, and identifies loud noise and unpredictability as the main problems for pet owners. Survey evidence shows owners reporting that their pets shake, pant and bolt.

Evidence concerning cats is less developed but points in the same direction. Dale and others surveyed owners of 3,527 animals and found that cats were more likely to hide or attempt to escape, whereas dogs exhibited more overt, active behaviours; six per cent of animals for whom injury information was available had reportedly suffered physical injury, most often indirectly during avoidance. Quieter behaviour may therefore conceal significant fear.

Lowering the limit would reduce the severity of noise-triggered distress, the need for veterinary or behavioural intervention, and the risk of animals escaping from homes, gardens, or enclosures.

Wild animals

For wildlife, a 90 dB limit would be expected to reduce disturbance to birds and other wild animals that cannot be contained, comforted, desensitised or moved indoors. The peer-reviewed evidence here is unusually strong because radar and GPS tracking permit observation at a scale unavailable for other taxa. Shamoun-Baranes and others used weather radar to demonstrate mass nocturnal flight immediately after midnight on New Year's Eve, with birds reaching altitudes more commonly associated with migration. Hoekstra and others combined radar with systematic bird counts and found that, on average, approximately 1,000 times as many birds were aloft on New Year's Eve as on regular nights, with the response strongest within five kilometres but remaining elevated up to about ten kilometres. Kölzsch and others analysed GPS tracks from 347 geese across eight New Year periods and found that on fireworks nights the birds travelled about 5–16 kilometres farther and flew 40–150 metres higher, then altered movement and feeding in ways consistent with compensating for the energetic cost.

Urban birds are not exempt. Wayman and others used L-band radar over Birmingham during Diwali, Bonfire Night and New Year's Eve and found more birds aloft at higher altitudes than in matched baselines, despite urban species often being regarded as relatively tolerant of anthropogenic disturbance.

Reducing the permissible sound level would help protect wild animals from startle responses, displacement, exhaustion, collision risk and disruption to feeding, roosting and nesting behaviour. This is particularly important because wildlife has no practical means of anticipating private firework use or seeking human protection from sudden explosive noise.

Farmed animals and horses

For farmed animals and horses, reducing decibel levels would lower the risk of panic, flight responses, injuries, and secondary hazards. The RSPCA explains that horses and farm livestock are easily frightened by loud noise and sudden bright light and may injure themselves on fencing, farm equipment, or fixtures and fittings if startled.

Recent UK research supports this. Gerow, Clegg and Cooke surveyed 1,234 horse owners and 232 donkey owners in 2026. Seventy-seven per cent supported tighter regulation; horse owners reported running, kicking, bucking and rearing; and eight per cent reported a horse injury attributed to fireworks. The authors note that equine injuries are typically indirect, arising from the animal's reaction rather than from the firework itself. The British Horse Society has recorded 1,468 firework-related equine incidents between November 2010 and March 2024, averaging just over 100 reported incidents annually. Across that period, there were 49 horse fatalities, 317 horse injuries and 84 human injuries.

Sanctuaries such as Hopefield Animal Sanctuary have reported the loss of otherwise healthy rescue animals overnight during the fireworks period, following exposure to sustained noise and disruption from private displays. A-LAW presents this as lived experience rather than as evidence of general causation, but it illustrates the severity of the outcome at the extreme of the range.

Noise intensity and predictability are distinct variables

A reduction in the permitted decibel level addresses the intensity and spatial extent of firework noise. It does not, by itself, make a private firework display predictable for those exposed to it.

The consultation itself recognises predictability as a distinct determinant of impact. In explaining the difficulty of assessing firework noise, it identifies, among the relevant factors, the psychological question of whether the noise is “expected or predictable”. It separately justifies continued professional access to louder products on the basis that such events are publicised and far less likely to occur illegally or at unsociable hours.

That reasoning applies with particular force to animals. A keeper who knows when a display will occur can bring animals indoors, adjust turnout, increase supervision, administer prescribed medication, mask sound, or arrange temporary relocation. A keeper given no notice can do none of those things, and wild animals have no means of anticipation at all.

A-LAW therefore supports the proposed reduction but asks the Government to recognise that it addresses only one of two mechanisms of harm. We return to the second, the unannounced and dispersed character of private use, in our additional recommendations below.

The Government’s own testing

Research conducted for the Office for Product Safety and Standards by the Health and Safety Executive found that F2 products tested ranged from approximately 70 to 120 dBA, and F3 products from approximately 75 to 120 dBA. Therefore, product category is not a reliable proxy for acoustic output.

Testing shows that products below 90 dB already exist across both the F2 and F3 categories, supporting the proposition that a 90 dB limit is technically achievable for at least part of the existing consumer market. A-LAW does not suggest that it establishes a commercially viable 90 dB equivalent for every product type or effect, and we address the consequences for industry in Questions 8 and 9.

The adequacy of the measurement standard

A-LAW draws attention to a limitation that the consultation itself identifies.

A-weighted measurement de-emphasises the frequencies to which human hearing is least sensitive and emphasises the roughly 1–5 kHz range, where human hearing is sharpest, so A-weighted measurements “tend not to express the full spectrum of the sound experienced”. The consultation accepts that A-weighting is less suited to measuring the type of noise fireworks produce but proposes retaining it because it is familiar to businesses and consumers.

A-LAW does not oppose that choice as a transitional matter. We do, however, invite the Government to recognise its consequences for the statutory objective in section 2(2)(b) of the Fireworks Act 2003. A metric derived from human auditory sensitivity is, on its face, an imperfect proxy for the exposure experienced by species whose hearing extends substantially beyond human hearing.

A-LAW does not claim to have settled on the appropriate acoustical methodology, nor does it suggest that any particular alternative is necessarily correct. We ask the Government to review, informed by veterinary audiology evidence, whether A-weighting alone adequately captures the frequency content and impulse characteristics relevant to animal exposure, and to consider supplementary or alternative metrics where the evidence supports them.

Question 8: What might be the negative impacts of reducing the maximum decibel level of fireworks available to the general public?

A-LAW does not suggest that reducing to 90 dB (A,imp) would be without cost. We identify the potential negative impacts below, together with our reasons for considering each manageable and outweighed.

Reformulation and compliance costs: Manufacturers of products above the new ceiling would need to reformulate or withdraw them, incurring retesting costs. The Government estimates that a reduction to 110 dB (A,imp) would affect around one third of current consumer products; a reduction to 90 dB would affect more. This is a genuine cost. However, it falls on a product category already subject to conformity assessment and periodic standards revision, and the Health and Safety Executive testing referred to above indicates that compliant, quieter products are already manufactured and sold.

Stranded stock: Retailers and importers may hold stock that can no longer be lawfully sold. The transitional arrangements proposed in Question 9 address this by allowing a reasonable period to clear stock before commencement.

Reduced consumer choice: Some currently popular products would become unavailable to consumers. A-LAW accepts this consequence. It is the intended effect of the measure, and Parliament has already determined that preventing “death of animals or injury or distress to animals” is a purpose for which fireworks regulations may be made. Celebration is not prevented: lower-noise consumer products and professionally organised displays remain available.

Displacement to illegal or imported products: A tighter ceiling increases the incentive to source non-compliant products, including online and across borders. A-LAW regards this as the most serious potential negative impact. This supports accompanying the change with verification duties for online marketplaces, market surveillance resources, and enforcement capacity, which we address at Question 10.

Enforcement burden: Verifying acoustic compliance requires test data rather than inspection. Our response to Question 2 explains why product-characteristic restrictions and a noise ceiling complement each other in this regard.

Cultural and community celebration: Fireworks accompany religious and cultural events in many communities. A measure directed at product noise applies uniformly and does not restrict the occasions on which fireworks may be used. A-LAW would oppose any measure that is framed so as to bear unequally on the celebrations of particular communities.

Considering these factors, A-LAW considers the welfare benefits set out at Question 7 to be substantial, recurrent and presently unmitigated, while the identified costs are transitional, quantifiable and capable of being managed through lead-in time and enforcement support.

Question 9: How much lead in time would businesses need to prepare for the changes proposed in this consultation and why?

A-LAW proposes a six-month lead-in period from the making of the amending instrument to commencement. The Government should also consider whether a narrowly defined transitional provision is required for contracts genuinely in the course of performance at commencement. A-LAW does not propose a general sell-through period for existing stock.

That approach has precedent under the Ivory Act 2018. The Ivory Act 2018 (Commencement No. 2 and Transitional Provision) Regulations 2022 were made on 14 March 2022 and brought the prohibition on dealing in ivory into force on 6 June 2022, a period of approximately twelve weeks, with a further transitional provision until 3 July 2022 allowing the completion of contracts already in progress. That lead-in followed several years of public notice after Royal Assent in 2018 and the subsequent litigation.

The fireworks sector has also had substantial advance notice of the possibility of tighter regulation, through parliamentary debate, petitions and this consultation, well before any instrument is made. Six months accordingly strikes a balance between allowing businesses a realistic period to reformulate, retest and clear stock, and preventing excessively loud consumer fireworks from remaining in circulation, at the expense of animal welfare, any longer than necessary.

A-LAW would not support a lead-in materially longer than six months unless there is clear evidence from industry of a specific operational constraint, and invites the Government to publish any such evidence so that it may be tested by other respondents.

Question 10: What other things should we consider when setting a lead in time?

A-LAW invites the Government to consider the following points.

Alignment with the fireworks season: Commencement should be timed so that the first Bonfire Night and New Year period after the instrument is made falls within the new regime rather than immediately before it. A lead-in expiring in late November would leave the principal period of animal-welfare harm governed by the existing rules for another year.

Enforcement readiness as a precondition to commencement: A-LAW draws attention to the approach in the Netherlands, where commencement of the consumer fireworks prohibition under the Wet veilige jaarwisseling was made conditional on the delivery of three things: an enforcement plan agreed between the police and municipalities, the secondary instrument governing local exemptions, and a funded compensation arrangement for the trade. A-LAW does not propose that the United Kingdom adopt the Dutch prohibition. We commend the principle that an instrument should not commence before the machinery to enforce it exists. The contrasting experience in Scotland, where fireworks licensing provisions were enacted but implementation has been paused for want of funding, illustrates the risk of the alternative.

Online sales: The lead-in period should be used to place verification duties on online marketplaces on the same footing as physical retail, so that the new ceiling is not circumvented at the point where it is least observed.

Market surveillance and Trading Standards capacity: The measure will require reviewing acoustic test data rather than merely inspecting products. A-LAW invites the Government to confirm what additional resources will accompany the change.

Northern Ireland and the internal market: Directive 2013/29/EU continues to apply in Northern Ireland by operation of the Windsor Framework, as this consultation acknowledges, and it applies across all four nations. A-LAW invites the Government to explain how a reduced consumer noise ceiling in Great Britain would operate alongside the position in Northern Ireland, and, in particular, how it intends to address the treatment of qualifying Northern Ireland goods under the market access principles in the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020.

We do not assert that an exclusion will necessarily be required: if the Government legislates uniformly, no relevant divergence within Great Britain arises. If an exclusion becomes necessary, the route for goods is an agreed exclusion in Schedule 1 to that Act, which the Secretary of State may amend by regulations under section 10. A-LAW asks that any such work proceed in parallel with the amending instrument, so that the implementation of a welfare measure is not unnecessarily delayed.

Baseline data: A-LAW asks that the Government establish, before commencement, a baseline for the indicators against which the measure will later be assessed, including veterinary and welfare reports, equine incident data, noise complaints and enforcement outcomes, so that effectiveness can be evaluated rather than inferred.

Additional evidence and recommendations

The consultation invites further evidence. A-LAW offers the following observation.

The proposed reduction in the permitted noise level is welcome, but it addresses the intensity of firework noise rather than its unpredictability. As set out in Question 7, the Government's own analysis recognises predictability as an independent determinant of impact and relies on it to justify continued professional access to louder products. The same reasoning, applied consistently, applies to private consumer use.

A-LAW therefore invites the Government, separately from this consultation, to examine measures aimed at that second mechanism:

- advance notification of private displays to neighbouring residents and animal keepers;
- traceability of consumer purchases to an identifiable user; and
- powers for local authorities in England and Wales to designate firework control zones comparable to those available to Scottish local authorities under the Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Act 2022.

None of these measures would prevent celebration. Each would allow those responsible for animals to prepare. Together with a reduced noise ceiling, they would address both the severity of fireworks noise and the current inability to anticipate it.

A-LAW would be glad to further assist the Office for Product Safety and Standards on any of the matters raised in this response.