



HeadsUp Forum # 22

[www.HeadsUp.org.uk](http://www.HeadsUp.org.uk)

## Animal Cruelty – Who Cares?

(September 17<sup>th</sup> – October 5<sup>th</sup> 2007)

*An online platform providing young people with a secure and structured space to discuss their perspectives on animal cruelty.*

**Animals are an integral part** of societies and families right across the globe. We wanted to assess young people's opinions on a variety of cruel or outdated practices concerning animals.

**Young people benefited from a sustained and engaging dialogue with legislators** who all visited the debate regularly. For most of the young people, this was the first time they had been in dialogue with legislators.

**All sides of the issues were examined by participants** in the animal cruelty debate which gained expertise from the range of legislators taking part, including:

- **Lord Rooker** - Minister of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- **Nick Palmer MP** - Member of the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare
- **Baroness Gale** - Member of the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare
- **Elliot Morley MP** - Member of the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare and RSPCA vice president
- **Glenis Willmott MEP** - Member of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety
- **Ian Strachan** - Head of the Animal Welfare Branch in the Scottish Government
- **Ian Cawsey MP** - RSPCA vice president
- **Liz Lynne MEP** - Member of the European Parliament interested in tackling animal cruelty
- **John Bowis MEP** - Member of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety
- **Bill Wiggin MP** - Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries
- **Ann Widdecombe MP** - RSPCA vice president

**Senior Ministers, MPs, Peers, AMs and MSPs** from all political parties continue to value HeadsUp as a useful forum to interact with young people on key issues. The HeadsUp team provide short, one-to-one online training sessions to all participating decision-makers.

**Young people remain very keen and committed to HeadsUp as a unique opportunity to** get their opinions heard by decision-makers. During this forum they posted comments both in and out of school hours - underlining how keen they are to use this resource, even giving up some of their spare time to keep on top of the debate as it developed.

**In keeping with the youth participation agenda**, a summary report outlining key findings and quotes is disseminated to interested parties, particularly legislators and government, enabling young people's voices to be heard by key decision-makers. The main objective of the site is not only to enable peer-to-peer deliberation on hot political issues, policies or events, but also to provide students with a means of informing themselves about the topic.

**All HeadsUp Debates** are supported by structured, student-centred background notes that include an overview of the key issues being debated, a comprehensive glossary and statistics package, plus summaries of arguments for and against specific issues.

**11 to 18 year olds from across the UK** took part in this Animal Cruelty Debate. HeadsUp continues to attract new schools, teachers, and young people to register to take part in the debates.

**The HeadsUp team would like to convey our thanks** and appreciation to the legislators who gave up their time to participate in this debate. We would also like to extend an invitation to interested parties, particularly legislators and government, and interested NGOs, academics and journalists to respond to the findings.

**Responses and requests** for further information should be directed to:

Barry Griffiths  
HeadsUp Manager  
Hansard Society  
40 - 43 Chancery Lane  
London  
WC2A 1JA  
020 7438 1214  
[b.g.griffiths@hansard.lse.ac.uk](mailto:b.g.griffiths@hansard.lse.ac.uk)

---

**Animal Cruelty – Who Cares?**

*Forum Summary*

**Should animal testing be banned once and for all?**

Animal testing was the primary focal point of this opening discussion space as we wanted to know whether young people were in favour of banning it once and for all. In particular, we asked if there was a difference between testing on animals for cosmetics compared to doing so for pharmaceutical medicines?

These deliberations proved to be the most popular in the entire forum. After considering the pros and cons of animal testing, young people were split over a decision to support the practice. Some disagreed with animal testing for ethical and moral reasons:

*animal testing should be banned as soon as possible. I think that it is cruel, mean and a pure act of hatred.*

*Animal Testing should be stamped out. If we can't test on humans then why test on animals? It doesn't make sense to me and I can't see reasons. I may be wrong but in my opinion I think we are cruel and evil for putting animals through that.*

However, others were less decided and voiced their conditional support for animal testing, as long as the correct checks were implemented:

*Animal testing can only be all right if the owner of the testing plant has a license to prove he's not cruel to his animals in the testing zone.*

*people should be able to lightly animal test in human conditions and only if they are constantly checked by the right authority.*

*if it wasn't for animal testing we wouldn't have drugs that we take for granted i.e paracetamol and treatment for our loved ones who have needed it! the animals are not just picked off the streets, but they are purpose bred and the welfare of the animals are the given absolute priority. we also wouldn't have ribena or lucozade as they were tested on animals!*

Elliot Morley MP came online to offer his experience on the subject and stress the distinction between testing cosmetics and medicines:

*There is a difference between using animals for testing cosmetics and for treatments that could save lives. We do need to minimise animal tests and there are alternatives that are being developed such as stem cells.*

In response to Elliot Morley's point, enthusiastic youngsters voiced their support for animal testing in order to find vital cures for diseases:

*i do agree with the bad aspects of animal testing, but if tests and experiments like these weren't conducted, cures and solutions wouldn't be found towards diseases and illnesses.*

*Without doubt animals should be tested for medicines, but I'm not sure about cosmetics. After all, do guinea pigs actually have rights? Are they even capable of conscious thought?*

One astute HeadsUp user called on the government to increase spending on research for animal testing in order to find safer alternatives to the outdated practices currently being implemented:

*It also concerns me that, despite my impartiality in terms of medical testing, testing on animals for pharmaceutical needs is unsafe. It is time that the government got a move on and put more money into researching better ways of testing instead of persisting on using these victorian methods.*

Still on the subject of animal testing, Nick Palmer MP offered his perspective on the issues and called for a ban on testing which causes undue pain to animals:

*I'd be in favour of an absolute ban on experiments that cause extreme pain and suffering - and yes, I'd say that even if they did bring medical advances. None of us will live forever anyway and there should be limits to what we'll do in order to live a little longer.*

Picking up on this comment, one young person disagreed strongly with Nick Palmer's argument and explained the reasons why:

*I definitely understand the problem of drawing a line, but I would disagree with simply denying extensions to the human life span, for the benefits of animals who may not even comprehend what is happening to them. Death is inevitable, but that does not mean we should not try to slow it.*

The discussion widened to cover animal testing from an EU perspective. John Bowis MEP used the Forum to highlight his thoughts on whether non-human primate testing should be banned:

*That is the question that I and my colleagues in the European Parliament have been asking following the successful adoption of Written Declaration 40/2007 that I tabled calling for a phase out of experiments on non-human primates as and when alternatives are validated.*

An additional layer of expertise was offered by Baroness Gale. She believed that there is no justification for testing on animals and that alternatives should be used in all circumstances. She told the young people on the Forum that cosmetic testing on rabbits/mice is being banned:

*I don't believe that there is any need to test cosmetics on animals. There is no need to have any more new cosmetics products which involve testing them on animals. There is already a huge selection of cosmetics available but the good news is that tests of cosmetic products on rabbits and mice will be banned in Europe after scientists now believe that most experiments can now be carried out using non-animal alternatives. This should end the practice, for example, of using rabbits to test eye shadow and mascara, very cruel!*

After reading this information, one young person voiced support for Baroness Gale's stance and noted that there are a lot of cosmetics on sale already, without the need to test more on animals:

*I agree with Baroness Gale's comment. I think it is wrong to test cosmetics on animals and anyway aren't there enough cosmetics in shops? Although some people think that it is a good thing because then we won't catch diseases when we wear it but I still disagree with this statement. Surely there is some other way of doing this without harming living creatures.*

For another legislator involved in this debate, Bill Wiggin MP, the situation was very straightforward. He highlighted several key priorities for the authorities: to minimise the number of animals being tested on, employ alternative methods and ban unnecessary research:

*I am absolutely against cruelty and have consistently pushed the Government to increase the prison sentences for those convicted of cruelty to animals. However some testing is not cruel. For instance if a new drug is invented it is very important that it does not have side effects. So animal testing should be the last resort before testing on humans. Agreed that not all drugs will act on animals in the same way as they do on people. So animal testing is not perfect which is why we should use the minimum number of animals, we should use other methods when possible and we should try to ensure that no unnecessary research is done. On another note we should also remember that Vets need medicines too for our animals and these must be tested before being released*



Animal Cruelty – Who Cares?

Forum Summary

**What do you make of the intensive farming of battery chickens in this country?**

We wanted young people to consider several broad themes in this discussion space, namely animal farming and transportation. More specifically, to analyse the impact of battery farmed chickens and the spread of disease.

Nick Palmer MP was clear that intentional ignorance played a big part in society turning a blind eye to battery cage conditions for chickens. However, he underlined that free-range eggs are increasingly popular amongst consumers:

*I reckon most of us shut our eyes to the conditions in battery cages, but where people become aware of them they are usually willing to pay a bit more to make the conditions less unpleasant. That's why free-range eggs are becoming steadily more popular, to the point that some supermarkets now sell nothing else.*

For these HeadsUp youngsters there was no room for negotiation regarding the practice of battery farming – it was simply wrong and should be stopped:

*Battery farming is wrong because it is extremely cruel on the poor hens who have to live their life in boxes which are only thrice their size.*

*Too many people are buying chickens which are (dare i say it) mass produced and not treated properly.*

Another participant was quick to stress the merits of organic produce including chicken and eggs. The participant acknowledged the costs associated with making this organic change in lifestyle but pointed out that if more people bought organic the prices would drop:

*i think that all chickens and eggs should be organic. some people may say different because they cant afford organic produce but if everyone bought organic produce then prices could be made lower because the companies would be getting more money. if everyone bought this produce then unfair farms would have to raise prices to get money for the chickens and the farms may even be forced to stop, bringing back chickens rights.*

However, there was some support for battery farming as a cheap alternative to organic food:

*Ultimately battery farming is a good way to get cheap food to the masses, as organic food is still overpriced and over idealised.*

Ian Strachan, Head of the Animal Welfare Branch in the Scottish Government, highlighted to young people that codes of practice exist to guide farmers wanting to keep or transport animals:

*Remember, there is legislation to regulate farming activities and codes of practice to advise farmers on the best way to look after the welfare of their animals - this includes "factory farmed" pigs and chickens.*

Legislators taking part in this debate were happy to share their knowledge and opinions with the young people online. Bill Wiggin MP posted welcome news that the battery cage would be illegal by 2012, whilst Elliot Morley MP asked if consumers would be willing to pay for more expensive cage alternatives. Baroness Gale informed students that her method of campaigning against cruelty was to become a vegetarian:

*In 2012 the battery cage as we know it will become illegal. I think this is very good news for everybody. It gives egg farmers enough time to reinvest and it makes it clear that higher animal welfare standards are important to us all. **Bill Wiggin MP***

*We can produce food with better welfare conditions. There are alternatives to battery cages but it does add some cost. Will people pay that? Food has actually fallen in cost in real terms and we do now insist on labelling. The RSPCA backs the 'Freedom Food' label. **Elliot Morley MP***

*For many years I complained about the cruelty of factory farms and battery reared chickens. Then one day I realised that I could not keep on complaining about the cruelty and still continue to eat its products. That's what made me become a vegetarian, which I have been for 24 years. **Baroness Gale***

One young person highlighted an example of European farming traditions which they considered to be particularly cruel:

*in france they force feed geese until they are really fat and their liver is huge then they use the liver for pate i think this is really disgusting and i don't no what kind of person would think of that kind of thing*

Finally in this discussion space, HeadsUp moderators picked up on a succession of news stories covering the spread of Blue Tongue disease and asked participants if they were worried by this outbreak. Elliot Morley MP took a rather pessimistic view:

*I fear Blue Tongue is here to stay and it was only a matter of time before it arrived given global warming. The midge that carries the disease is normally killed off in European winters. That isn't happening any more with an increase in temperature and we are seeing that in other pest species of insects. This is why there is a cost to not taking action on climate change and why we must address this seriously globally*

**Animal Cruelty – Who Cares?**

*Forum Summary*

**Is the renewed use of fur in the fashion industry cruel to animals?**

In this timely debate, we wanted to ask students for their views on the use of fur, primarily in the fashion industry – was this process cruel to animals? Furthermore, participants were asked if they had ever made a decision not to wear fur or similar products due to the way it is farmed.

Clearly, these young people were acutely aware that as a result of the increased use of fur in fashion more animals were being killed solely for the purpose of using their skin or fur for clothes. The majority of young people were adamant that this practice was terrible and particularly cruel:

*I think that animal fur is disgusting to wear especially if the animal was killed. The thought of killing animals just for the thought of clothes is horrible and only people who have a heart of steel would kill a innocent animal*

*Killing animals for their fur is both wrong and unfair. Animals have a right to live as much as us and I think that animal fur should be classified illegal.*

At this juncture, Glenis Willmott MEP, who was following deliberations closely, summarised the anti-fur comments being posted and highlighted the conditions that animals are kept in and how they are killed:

*It is clear to me that most of you are against the use of fur. It is a cruel practice. Most of the animals kept in fur farms lead a horrible life, with limited space and a short life. They are often electrocuted or gassed, so as to not damage the precious fur.*

One young participant took an alternative viewpoint, focusing on the fact that animals have been bred for a specific purpose:

*I think it is important to remember that these animals have often been bread by humans. If we weren't here, they wouldn't be here either.*

Responding directly to this point, Nick Palmer MP, wanted young people to put themselves in the position of these animals:

*It's not the biggest form of ill-treatment of animals, but it's surely one of the most unnecessary ones. And while jmj is right that animals used for fur may have been bred for that purpose, I don't think that justifies it: if we were bred to live in a cage and have our skin used for handbags, I doubt if we'd feel grateful for having been bred in the first place.*

An interesting dynamic developed in this discussion thread, after a teacher used the Forum to post thoughts on the use of fur in society. The teacher questioned the legislators as to why fur is still used on robes for Members of the House of Lords:

*Why can't the use of fur robes (fake or otherwise) be banned in the House of Lords? As a fellow philosopher has just pointed out, it surely isn't cold in there? I watched a programme recently which traced the killing of tigers in India to a ceremony held by a tribe whose wealth was displayed by the amount of fur they wore.*

As a current member of the upper house, Baroness Gale, was well qualified to answer queries of this nature. She informed participants that she too was against wearing robes, whether made of fake or real fur, but that they were worn only on certain occasions:

*I would happily campaign to end the need to wear robes in the House of Lords whether they be real or fake fur, but at the present time robes are worn for special occasions only, such as the State Opening of Parliament, or when Peers take their seat for the first time. I'm glad to say we don't wear them everyday!*

Attention in this discussion thread turned towards the use of fur in making coats and other clothing. The majority of young people were clear that wearing real animal fur was unacceptable, especially with such a good range of fake alternatives available to choose from:

*Fur coats and other clothing is 100% WRONG. If you are wanting to wear fur, wear fake fur, not real fur from animals. If you take the fur of an animal, it is part of it's adaptations, and if it used in a way to help it survive, then the animal could die. A life of an animal is not worth a fur coat.*

*i think that if your going to buy a furcoat for the winter then at least get a fake one!, plusssss i slightly agree that people die every year and that it wouldnt take that many animals to test it i think the testers shouldn't be aloud to test on endangered species*

*i think that it is really mean to keep animals just to be killed. people who wear fur are just supporting horrible people. you can get nice clothes without fur and if you want to wear fur you can wear faux fur. Faux fur looks exactly like real fur and is much nicer*

Some legislators responded to a range of student comments on fur. Elliot Morley MP informed participants that fur is not a by-product of meat and the rest of the animal is disregarded. Interestingly, Bill Wiggin MP, asked participants if they bought non-animal products and underlined the importance of the right to choose:

*Most fur is a not a by-product of meat. The rest of the animal is thrown away. Many of the species concerned are kept in very cruel systems of barren wire cages of the type this government has now banned. Other fur comes from animals trapped in the wild with leghold traps which are cruel and of course a fur industry does encourage illegal poaching. It is true that in Tibet Tiger fur has a cultural and religious significance but a recent guidance from the Dali Lama has stopped that. We should do that too in fashion and in our own traditions like bearskin caps. I know synthetic alternatives have been tried and not considered a success in rain. I can't believe however that we cannot produce a decent alternative. **Elliot Morley MP***

*Do you eat meat, wear shoes or belts made from leather or do you prefer to use non animal products? I think you should have the right to choose. **Bill Wiggin MP***

**Animal Cruelty – Who Cares?**

*Forum Summary*

**Which is worse in terms of cruelty to animals from the following: zoos or bullfighting or a circus?**

In the final discussion space, we felt it was important to allow young people to have their say on a range of controversial spectacles involving animals. Students had to weigh up the animal cruelty pros and cons from the following: zoos, bullfighting or a circus.

This intriguing dilemma clearly stirred up a lot of passion in participants. For one young person the decision was a simple one - they believed that a circus was the worst culprit when it comes to animal cruelty as they train animals to do tricks:

*In my opinion circus is the worst, the animals are forced to do tricks and are treated very badley in most circumstances, its like being a slave as a human animals should be free especialy when they use species like elephants, which are going extinked! i think that if your going to make a circus then animals should not be in the show. The show must go on... whithout animals*

In contrast, another participant felt that the training and discipline offered by a circus could be a much wanted stimulus for the animals:

*Even if animals do not like being part of a circus, this does not mean that they do not like being trained to do certain tricks; such as jumping through a hoop, or standing up; in fact certain animals enjoy being trained to do tricks, and doing such tricks.*

However, another HeadsUp user disagreed and argued that bullfighting was worse in terms of animal cruelty. They called on it to be banned in countries where it is currently legal as the bulls are repeatedly speared to death and also people get badly hurt or even killed:

*i think that out of all of these bullfighting is the worst .in no rest often this is not the case and the animals are treated almost as pets. bullfighting has never been fair the bulls are sent in the ring loads and are speared sometimes to death.sometimes people are killed and badly injured and the bull is always killed at the end. i think it is really mean and should be banned as soon as possible because it is really dangerous and unfair.*

Perhaps understandably due to the media coverage it receives and the fact that bullfighting is illegal in the UK, bullfighting was the 'activity' which was considered most dangerous and cruel to animals:

*bullfights are very cruel, the bull actualy dies, and it dies a very painfull death... spears in its side, bulls should be free, not in a ring being killed... and i think that alot of money it made from killing animals which is terrible!!!, how would you like it if you were in a ring against a big monster with 4 spears???*

Finally, the standard of animal care and appearance of zoos were scrutinised by participants. The result was positive, probably because it is far more likely that a HeadsUp user has visited a zoo rather than a bullfight, for example.

One young person seemed to capture the main benefits of zoos, namely looking after animals and breeding rare species, and shared these thoughts with their HeadsUp peers in the debate:

*Zoos are much better for animals as they are treated fairly and are used for breeding to save endangered species*

Ian Strachan used his experience to stress to participants that all zoos must follow strict rules to protect the animals on show:

*All zoos in GB need to comply with the Zoo Licencing Act 1981. This ensures that the zoo is inspected regularly, meets the welfare needs of the animals, and the larger zoos have an obligation to provide an education or conservation programme.*

In a similar vein, Elliot Morley MP reported that there were good and bad zoos but most important of all was the reason for building zoos - namely education and conservation:

*There are also good and bad zoos and we should be clear what they are for, not just gawping at animals but for education and conservation. I also think there is no justification for using caged animals in circuses. I think there are other forms of entertainment that doesn't demean animals. The new Animal Welfare Bill will introduce new regulations on this which I very much welcome.*

Picking up on these comments, one student agreed with legislators and also drew attention to some drawbacks of zoos. They were concerned that zoos restricted the movement of animals but were quick to praise Vienna Zoo which offered wide open spaces for their animals, giving them a good quality of life:

*Zoos are good and bad as they look after the animals and make sure that they get expert help if they are ill and they help to save endagendered species. However, the animals don't get a sense of freedom to be able to travel as far as they want and all they see every day is people looking in at them. Zoos overall though are a good idea as long as the animals have a big space like the animals in Vienna Zoo. As well as bullfights, I think that they are horrible as they are making animals do things that they don't want to and occasional get killed for mere enjoyment of humans.*

Bill Wiggin MP listed the criteria for good zoos. He strongly believed in the merits of a good captive breeding programme and high quality of care for the animals:

*I think cruelty is not acceptable in any form. I don't think it matters if you have a zoo or keep a pet gerbil - Cruelty is simply wrong. No matter how big or small or if you are an institution or a private individual .It is how your treat your animals that matters. We should not allow the debate to label all zoos good or bad. Surely it is not zoos we care about, it is the treatment of their captive animals. If a zoo is well run, its animals will be well looked after, they will usually have a breeding programme and all the five freedoms (expressing natural behaviour, mixing or not with others of their species, no pain, injury or disease, no fear or distress, food, shelter and water) will be adhered to.*

## Conclusions

Battery farming undermines animal welfare  
Opposed to the use of fur in fashion or elsewhere  
Support for animal testing but only for medical reasons  
Calls for bullfighting to be banned in countries where it is  
currently legal

**Students were very passionate and argued their opinions well** in this animal cruelty debate. Equally, when it came to solutions, they were innovative and constructive when it came to questioning relevant legislators.

**Young people made four key conclusions in this animal cruelty debate...**

**Participants felt that battery farming was particularly cruel to animals** and the majority supported the principles behind organic produce. Bill Wiggin MP shared welcome news that the battery cage would be illegal by 2012.

**The use of fur in fashion and across society was condemned by young people** especially as so many alternative materials were readily available. Students could not understand why faux fur, which is not made from animal skins, was not used more as an animal-friendly option.

**All forms of animal testing were controversial. However, testing on animals** specifically for medical reasons was deemed to be valuable by young people. Conversely, they could not comprehend or condone testing on animals for other reasons such as for cosmetics.

**Students believed that bullfighting should be banned in countries where it is currently legal**, and reserved special praise for zoos. The majority of participants highlighted the gruesome and cruel nature of bullfights but also felt that zoos effectively protected endangered species as well as having an educational purpose.

**The range of enthusiastic and relevant legislators** taking part online during all three weeks gave the debate added momentum and a stamp of parliamentary approval from the young people's collective viewpoint.

**Animal Cruelty – Who Cares?** was a particularly topical issue for a HeadsUp Forum and therefore one that was welcomed by young people who participated alongside NGOs and MPs from across the political spectrum. It provided a secure, structured but non-sanitised platform for young people to voice their perspectives on animal cruelty.