

Briefing on Decapod Crustaceans in the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill

Crustacean Compassion welcomes the introduction of the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill as part of the range of animal welfare legislation currently progressing through parliament. We were pleased that the Bill was extended in the House of Lords to include decapod crustaceans within its scope, a groundbreaking decision which we believe will drive change for animals around the world. We were encouraged that the Bill received such broad, cross-party support during the Second Reading debate in the House of Commons last month..

While this briefing is focused on the inclusion of decapod crustaceans, such as crabs, lobsters, and prawns, we support the Bill in its entirety and believe it represents an improvement to the UK's animal welfare legislation.

Review of the Evidence of Sentience in Cephalopod Molluscs and Decapod Crustaceans

This robust and compelling London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) report concluded that there is strong scientific evidence that decapod crustaceans are sentient and can experience pain. The overarching central recommendation of the report is that:

"...all cephalopod molluscs and decapod crustaceans be regarded as sentient animals for the purposes of UK animal welfare law. They should be counted as "animals" for the purposes of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and included in the scope of any future legislation relating to animal sentience".

Led by Dr Jonathan Birch of the LSE, the team included animal science experts from Cambridge University and the Royal Veterinary College, who reviewed evidence from aquatic animal welfare experts, the shellfish industry, animal welfare organisations and the experimental science sector. After analysing over 300 scientific studies over several months, the peer-reviewed LSE report has concluded that there is strong scientific evidence of sentience in decapod crustaceans and cephalopod molluscs and recommends that they should be included in animal protection legislation.

Key points and recommendations from the LSE Report

- The scientific evidence of sentience in decapod crustaceans is vast, robust and satisfies the threshold needed to explicitly include them in the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill.
- Whilst there may be more evidence available for certain species, the report recommends that ALL decapod crustaceans should be included in the scope and protected in animal welfare legislation, similar as to it has been established, for example, in mammals. It would be incorrect to limit the scope of the Bill to certain species only.
- There is no dramatic difference in the quality or volume of evidence regarding cephalopods as opposed to decapods. This led to the recommendation that, if cephalopods are to be included in the scope of animal welfare laws, decapods should also be included.
- The report provides some helpful recommendations for improving best practice and welfare, and for regulating existing commercial practices that that are of reasonable and widespread animal welfare concern for decapod crustaceans.

In light of these findings and recommendations, it is right that decapod crustaceans have now been included in the Bill. The decision was made on the basis of overwhelming scientific evidence.

Importance of including decapod crustaceans

The inclusion of decapod crustaceans in the Bill is also consistent with the approach taken by other countries, where decapod crustaceans are protected in animal welfare legislation. These include Austria, Switzerland, Norway, New Zealand, some Australian states and territories, and some German and Italian cities. This is a pivotal time for animal welfare legislation. The incorporation of these unequivocal LSE findings and recognition of decapod sentience in this Bill will make animal welfare history in the UK and provide global leadership on this issue.

Public and expert support

The decision taken by the Government to extend the definition of “animal” within the Bill has widespread public, scientific and NGO support for their protection.

- Our [online petition](#) has been signed by almost 60,000 people and our [open letter](#) in 2018 was signed by over 50 scientific experts, veterinary professionals and public figures including Dr Sean Wensley, Professor Michael Appleby OBE, the Animal Welfare Science Ethics and Law Veterinary Association (AWSELVA), the British Veterinary Association (BVA), and naturalist and broadcaster Michaela Strachan.
- Additionally, over 4,200 people have written to their MPs supporting the inclusion of decapods in the Sentience Bill.
- Groups such as the [BVA](#) and the [Scottish Animal Welfare Commission](#) have policies that recognise the sentience of these animals and [support their inclusion](#) in legislation.
- Over 40 animal welfare organisations have supported the legal protection of decapods in a joint post-Brexit animal welfare manifesto and over 50 animal welfare organisations have called for the definition of ‘animal’ to be expanded to include decapods and cephalopods in the Bill through the Better Deal for Animals alliance.

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Crustacean Compassion campaigns for the humane treatment of decapod crustaceans such as crabs, lobsters, and prawns.

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