

Response to Defra's consultation on welfare in transport

March 2021

Bird welfare in the UK is world-class, science-based, and continually improving. Health and wellbeing of our birds is of the highest priority and in everyone's interest. The British Poultry Council welcomes the discussion around Defra's consultation on welfare in transport, but argues that the proposed measures are based on outdated research that do not reflect modern practices. This briefing paper explains why implementing such measures could potentially cripple British poultry meat supply chain.

Poultry meat industry strongly opposes Defra's proposals

- We are disappointed that the Government consultation suggests implementing significant changes to the requirements for the transport of birds without investing in the necessary scientific research and evidence base to support such changes.
- It is crucial that further research is conducted to assess welfare in transport using modern broiler genotypes and transport systems. Making legislative changes without latest research would be both premature and potentially damaging to the strides made in bird welfare during transport over the last 25 years.
- The overriding conclusion of the Systematic Review commissioned by Defra and published by Scottish Rural Agricultural College and the subsequent Farm Animal Welfare Committee opinion on welfare of animals during transport already suggests that "there are significant gaps in knowledge and further research on the welfare of animals in transport was required".

What is wrong with these proposals?

- Defra's proposals can potentially cripple British poultry meat supply chain as they prevent the consistent, secure, and just-in-time flow of birds from farms to processing plants. These proposals will cause significant disruption to the poultry meat supply chain and severely impact industry's ability to supply fresh poultry meat to meet the growing consumer demand across retail and food service. This will also have a knock-on impact on British food security and lead to dilution of standards due to cheaper imports – all of which is unacceptable.
- Limiting journey time of broilers to slaughter to a max 4 hours (including loading and unloading) will result in a 50% reduction in the total number of broiler journeys in the UK, which will have a catastrophic impact on UK food security as well as the local economy (as farms will have to be taken out of the supply base). Also, limiting the transport of day-old chicks to 21 hours would prevent over 70% of UK breeding stock exports and force primary breeding companies to move their breeding programmes to other countries.
- Prohibiting both short and long poultry journeys when the external temperature is outside the range of 5-25oC would result in the cancellation of most journeys in January and February as well as a significant percentage of journeys in November, December, March, and April. Implementing this requirement would mean a complete change to the poultry transport fleet resulting in an additional cost of £55 million without any evidence-based guarantee of better welfare for the birds.

- Preventing the passage of day-old chicks on ferries at the last minute where wind speed is more than 23mph would increase the likelihood of destruction of valuable day olds.

What is the industry doing to prioritise welfare during transport?

- British poultry meat industry ensures high standards of animal welfare during transport by carefully planning and executing the journey plan through a joined-up approach. All players across the supply chain including farmers, catching crews, hauliers, processing plant intake workers and official veterinarians work closely to minimise any potential welfare compromises during every journey. Each party takes ownership of their section of the journey and clear and concise Standard Operating Procedures are developed and employed by each business based on various factors including journey time and type, vehicle design, bird type and weight and ambient weather conditions.
- The industry has excellent broiler Dead on Arrival (DOA) figures which demonstrate that current practices are working well and are by no means detrimental to bird welfare. We have successfully reduced the % DOA levels from 0.194% back in 1992 to 0.078% in 2020.
- Over 30 countries have been supplied with breeding stock that has hatched in the UK and the average liveability on arrival was above 99.0% for all journeys and 99.5% for journeys more than 24 hours. The BPC recommends that the current position of journey time of up to 72 hours (as long as feed and water is supplied after 24 hours) is maintained.

Financial impact of Government's proposals on industry and UK economy

- Proposed implementation of a max 4-hour journey time across the UK broiler industry will result in a 50% reduction in total broiler journeys which would mean a £2.75 billion reduction in GVA contribution to the UK economy, and a £600 million reduction in tax revenue to the Exchequer.
- A further impact would be the reduction in fresh British poultry meat in retail and food service. These sales would either be lost completely or replaced with imports which would not necessarily be produced using the same welfare standards.
- British poultry breeders are the world's most sought-after suppliers of high value breeding stock for poultry meat, with exports worth £230m a year. A limit of 21 hours total journey time for such genetic stock would prevent over 70% of GB breeding stock exports with a loss of value of £180 million to the UK economy.
- If our breeding companies are not allowed to send day-old poultry on a journey of more than 21 hours, it will restrict UK's ability to trade and force businesses to move their breeding programmes to other countries. Primary breeding operations support over 2,000 GB based staff and exceeds an annual turnover of £310m.
- As an independent trading country post Brexit, Government must support poultry meat businesses and enable them to thrive as world leaders in poultry genetics.

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