



**Craig Whittaker MP**

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## **The Hunting Act**

Thank you for contacting me about fox hunting.

I appreciate the strong feelings many people have on this issue and I share your concern for ensuring the welfare of animals. The Government's manifesto included plans for a free vote to give Parliament the opportunity to decide the future of the Hunting Act 2004. In January 2018 the Prime Minister confirmed that having listened to the views of the country, as a result there will not be a vote on fox hunting during this Parliament.

I do believe it is important to listen when there is widespread opposition to a measure that has been proposed, so I support her decision not to hold this vote.

As you may know, fox hunting is banned under the Act, so whether or not an offence is being committed depends on whether or not the behaviour violates its provisions.

Since the introduction of the Hunting Act 2004 many hunts have turned to trail hunting as an alternative to live quarry hunting. This involves a pack of hounds following an artificially laid, animal-based scent. It closely mimics the hunting that took place before the ban, but does not involve a hunt for a live fox, so is not banned. For an offence to be committed it is necessary to prove that a wild animal is being hunted intentionally.

Ministers are cementing the UK's position as a global leader on animal welfare. The draft Animal Welfare (Sentencing and Recognition of Sentience) Bill sets out that the Government "*must have regard to the welfare needs of animals as sentient beings in formulating and implementing government policy*", and will also increase the sentences available to the courts in the most severe cases of animal cruelty to up to five years' imprisonment.

Other recent steps include announcing plans to make CCTV mandatory in all abattoirs to ensure animals are treated humanely at the end of their lives, banning microbeads that can harm marine life and introducing Europe's most comprehensive ban on the ivory trade, to protect the lives of endangered African elephants.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Craig Whittaker'.

Craig Whittaker MP