Craig Whittaker MP

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Caging Gamebirds

Thank you for contacting me about the welfare of gamebirds.

By convention, as a Government Whip, I do not sign EDMs.

That said, I do appreciate your concerns on this issue. Both I and the Government are committed to the highest standards of animal welfare, so I am glad to tell you that the Animal Welfare Act 2006 already makes it clear that gamebirds must not be caused any unnecessary suffering.

A Code of Practice for the Welfare of Gamebirds Reared for Sporting Purposes was drawn up based on research carried out by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, advised by a working group that included animal welfare organisations such as the RSPCA. Stock-keepers who fail to follow it could be found to have committed an offence. The Code specifies that these birds must:

1. have an environment appropriate to their species, age and the purpose for which they are being kept, including adequate heating, lighting, shelter, ventilation and resting areas;

2. have ready access to fresh water and an appropriate diet to maintain growth, health and vigour;

3. be provided with appropriate space and facilities to ensure the avoidance of stress and to allow the exhibition of normal behaviour patterns;

4. be provided with company of their own kind as appropriate for the species concerned; and

5. be adequately protected from pain, suffering, injury, or disease. Should any of these occur a rapid response is required, including diagnosis, remedial action and, where applicable, the correct use of medication.

The full Code can be found at www.gov.uk by searching on the term 'Gamebirds'.

These rules are enforced by the Animal and Plant Health Agency and local authorities, which carry out routine welfare inspections and investigates complaints; prosecutions can be brought where necessary.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP