

Naturewatch

Fact Sheet on Political Lobbying

Parliament and the Democratic Process

Members of Parliament (**MPs**) are the elected representatives of you, the general public, in the **House of Commons**. Each MP represents a geographical area known as a **constituency** and your constituency is the area where your main residence is based. The House of Commons is the place where all possible legislature (bills that will become legally binding laws) is openly discussed and only MPs are allowed to take part in these discussions. Therefore it is important that you make sure that the MP that represents you knows your views on animal welfare issues and in particular on bills to be discussed in the House, for example, the Bill to Ban Fox Hunting. You will then be sure that your MP is able to represent your views when he/she takes part in

Debates in the House of Commons.

During a Debate time is allowed for both sides to present their individual arguments, and at the end of most Debates the House decides whether to support or reject a proposal by holding a vote.

Unfortunately, your MP has only limited influence in the sphere of Government. The Government is the **Cabinet** made up of Senior Ministers chosen by the Prime Minister that is responsible for running the State Departments and deciding **Government Policy**. The Cabinet always contains members of the elected political party. There are about 65 other MPs who are Junior Ministers, Private Secretaries, Speakers, etc. who are also Members of Government but not Members of the Cabinet. The rest of MPs are known as **Backbenchers**. The MPs who are Members of Government are not able to lend their support to any political campaign or sign any **Early Day Motions** expressing their views. An Early Day Motion is a motion tabled by an MP calling for a Debate on an issue: however, these Motions rarely lead to a full Debate in the House and are more commonly used as a way to gain publicity for an issue. It is the Backbench MPs who mainly get involved in lobbying activities because they have more freedom to speak on issues that concern them.

Lobbying in short is the practice of influencing the way MPs vote on an issue. MPs can be lobbied by members of their constituencies, by fellow MPs, by their own political party, or by outside pressure groups, such as *Naturewatch*. Please see the **enclosed flo-chart** for details of the lobbying process that takes place within Parliament and the Government itself. This illustrates the fact that in lobbying your MP you are taking the first step

in the democratic process. Lobbying as a term is also applied to the work of commercial lobbying companies that are employed by organisations and businesses to represent their views to Parliament.

Ways to Lobby your MP

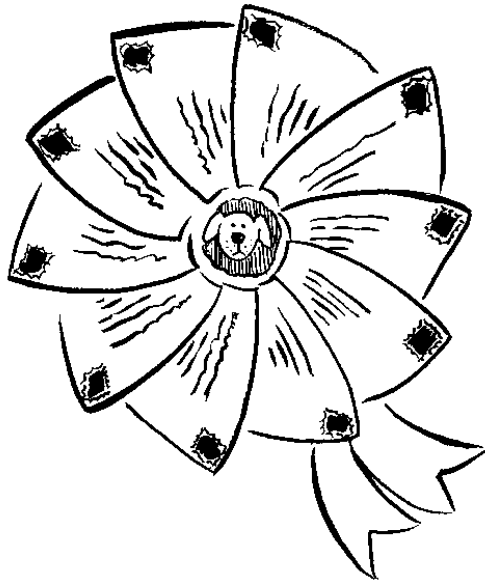
Write a letter to your local MP or to the Minister of the relevant Government Department – see 'Government Departments Responsible for Animal Welfare Issues'. When you write to your MP let them know what you think about a particular issue and also tell them what you would like them to do about the matter. For example, you may ask your MP to introduce a Private Member's Bill prohibiting a certain practice or you may ask a Minister to introduce a new law or to ensure that there is better enforcement of an existing law (e.g. Badger

cruelty). You may also ask your MP to lobby the relevant Government Minister about the issue, as a Minister is much more likely to read a letter from an MP than from a member of the public. You may also ask your MP to sign an Early Day Motion or to support a Bill that is before Parliament on a certain animal welfare issue.

Make your letters relevant, concise and write in a clear style: it is better to stick to one issue per letter to give the letter greater impact and to make it less confusing. Also make it clear that you are enquiring about the MP's personal views and not those of his/her political party or the views of the Government. **Please**

remember to always be polite – MPs are only human and are far more likely to listen to your argument if it is courteous. If your MP's reply is supportive, then it is worthwhile writing back to thank them. When you write to your MP you can send the letter either to the local constituency address or to the House of Commons – see *Further Information*.

Meeting your MP: Your MP will usually hold a weekly evening surgery in his/her constituency while Parliament is in session. If you telephone your MP's constituency party headquarters they will give you details of the times and location of these surgeries. Some may require you to make appointments in advance and for others you will be able to go along and wait. It will be useful to make notes from the meeting and to have a list of issues you may wish to cover during the meeting: the important thing to find out from the meeting is what degree of concern they have for the issues that you raise. If you are keen to meet with your MP and to find out their views then please contact the *Naturewatch* office and ask for an 'MP's Survey Form' as we are keen to get the



views of all new MPs on a range of animal welfare issues.

Asking Parliamentary Questions: Write to your local MP and ask him/her to ask Parliamentary Questions in the House on your behalf. There are regular **Question Time** sessions each day in the House of Commons when Oral Questions can be taken. You could also ask your MP to ask Questions for a Written Answer on your

support they stand a good chance of becoming law. Even if a Bill doesn't become law, this is a good way of making MPs and the media aware of a particular issue as Private Member's Bills are often covered in the press.

UK Government Departments Responsible for Animal Welfare Issues

Home Office: The Home Office is the Government Department responsible for all animal experiments and for the Freedom of Information Act. Because the Home Office deals with crime, it also has responsibility with issues relating to badger cruelty. The Home Secretary is the Cabinet Minister responsible for the Home Office.

Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA): The Secretary of State has overall responsibility for the Department, which comprises two Ministers of State and two Parliamentary Under-Secretaries. DEFRA's responsibilities include animal health and welfare, veterinary medicine, hunting with dogs, farming, fisheries, zoos, the Pet Travel Scheme and wildlife.

The House of Lords

This is the second Chamber of legislature of the UK Government and has recently been reformed to include more elected members: at present there are only 92 hereditary peers sitting in the House. The rest of the House comprises approximately 600 life peers, plus twelve Law Lords (senior judges) and 26 bishops. Generally members of the House of Lords are not elected and since 1911 they have not been able to amend any finance Bills. However, they can debate and suggest amendments to non-finance Bills but have no power to veto any Bill. Lobbying the House of Lords is difficult because most of them are not elected to the House and so have no constituents to be responsible for once they take up their seat. This means they are independent politically and free to vote and debate on issues as their conscience dictates. Most of them are members of political parties and can be forced to 'toe the party line' on certain issues, but there are some 'Cross-benchers' who have no political affiliations.

Royal Commission

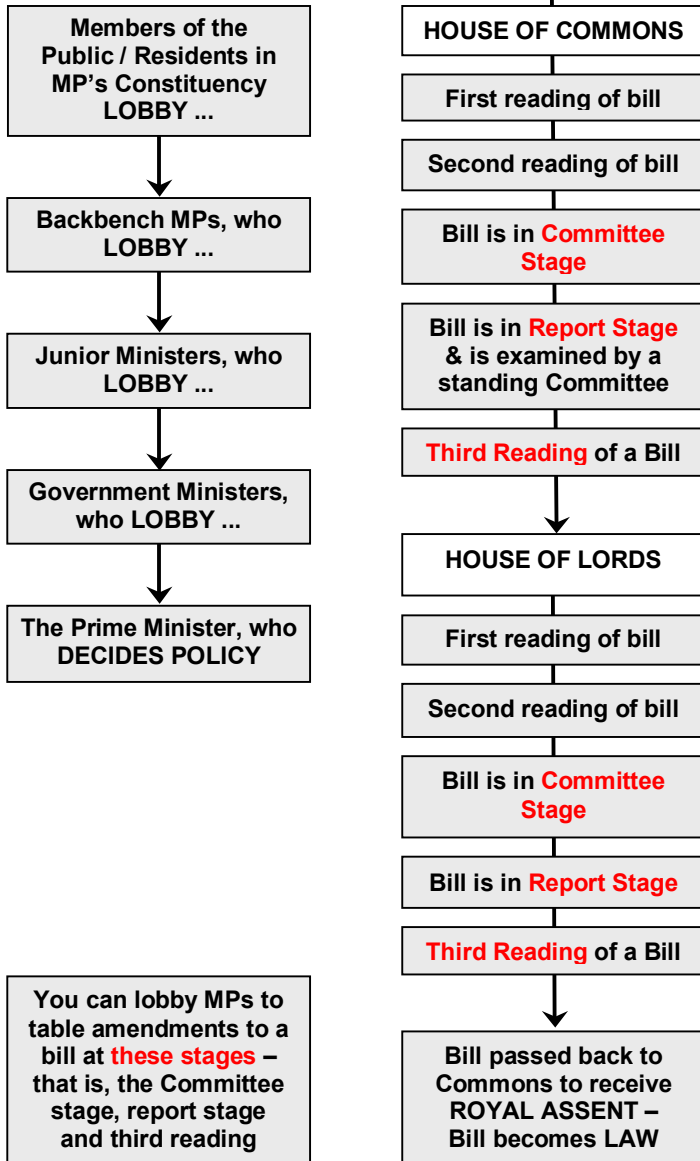
These are Advisory Committees set up by the Government to investigate any subject, often non-party political issues. Commissions take evidence on the subject, study it and then produce a Report. Commissions usually sit for two to four years, but some can be semi-permanent – Standing Royal Commissions. The Government is not obliged to accept the advice of any Royal Commission.

Lobbying your Member of the European Parliament (MEP)

Lobbying your MP is a useful way of letting those who represent you in parliament know what your concerns are and how you want them to represent your views. Animal welfare issues are not just a domestic concern,

The Lobbying process

The passage of a bill



behalf. These are passed to the relevant Government Minister who will answer them within a time-frame of usually two weeks. You may ask your MP to ask a Question on any issue that you choose.

Introducing a Private Member's Bill: Each year a ballot is held at the start of the Parliamentary session in November and the 20 MPs whose names come out on top are allowed to introduce their own Member's Bill on any issue. The top seven MPs are given Parliamentary time for discussion of their Bills in the House of Commons. If any of these Bills have strong cross-party

however, and we are now finding that these issues must also be addressed in the wider forum of Europe. When writing to your MP you must also consider if it may be worth writing to your MEP too, for example the testing of cosmetic ingredients became a pan-European issue that was discussed at length within the European Parliament.

There are several different institutions of the EU, amongst them being those institutions responsible for its legislation: the European Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. The European Union currently has 15 Member States, with ten more due to join in 2004. The EU is represented by its 626 elected MEPs in the European Parliament. The number of MEPs each Member State has to represent its interests depends upon the size of the country's population, for example the UK has 87 MEPs in contrast to Belgium's 25 MEPs.

The European Parliament is based in Brussels, but will normally meet in Strasbourg, France for its plenary sessions, where it will meet for one week each month. These meetings are to amend and vote on draft legislation and policy. The Parliament meets in Brussels for its committee meetings. The Parliament also has a range of specialist committees which all meet to discuss and study proposals for new EU laws.

There are presently seven different political groups in the European Parliament, representing a range of political parties (almost 100) with the European People's Party (PPE) and the Party of the European Socialists (PSE) holding the majority of seats. The PPE includes the British Conservative MEPs and the PSE includes the British Labour MEPs. The ELDR (European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party) includes the British Liberal Democrats. The MEPs sit in multinational political groups, as opposed to national delegations.

MEPs have a growing role in the formation of EU policy and, among other things, they have the power to approve the appointment of the European Commission, question these Commissioners on various topics and decide upon the EU budget. The MEPs are elected in a democratic system within their member country and collectively they represent approximately 375 million citizens of the Union. With this growing role comes a growing responsibility to represent the views of its citizens. Animal welfare concerns should be at the heart of this process and as an EU citizen you are able to lobby your MEP and ask them to represent you in a variety of ways at the European Parliament. As your elected representative you must let them know what you want them to do for you.

Who is your MEP?

There are 87 MEPs currently in the UK and they each represent one of the 11 different regions into which

Great Britain is divided. The electoral regions include both counties and unitary authorities.

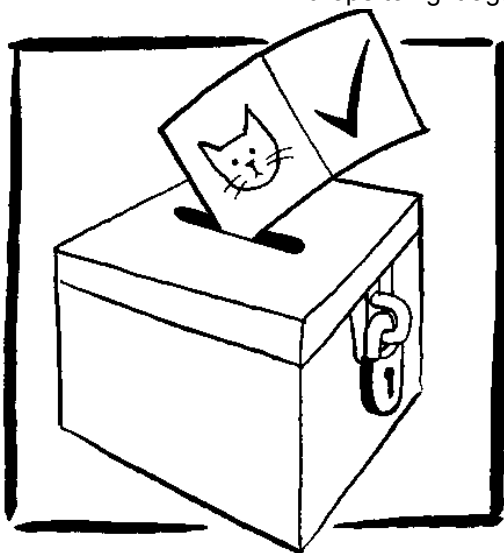
There is more than one MEP per region and you can write to any or all of them about your concerns. If you find that an MEP in your region has genuine sympathies about animal welfare issues, you could focus on lobbying them in particular. As these MEPs are based in Brussels for some of the year, you can send your letter to the European Parliament in Brussels. But it would be better if you sent your correspondence to your MEP's UK address. There are too many addresses for us to list here, so again, please contact the European Parliament's UK office for details – see *Further Information for contact details*.

Which Animal Welfare Issues Concern You?

There are so many issues of concern, and as many have to be tackled on a European level, you need to consider which animal welfare issues are of particular concern to you. Perhaps there is an issue which you feel should be raised at a European level and you should therefore ask your MEP why it isn't being addressed.

It is better to focus on one issue at a time and *Naturewatch* can help if you need assistance with this as we have experience in the lobbying process. For example, *Naturewatch* has recently been lobbying in Europe to fight against the cruel live export laws which

allow horses to travel long distances without adequate stops for water and rest. We also successfully lobbied to encourage the European Commission to support a marketing ban on cosmetic ingredients in Europe. Once you've chosen an issue you can start the lobbying process.



Written or Oral Question in the European Parliament.

Writing Letters: Be specific and tell your MEP what you would like them to do. Letters should be concise and to the point. Only raise one issue per letter. Use your own words, and make it personal to you, but remember to be polite at all times. Always give your name and address so that they can respond to you. You can ask *Naturewatch* to help you with the facts and the wording of a letter if you wish and we can also suggest issues which we feel need raising. Do your homework, quote facts and figures and the legislation you're referring to and use any scientific arguments which support your point. Ask for a reply to your letter to find out if they've actioned your request. You can also email them, but do not send multiple copies an email to the same MEP – there is a risk of them being deleted without being read.

How to Lobby your MEP

There are three main ways to lobby your MEP and the European Parliament: you can write letters to your MEP asking for their opinion or support; you can start a petition; or you can ask them to raise a

To find out the email address of your particular MEP contact the European Parliament offices in the UK.

Exercising Your Right of Petition: You also have the opportunity of sending a petition to the European Parliament to voice your concern as a European citizen, group or organisation. You can use this method to deal with a variety of subjects: either a matter of general concern to you; a complaint about an issue or you can ask the Parliament to react to a matter of public interest. A guide explaining how to lay out, structure and submit your petition is provided by the European Parliament's UK Office. Once received, petitions are passed on to the Committee on Petitions, who decide if the petition falls within the guidelines of the EU. If your petition is deemed acceptable, its contents will be considered and the Committee will decide what suitable action should be taken in response to it.

Written and Oral Questions: Your MEP has the power to question Parliament and members of the European Commission. The European Commission is responsible for the generation and implementation of legislation and so lobbying them is another way you can put pressure on the EU to adopt good animal welfare laws. Your MEP can raise a Written or Oral question at the European Parliament and ask a question of the European Commission. You can ask your MEP to question the Commission on their past actions or on their future intentions. For example, Peter Skinner MEP submitted a Written Question to the Commission concerning the International Trade in Dog and Cat Fur: "Given the increasing body of evidence indicating that an international trade in domestic cat and dog fur now exists in the EU and that this trade supposedly emanates from outside the EU ... can the Commission inform Parliament which steps it can take to prohibit this trade inside the EU?" To which the Commission has to reply in full.

Other Ways to Lobby in Europe

The European Commission is another European institution which citizens can lobby in pursuing improvements in animal welfare laws. As the initiators of European Union law, it is prudent to consider writing to the European Commission, and in particular to one of the 20 Commissioners who are each responsible for the different Directorate Generals. Each Directorate General is responsible for different areas of policy and is headed by the appropriate Commissioner. The relevant DGs which affect animal welfare issues are as follows: Trade, Enterprise, Agriculture, Environment, Research, Fisheries, Health and Consumer Protection, Regional policy and Enlargement. For example, in the past *Naturewatch* has asked its supporters to write to two different Commissioners:

Philippe Busquin, the Commissioner for Research—asking him to press for more funding for research into non-animal alternatives used in testing cosmetic ingredients;

David Byrne, the Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection—asking him to support the banning of sow stalls and asking him to lobby the WTO

to include third countries in the mandatory labelling of eggs which are sold within the EU.

Contact the European Commission to learn more about the individual Commissioners and what each Directorate General is responsible for.

Continue the Pressure...

Once you have made contact with your MEP try and follow it up with a letter. You can either thank them for their effort or say how disappointed you are that they failed to supply the answers you were looking for. Don't just let the matter go, if you're not satisfied say so—ask your MEP to try a different approach if you weren't satisfied the first time around.

When you have written to your MEP you should expect a response in writing. We would be grateful if you could send us a copy of your MEP's letter so we can monitor which MEPs are genuinely concerned with animal welfare issues in Europe. We can also write to the MEP to ask for further information or put pressure on them if we wish to seek further answers or action.

If you're still not happy with your MEP's response to your concerns or think you could be more persuasive if you met them face to face, then why not arrange a meeting with them? In a meeting you can cover a range of different animal welfare issues which concern you. It is important to keep up the pressure so that your MEP knows what issues concern you and can speak on your behalf in the European Parliament.

Further Information

We produce an '*MP Pack*' for further help in lobbying your MP. Please send us 50p postage to help cover our costs.

For further information about lobbying your MP or MEP please refer to the following list of useful contacts:

House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1A 0AA.
Information Line: (020) 7219 3000 Website:
www.parliament.uk

House of Lords, Westminster, London SW1A 0PW.
Information Line: (020) 7219 3107 Website:
www.parliament.uk/lords/

European Parliament, Rue Wiertz, BP 1047, B-1047 Brussels, BELGIUM. Tel: + (32-2) 2842111 Website:
www.europarl.eu.int

European Parliament (UK Office), 2 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AA. Tel: (020) 7227 4300
Website: www.europarl.org.uk
Email: ep_london@europarl.eu.int

European Parliament (Edinburgh Office), 9 Alva Street, Edinburgh EH2 4PH. Tel: (0131) 225 2058
Email: epedinburgh@europarl.eu.int

European Commission, 200 rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200, B-1049 Brussels, BELGIUM Tel: + (32-2) 299 1111
Website: www.europa.eu.int

Eurogroup for Animal Welfare, 6 rue des Patriotes, B-1000 Brussels, BELGIUM Tel: + (32-2) 740 0829
Website: www.eurogroupanimalwelfare.org

Conservative Party HQ, 32 Smith Square, Westminster SW1P 3HH. Tel: (020) 7222 9000 Fax: (020) 7222 1135
Website: www.conservatives.com/

Green Party HQ, 1a Waterlow Road, London N19 5NJ
Tel: (020) 7272 4474 Fax: (020) 7272 6653 Website: www.greenparty.org.uk Email: office@greenparty.org.uk

Labour Party HQ, Millbank Tower, London SW1P 3NB.
Tel: (08705) 900200 Fax: (020) 7802 1234 Website: www.labour.org.uk/ Email: info@new.labour.org.uk

Liberal Democrat HQ, 2 Little Smith Street London SW1P 3DH Tel: (020) 7222 7999 Fax: (020) 7799 2170
Website: www.libdems.org.uk/ Email: libdems@cix.co.uk

Scottish National Party HQ, 107 McDonald Road, Edinburgh EH7 4NW. Tel: (0131) 525 8900 Fax: (0131) 525 8901 Website: www.snp.org

This fact sheet, which was written and produced by the staff of Naturewatch, has been provided as a service to visitors of our web-site. If you found the information helpful, please consider sending a donation to Naturewatch. Our address is:

*Naturewatch, 14 Hewlett Road, Cheltenham,
Gloucestershire GL52 6AA, UK.
Telephone: 01242 252871; Fax: 01242 253569;
Email: info@naturewatch.org*

Other fact sheets include: Animal Experiments, Intensive Farming, Badger Cruelty, Endangered Species and Zoos. See www.naturewatch.org for the complete range.

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