

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

HUNTING TROPHIES (IMPORT PROHIBITION) BILL

Wednesday 25 January 2023

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CLAUSES 1 to 4 agreed to.
Bill to be reported, without amendment.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 29 January 2023

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chair:* SIR MARK HENDRICK

† Chamberlain, Wendy (*North East Fife*) (LD)
 † Dowd, Peter (*Bootle*) (Lab)
 † Drummond, Mrs Flick (*Meon Valley*) (Con)
 † Firth, Anna (*Southend West*) (Con)
 † Foster, Kevin (*Torbay*) (Con)
 † Gibson, Peter (*Darlington*) (Con)
 † Harrison, Trudy (*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of
State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*)
 Higginbotham, Antony (*Burnley*) (Con)
 † Knight, Sir Greg (*East Yorkshire*) (Con)
 Latham, Mrs Pauline (*Mid Derbyshire*) (Con)

† McCarthy, Kerry (*Bristol East*) (Lab)
 † Maskell, Rachael (*York Central*) (Lab/Co-op)
 † Rodda, Matt (*Reading East*) (Lab)
 † Smith, Henry (*Crawley*) (Con)
 † Spellar, John (*Warley*) (Lab)
 † Stevenson, Jane (*Wolverhampton North East*) (Con)
 † Wilson, Sammy (*East Antrim*) (DUP)

Anne-Marie Griffiths, *Committee Clerk*† **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 25 January 2023

[SIR MARK HENDRICK *in the Chair*]

Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Bill

1.30 pm

The Chair: Before we begin, I have a few preliminary reminders for the Committee. Please switch electronic devices to silent. No food or drink is permitted during sittings of the Committee, except the water provided on the tables. *Hansard* colleagues would be grateful if Members could email their speaking notes to hansardnotes@parliament.uk. My selection and grouping list for today's sitting is available online and in the room. No amendments have been tabled to the Bill. We will have a single debate on all the clauses.

Clause 1

IMPORT PROHIBITION

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The Chair: With this it will be convenient to discuss clauses 2 to 4 stand part.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark. I am grateful for the support of hon. and right hon. Members from across the House who are serving on the Committee.

The Bill proposes to ban British hunters from bringing home the bodies and body parts of endangered species that they have killed. It has the support of the Government and all parties across the House. Outside of Parliament, such a ban enjoys the support of 86% of voters, and that has been reflected in the supportive media coverage. The UK's leading wildlife and animal welfare charities have given the Bill their backing, as have some of the world's leading conservationists and public figures, and African leaders.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs held an extensive public consultation. More than 44,000 people and entities took part, including representatives of African communities and scientists. Some nine out of 10 of the submissions received by the Government supported the action we are discussing.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): On that long list of support, including, most significantly, from the Government, can the hon. Member tell us what assurance he has had from the Government that they will help facilitate the Bill's passage through not only the Commons but the other place, so that it becomes law in this Session?

Henry Smith: I am grateful for the right hon. Member's intervention, and I pay tribute to all the work he does. I know he is passionate about this issue. I have been grateful for the support and advice given to me by the Government Whips. I am never complacent, but I have a significant degree of confidence that the Bill has the support to go through not only this place, but the other place.

Jane Stevenson (Wolverhampton North East) (Con): I share the concern that we must get this important Bill through in this Session, but does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should be congratulated on having such a strong record on enhancing animal welfare and rights? They supported my ban on glue traps last year, and they have acted strongly on many other animal welfare issues.

Henry Smith: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention, and I commend her for successfully securing the prohibition on glue traps last year. That is a significant win for animal welfare. Again, there is a long list of Bills that have become law and others that will shortly be put on the statute book by this Government on animal welfare issues.

In answer to the points made by the right hon. Member for Warley and my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton North East, this House can help the passage of the Bill. I hope that its Report stage and Third Reading will be scheduled for Friday 17 March. If that is the case, attendance by Members on that date to ensure that the Bill has support if there are any Divisions would be a great help in ensuring that it passes its Commons stages and has plenty of time to go through the other place during this Session.

Sir Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): I note that clause 4(2) states:

"Sections 1 and 2 come into force on such day as the Secretary of State may by regulations appoint."

Has my hon. Friend received any assurances from the Government that they will not unduly delay those parts of the Bill coming into force? If he is not able to answer that question, perhaps the Minister could do so when she addresses the Committee.

Henry Smith: My right hon. Friend raises a very important point. I do not have a date, because obviously we do not yet know when the Bill will receive Royal Assent, but it is my understanding and belief that the Government are committed to this legislation and want it to come into force at the earliest opportunity. I echo my right hon. Friend's remarks, and seek similar reassurances from the Minister when she responds at the end of the debate.

A recent opinion poll shows that almost 70% of South Africans believe that trophy hunting should be banned altogether. However, we are not here to ban trophy hunting, even though we may wish we could, because that is not our purpose or remit; the territorial extent of the legislation is Great Britain.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I offer him my support for his work on this matter. I also pass on the good wishes of my constituents, many of whom have been deeply concerned about this issue for some time. I have had a great deal of correspondence about it, and they appreciate the work that the hon. Gentleman is doing.

Regarding the territorial extent of the Bill, this legislation obviously affects the UK. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could update the Committee on any discussions he has had with the Government about their plans for training

Border Force staff in this area, and what additional equipment those staff will have to enable them to scan for this material, should some hunters quite wrongly try to bring it into the UK.

Henry Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support. He is absolutely right; I think we have all been very much heartened by the support of our constituents, who have encouraged us to ensure that this legislation gets on to the statute book. I am grateful to the voluntary organisations that have for many years campaigned on this issue, raised awareness and ensured that we here in Parliament respond to their requests.

The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point about enforcement. We can pass all sorts of legislation in this place, and that is fine, but unless that legislation is enacted, as my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire mentioned, and then enforced, it has little effect. I am sure that the Minister will have heard that point, and I will certainly pursue it. It is important that Border Force customs officials are aware of how people who wish to abuse or circumvent the ban might do so, and how to spot that.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work he has done on the Bill. Will he reflect on the fact that Border Force already enforces a range of obligations—for example, looking to prevent the import of banned items into the UK under the convention on international trade in endangered species—and an extension to include ensuring that illegal hunting trophies do not enter Great Britain is something that they should easily be able to build into their work?

Henry Smith: My hon. Friend raises an important point: UK border and customs officials enforce very professionally the laws that exist right now, identifying where people might be seeking to bring illegal items into the country. Of course, I encourage the Home Office to ensure that when the Bill makes it into law, as I hope it does, that is clearly understood by the officials securing our border.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): My constituents, too, are passionate about seeing this Bill on the statute book, and much more besides. Will the hon. Gentleman clarify what assurances he has had from the Government, at a time when the Northern Ireland protocol is being hotly debated, that there will be no leakage regarding the Bill, and that they will ensure that there can be no imports into the UK of these so-called trophies?

Henry Smith: I very much appreciate the support for the Bill from the people of York, Crawley and elsewhere in the country. I wish the Bill's extent was the whole United Kingdom, but because of the Northern Ireland protocol, that is not possible at the moment. I will address that point later when I discuss the detail of the relevant clauses. The hon. Lady makes a very important point: we do not want what are technically trophies—I call them body parts—hunted from endangered species to come through some sort of back door in Northern Ireland. I will talk a bit more about that in a few moments.

We can send a very strong message to the world and show international leadership in the face of a global extinction crisis. We can stop British people killing the

world's most endangered species for entertainment and symbols that some people sadly think represent an achievement they can be proud of.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The Bill is obviously about preventing the import of trophies into this country, but the hon. Gentleman just spoke about showing leadership. A Danish company called Limpopo & Diana Hunting Tours is promoting hunting trips in Bedfordshire—on the Woburn estate, I think. People pay up to £25,000 to shoot stags. Clearly, people from other countries come to this country for trophy hunting, so I hope the Bill influences other countries to follow suit.

Henry Smith: I am grateful for that intervention. I paid tribute to the hon. Lady last night in a different animal welfare debate in the main Chamber, and I am happy to repeat my appreciation for all the work she does to highlight animal welfare issues in Parliament. She has a strong record on that. I was not aware of the very sorry example that she mentions. The Bill is about preventing the import of trophies hunted from endangered species, but I very much support her wider point. Personally, I find it abhorrent that people should be flying into this country to shoot stags, but that is beyond the scope of the Bill.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Meon Valley) (Con): This point is in a very similar vein to that made by the hon. Member for Bristol East. The explanatory notes state:

“Trophies from captive-bred animals are currently subject to less strict controls than wild animals. An Import permit is not required for trophies from captive-bred animals of Annex A and six Annex B species.”

That is what we are looking at. Will my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley confirm that the trade in trophies from captive-bred animals will also be covered by the Bill?

Henry Smith: Yes. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that important clarification. She is referring to so-called canned hunting experiences, whereby, appallingly, endangered species are bred purely to be in an enclosure to be shot for some sort of entertainment by trophy hunters. The Bill covers that—it covers all endangered species listed in CITES annexes A and B. The sorry and sad circumstances in which an animal is killed for a trophy—whether they are out in the bush or the tundra, in the case of polar bears, or in an enclosure—do not matter.

1.45 pm

In the eyes of the vast majority of right-minded people, trophy hunting is barbaric. There is simply no reasonable or plausible excuse for it. The science proves that it is cruel. Most animals shot by trophy hunters do not die clean, quick deaths. They die slowly and painfully. Many are lost by hunters, as animals crawl into the bush after being hit in a desperate bid to avoid death.

The Bill makes an important contribution to tackling the conservation crisis before us, as species hunted for trophies are among those that have suffered the most dramatic declines. Big cats such as lions and leopards have seen their numbers fall by 90% in the last half

century, and Africa's two elephant species have just been declared endangered and critically endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature red list. Hippopotamus numbers have fallen significantly over the past decade and there are now only around 30,000 zebras left.

I pick those species for particular mention for a reason: those five animals, classed as endangered by CITES, are the African species that British trophy hunters most like to shoot. However, they are not the only endangered or threatened animals killed by British hunters for souvenirs. Others include cheetahs, which have vanished from 98% of their range and of which an estimated 6,500 remain; the black rhino, which is classed as critically endangered on the red list and of which just 3,000 are left in the wild; and polar bears, which I mention as, further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Meon Valley, the Bill covers all endangered species regardless of where they are in the world. There are believed to be only some 26,000 polar bears left in the wild. Over the past half century, twice that number have been shot for their skins and for so-called sport.

The extinction emergency before us is the result of many problems, including habitat destruction from human expansion, habitat degradation caused by climate change, persecution and poaching, but trophy hunting is making the struggle for survival even more difficult. One of the threats facing species, which is virtually unique to trophy hunting, is the problem of artificial selection. Trophy hunters seek out and kill the biggest animals. They do that because they want the most impressive trophies to put on display, and because it helps them win prizes and enter the records books of hunting groups such as Safari Club International.

Scientists have found that lions have lost 15% of their gene pool over the past century. They say that killing just 5% of the best males that are left may be enough to push the species past the point of no return. Elephant tusks are getting smaller, and there are many more tuskless adult elephants than before. That means that elephants are more likely to die each year as drought becomes more frequent. Elephants are finding it harder to search for water that may lie under dry riverbeds.

Humanity has a duty to do everything it can to tackle these challenges. Trophy hunting is one thing that we can do something about now. The problems of feeding a growing African population are complex; trophy hunting, however, is simply unnecessary and unconscionable. It does not feed hungry people, it does not clothe or provide fuel for people living in subsistence economies, and it is not an act of self-defence. Trophy hunting is the leisure activity of a tiny and mindless minority. It is completely alien to African and Inuit cultures and traditions, and, unlike photo safaris and other forms of nature tourism, it brings a pittance into local communities and generates next to no revenue for wildlife conservation.

I am pleased to say that we are not alone. The Australians, the French and even some American states have all brought in varying degrees of trophy hunting bans. The Dutch have introduced sweeping prohibitions, the Belgian Parliament has voted unanimously to implement identical restrictions, and, in the last few weeks, the Government of Finland have announced plans for a ban on hunting trophies from outside the European Union. We are on the right side of history, we are on the right side of public opinion, and we are on the right side of the people of Africa and elsewhere, where trophy

hunters are robbing people of their—and our—natural heritage. We are on the side of the world's wildlife, which is in crisis. We must act now, before it is too late.

I therefore hope that the Committee will give its strong support to the Bill. I urge colleagues in both Houses to see that it passes all stages before the end of the Session, further to the point made by the right hon. Member for Warley. I hope that when it comes to the secondary legislation stage, the Government will ensure that the scope of the Bill includes not just species listed in the wildlife trade regulations, annexes A and B, but those classed as “near threatened” and above on the IUCN red list. That is key to ensuring that the Bill accomplishes the aim of both the Government and the public by introducing the toughest ban on hunting trophies in the world.

I will briefly run through the four clauses and what they are designed to do. Clause 1 prohibits the import of hunting trophies into Great Britain. Subsection (1) prohibits the import of hunting trophies where they are from animals of certain species, as set out in clause 2. The prohibition applies to animals that are hunted after the clause comes into force and being brought into Great Britain by or on behalf of the hunter.

Subsection (2) defines “hunting trophy”. The definition is consistent with the internationally agreed definition used in the UK's current controls. There are no exemptions to the import ban, which would see import permits for hunting trophies meeting the conditions as set out in subsections (1) and (2). Items that are not hunting trophies according to those conditions will continue to be covered by the UK's current controls. Subsection (3) disapplies the current controls on the import of hunting trophies under the UK wildlife trade regulations for items in the scope of this prohibition. Subsection (4) defines the wildlife trade regulations, which are retained law implementing CITES.

Clause 2 sets out the species in scope of the import prohibition. Subsection (1)(a) applies the import prohibition to all animal species listed in annexes A and B to the wildlife trade regulations, with exemptions made by the Secretary of State through regulations. Subsection (1)(b) applies the import prohibition to other animal species, as can be specified in regulations. The rest of the clause gives more information about those regulations. Subsection (2) sets out standard technical provisions about what the regulations are able to do to make different provision for different purposes, or make consequential, incidental, supplementary, transitional, transitory or saving provision.

Subsection (3) sets out that those regulations are to be made by statutory instrument. Subsection (4) sets out that the first regulations made under subsection (1)(b)—in effect, the first listing of additional species—are subject to the affirmative procedure. That ensures wider parliamentary scrutiny. Subsection (5) sets out that further regulations will be subject to the negative procedure. That is in line with how annexes to the wildlife trade regulations are updated—when new species are added to the CITES appendices in order to regulate their international trade, for example.

Clause 3 sets out how a provision on imports to Great Britain will work in relation to Northern Ireland, taking into account the unfettered access principles in the UK Internal Market Act 2020. Subsection (1) makes it clear that the movement of trophies from Northern Ireland to Great Britain will be covered by the ban, and

subsection (2) makes it clear that the same sanctions under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 will apply. Subsection (3) exempts qualifying Northern Ireland goods from the import prohibition as defined in subsection (4), with reference to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, in line with the UK Internal Market Act 2020. Qualifying goods currently include Northern Ireland “processed products” and goods that are

“present in Northern Ireland and are not subject to any customs supervision, restriction or control which does not arise from the goods being taken out of the territory of Northern Ireland or the European Union.”

Part 2 of the definition of “qualifying goods” includes hunting trophies from all annex A species and from six annex B species that have been issued a UK import permit to be lawfully imported into Northern Ireland. The qualifying trophies would result in a CITES permit to be moved from Northern Ireland to Great Britain.

Finally, clause 4(1) sets out the territorial extent of the Bill. Subsections (2), (3) and (5) set out when and how the provisions of the Bill come into force, and subsection (4) provides powers for the Secretary of State to make transitional or saving provisions in regulations that commence provisions in the Bill. Subsection (6) provides that the short title of the Bill will be the Hunting Trophies (Import Prohibition) Act 2023 once it receives Royal Assent.

I commend the Bill to the Committee.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I welcome the Bill and congratulate the hon. Member for Crawley on getting it to this stage. I hope the Government will support it to ensure its full passage through both the House of Commons and the upper Chamber.

I want to start by saying some things about the necessity of the Bill. First, public opinion is clearly in favour of it. Some 86% of those surveyed believe there should be an immediate import ban, and that cannot be ignored.

Secondly, in the countries where these animals are often hunted, there is now a growing consensus among politicians, the population, academic researchers and environmentalists that the trade is not good for their country and not good for the animals, especially those under threat—it does not even contribute economically in the way that many of those who support this trade and activities claim that it does.

Thirdly, it is clear from the figures that have already been quoted—I will not go through them all again—that many of the animals are being hunted close to extinction.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Crawley on his Bill and my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley, who has been working on the issue for a long time. I completely support what the right hon. Member for East Antrim says, but on the question of potential extinction, does he agree that it would be better if organisations such as Safari Club International were honest about their position—that they just like shooting and killing things? They appear to be dressing that up as a sort of conservation effort on their part, with the killing of the animals bizarrely irrelevant to that aim.

Sammy Wilson: The hon. Member is right. There is no evidence that such activity has led to the conservation and protection of animals. In fact, as a result of trophy hunting, elephant numbers are now in a critical situation. Lions are often hunted after they have been bred in captivity, so there are no longer even enough out in the wild, and the numbers are down to about 200,000. Leopards have fallen from 700,000 in the 1960s—in 1961, I think—to 50,000 today, so there is no evidence there of conservation. It is the same with hippos—the hippopotamus population is down by 20%.

The idea that hunting animals somehow helps with conservation is just not proven by the facts—yet despite that, and despite the clear threat, we find that, given the number of trophies coming into the United Kingdom, the trade has not declined but increased substantially: from 17 per year in 1981 to 300 in the year before the pandemic. There does not even appear to be any restraint on those who carry out these activities, despite the fact that fewer animals are available.

Fourthly, I do not think that there is even an economic case. It is significant that countries such as Tanzania, which are banning the practice, are getting far more money per hectare from nature tourism than they would have from the hunting of animals. The figure that has been given is \$14 per hectare, as opposed to 20 cents per hectare for when tourism was centred on hunting wild animals. The case is unassailable.

2 pm

I have two concerns about the Bill, one of which is totally outside the control of our Government. I have read the comments made by the hunters—I do not want to go through some of them, but we all received the briefing. Some people hunt for pure pleasure. One comment was: “We sat and had a few beers, then went out and shot monkeys.” Another was: “It’s lovely to hear the smack of the bullet hitting the animal.” I do not know whether banning the importation of trophies will ever stop such people from going hunting; the only difference will be that they cannot bring the heads or parts of the body home. This might be beyond the remit of the Bill or the discussion today, but we need to look at how to offer economic alternatives to countries that still allow people to make a holiday out of killing animals. That, however, is outside the scope of the Bill.

I have another concern about the Bill itself. As has been alluded to, it refers only to Great Britain; it cannot refer to Northern Ireland because of the Northern Ireland protocol and the fact that Northern Ireland remains under EU law. If the EU allows the importation of trophies, they have to be allowed into Northern Ireland. Many of those who go trophy hunting probably do not have homes in Northern Ireland or places to display trophies there, but I am still concerned. I do not even know whether many people in Northern Ireland engage in trophy hunting and bringing trophies home, but I have some fears that it could become a depository for some such items.

Furthermore, despite the assurances given by the hon. Member for Crawley about isolation or the ability to ensure that Northern Ireland does not become a conduit for such trophies, clause 3 makes it clear that trophies cannot be imported from Great Britain into Northern Ireland—I believe there is the ability to stop that—and that they cannot be removed from Northern

Ireland to Great Britain. Here is the problem, however: I do not want to see any more restrictions on trade between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, but there is a free flow of goods from Northern Ireland to GB. There are no checks, and should not be, on any internal trade, but while Northern Ireland remains under the protocol and while the Bill cannot apply to trophies being brought into Northern Ireland through the EU, there is always the danger of it being used as a back door.

The obvious answer is for the Government to deal with the issue in the current negotiations, so that the law that applies to the rest of the United Kingdom will apply fully to Northern Ireland and laws we do not want to apply to the United Kingdom do not apply to Northern Ireland either. It is important that that issue is addressed—this is another incentive. I know that you will stop me if I deviate from the Bill too far with this issue, Sir Mark, but it is yet another example of the position we have remained in, as a result of the inadequate negotiations on Brexit, impinging on the rest of the United Kingdom. Sometimes people think that this is only a Northern Ireland issue. It is not; the loophole regarding what happens in Northern Ireland can influence, affect and sometimes make less effective the laws that we want to apply to the whole country.

I hope that the Minister will address the question of what can be done. While the protocol is in place, that will be difficult, but I hope that thought will be given to the issue, because we do not want to become the channel through which an illegal trade can continue.

Kerry McCarthy: The right hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say on it. The right hon. Gentleman is quite right that the Bill could mean that Northern Ireland acts a back door. Another way of tackling the issue is to persuade EU countries to implement bans. Finland has passed a law that will, from June, ban the import of hunting trophies of endangered species. Does he agree that we need to encourage other EU countries to go down the same path?

Sammy Wilson: Yes, I do. There is an international battle to be had here. If we really believe that hunting is endangering animals, then we should encourage nations across the world to act—and not only nations in Africa; do not forget that there are 30 countries across the world where endangered animals are hunted almost to extinction. We need to persuade those countries that there is an alternative to this trade. We also need to persuade countries that allow trophies in, and therefore encourage the trade, of the view encapsulated in the Bill, so that there is a whole approach to the issue. I would be more than happy if, instead of Northern Ireland having to comply with EU law, the EU decided it would comply with UK law. That would be a gain for us. I have no doubt that the UK population shares its opposition to hunting trophies with the populations of many other countries.

I give my full endorsement to the Bill, and congratulate the hon. Member for Crawley on pushing it to this point. I would like to hear from the Minister about how the loophole that will exist until the protocol is dealt with can be handled.

Sir Greg Knight: It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Sir Mark. I want the Bill to proceed, so I will be brief. I congratulate the my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley on bringing it forward. Some 11 years ago, I backed a new wildlife protection campaign launched in this House by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The theme was: stamping out the international trade in endangered and vulnerable species. I was shown a selection of items that the authorities had seized. Among them were some elephant tusks, which were under police guard because of their value. That was not what shocked me most. I was handed a trinket—not a carving or a sculpture, but a stuffed tiger cub, slaughtered at 10 days of age and mounted on a plinth. It was killed solely to be a decoration on someone's mantelpiece. The baby cub trophy was seized in a police raid in the UK. I was horrified and repulsed by that, as I am now by the knowledge that there are people out there who think it is quite acceptable to slaughter an endangered animal for a trophy, or for decorative purposes.

Over a decade later, we are still debating the problem. It has taken too long to get here. I wholeheartedly support my hon. Friend in bringing forward this important measure. Trophy hunting of endangered species is sickening, barbaric and totally unacceptable.

The biggest threat to any private Member's Bill is the clock. It is all too easy to run out of time, so I conclude by saying "Well done" to my hon. Friend. The right hon. Member for East Antrim said that we may need to do more. He is right, but this is a good start. Let us get on with it.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Trudy Harrison): It really is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Mark.

As other right hon. and hon. Members have done, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley for doing such a sterling job in bringing the Bill before us and for his work on conservation and animal welfare more generally. I also thank all right hon. and hon. members of the Committee.

There have been queries about how the Government will support the Bill. As the Minister dealing with the Bill, I will work with my colleague in the other place, Lord Benyon, and I will speak to all Members across the House to ensure that the Bill has the support that it needs. I pay tribute to officials across DEFRA who have supported my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley, me and previous Ministers in making progress with it.

Kerry McCarthy: As has been mentioned, we have had quite a bit of lobbying by people who are involved in talking to the Government about this issue. At one point, basically, they said that the majority of what was said by Members on Second Reading was factually incorrect. Will the Minister confirm that she, with her officials, has carefully considered the evidence, that she has looked at whether their arguments are valid and that she has come to the conclusion, as we all have, that the Bill is the right thing to do?

Trudy Harrison: I thank the hon. Member for the opportunity to do exactly that. As the new Minister taking up this responsibility, I have had detailed conversations with Members and my officials, who have

done a diligent and highly professional job of assessing all the evidence, supporting me and my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley in making progress with the Bill.

We are taking decisive action to respond to the British public's concerns about trophy hunting abroad. We are acting to protect some of the world's most iconic animals, including lions, rhinos, elephants and polar bears.

John Spellar: I welcome the Government's support for the Bill. As mentioned by a fellow ex-Deputy Chief Whip, the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire, the most crucial thing is to ensure sufficient time for it. In the event of unreasonable obstruction, will the Minister consider a Government carry-over motion for the Bill?

Trudy Harrison: I very much appreciate the advice of the experienced right hon. Member. All I can say at this stage is that I look forward to a speedy Third Reading. I very much hope that Members across the House will support the progress that the Bill needs to make to secure Royal Assent.

Peter Dowd: May I pick up on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East? I have had information today that came from Dilys Roe, a member of the UK Government Darwin unit, and Professor Amy Dickman of Oxford University, who describe the figure that 86% of the public would like the Bill to become law as "cherry-picked data" and write that

Survation
"found that only around 40% of Britons surveyed would want a trophy hunting ban if it caused harm to people or wildlife."

I find it remarkable that we are getting that kind of information when, as far as I can see, the evidence is contrary to that. It really is important—I hope the Minister agrees—to put paid to some of the points being made, which are claims of misinformation that in themselves appear to be misinformation.

Trudy Harrison: I will not be drawn into a conversation about that particular piece of information. Suffice it to say that in my comments, I hope to address some of the points that Members have raised today.

One of those points was about whether the Bill would apply to captive-bred or so-called canned animals, and I can confirm, as my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley did, that it will. It will be one of the toughest import bans, covering thousands of species of conservation concern and not allowing any exemptions. The ban will help to strengthen animal protection and support long-term conservation outcomes.

2.15 pm

Our aim is to ensure that imports of hunting trophies to Great Britain are not putting additional pressure on already threatened species. I will address the points made by the right hon. Member for East Antrim about Northern Ireland later in my remarks. It is a clear signal of our commitment to conservation, in line with our wider commitment to halt and reverse biodiversity loss.

Around 1 million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction, many within decades, and the abundance, diversity and connectivity of species are declining faster than at any time in human history. From 2011 to 2020, the UK recorded 731 imports of hunting trophies under CITES. That included so-called trophies from elephants, hippos, lions, leopards and brown and black bears.

Imports came from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Tanzania, Canada, Zambia, Namibia, Russia, the US, Botswana and a small number of others. Over 85% of the 44,000 responses to our consultation were in favour of further action. Opinion polling has shown similar levels of support for a ban among the British public.

The right hon. Member for East Antrim asked what else we are doing internationally. We have a range of programmes aimed at conserving and restoring biodiversity, contributing to poverty reduction in developing countries and supporting local communities. Those include £90 million for the Darwin initiative and Darwin Plus, to address biodiversity challenges and support local communities; £30 million for action on illegal wildlife trade; and the £100 million biodiverse landscapes fund, to work across six landscapes to protect and restore critical terrestrial ecosystems. We are working internationally to address the concerns about biodiversity and restoring nature.

Rachael Maskell: I am concerned that the trophies that these bloodthirsty hunters bring into the UK will be in the form of money, not body parts, because they will sell their kill to other traders across the world. What consideration has the Minister given to introducing a moratorium on people being able to make proceeds out of their kill?

Trudy Harrison: I share those concerns. I am having detailed discussions with international counterparts in subsequent months. I am afraid that I cannot provide any further detail on that specific point, but I agree with the premise of what needs to be achieved internationally to truly make a difference and conserve endangered species. An awful lot was achieved at the recent COP15, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State attended, including a commitment to protect 30% of land and sea and a whole host of other targets and goals to preserve nature and biodiversity.

Clause 1 makes provision for the import prohibition and also defines a hunting trophy for the purposes of the ban. This prohibition, without exemptions, goes much further than our current licensing system in clamping down on these imports. We are sending a clear message, addressing the public's concerns and delivering our manifesto commitment. The ban will make sure that there is no possibility at all that imports to Great Britain could be putting the conservation of species abroad at risk. A ban is also practical to implement, avoiding ambiguity about what cases might or might not be covered.

The definition of a hunting trophy is drafted to maintain the effect of the current definition that is used for CITES controls. It will cover all items from trophy hunting. That approach means that we will not inadvertently have knock-on effects on other forms of trade under CITES that are not products from trophy hunting. Changing that definition could cause confusion about what is and is not covered, and disrupt other imports by businesses or individuals for other purposes, such as commercial trade in items.

Moving to clause 2, the Government committed to ban imports of trophies from endangered animals, and that is exactly what the Bill delivers. The clause ensures that our approach will be comprehensive, properly clamping down on imports of trophies from endangered animals. By cross-referencing annexes A and B of the wildlife trade regulations, which implement appendices 1 and 2

[Trudy Harrison]

of CITES, the Bill covers all animal species that are internationally agreed to be threatened or potentially threatened by international trade, including imports of hunting trophies. Thousands of species are covered by those annexes, and covering all those animals even though not all are trophy-hunted means that our policy is as clear and practical as possible. It is a clear and straightforward approach: there will be no imports of trophies from any annex A or B species. That is what the public expect, and it is what the Bill will deliver.

The Bill also includes, in clause 2(1), a power to add further species to the scope of the ban to make sure that nothing is missed and that trophy hunting pressure does not shift to target other endangered animals. On Second Reading, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), made it clear that we will be using that power to list additional species of conservation concern that are targeted for trophies, such as African buffalo and reindeer. We will be looking at species with a conservation status of “near threatened” or worse according to the IUCN red list, and will publish that list of species for Members’ consideration before we table the instrument to list them. We will be able to act swiftly to list any more species in future if those species’ conservation status worsens, or if we see evidence of trophy hunting becoming a problem in such cases.

Clause 3 sets out how a ban on imports to Great Britain will work, and how it will deal with movements from Northern Ireland. As I know the right hon. Member for East Antrim understands, by virtue of the Northern Ireland protocol, current CITES controls on hunting trophies contained within EU legislation will remain in force, effectively maintaining the status quo. The hon. Member for York Central mentioned a concern about trophy hunters avoiding the ban by moving banned trophies through Northern Ireland, but there is no back door through which trophies can enter Great Britain.

Clause 4 deals with the extent and commencement of the Bill, and sets out its short title.

Matt Rodda: I have a further question in relation to Northern Ireland. Could the Minister explain to the Committee what discussions, if any, she has had with the Government of the Irish Republic about this matter? Clearly, there is a lot of cross-border trade that, as my hon. Friend the Member for York Central mentioned, could inadvertently find its way into Great Britain.

Trudy Harrison: As the hon. Member will realise, I am a relatively new Minister in this particular post; it is officials who have dealt with the devolved Administrations, consulting on how we can best ensure that the Bill meets both our legal aims and, importantly, our policy aims. This is a reserved matter, and I thank officials in the devolved Administrations—in Wales and Scotland in particular—for their engagement with DEFRA.

Rachael Maskell: Obviously, there is concern about the increase in this trade that we may see in parts of the United Kingdom. I have two questions for the Minister. First, how will she monitor the effectiveness of this legislation, and is it her intention to report regularly to the House on its impact? Secondly, is passing the animals abroad Bill still on the Government’s agenda, and if so,

will the Minister look at the tourism industry that is promoting this trade and seek to introduce a ban on UK companies promoting hunting? Again, that could influence the effectiveness of this Bill.

Trudy Harrison: On monitoring and publishing how effective the ban is, there will be a great deal of interest among both the public and Members across the House in whether the ban has been successful. That will be important in encouraging other countries to follow suit. We will be as transparent as we possibly can be.

On the effectiveness of the ban, there was a question earlier about whether Border Force would require extra equipment to undertake its work. That is not anticipated at this stage. Border Force is well versed and experienced in dealing with imports. We expect to have the skills available at ports and airports to undertake that work.

Sir Greg Knight: Before the Minister concludes, for the benefit of the Committee, will she address the point that I made earlier about the coming into force of clauses 1 and 2? Can she give some hope that that will be done speedily, please?

Trudy Harrison: I certainly can provide assurance that I will work with my counterparts in the Lords and with the Whips Offices to ensure that we do everything we can to get the Bill through all stages in both Houses and to secure Royal Assent.

We are taking decisive action on animal welfare, and I know that colleagues have great interest in that agenda. We set out an ambitious programme of legislative and non-legislative animal welfare reforms in our action plan for animal welfare, which was published in May 2021. We are delivering on those commitments in this parliamentary Session—I am pleased that the Shark Fins Bill, which we support, has now been introduced in the other place, having completed its passage through this House. We are making good progress in this area.

I reiterate the Government’s full support for this important Bill as it makes its way through Parliament, thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley and the other right hon. and hon. Members in Committee. They have done an excellent job diligently, dedicated to the benefit of conservation abroad.

Henry Smith: Let me conclude by expressing my sincere thanks to right hon. and hon. members of the Committee for their supportive remarks. Remarkably, I agree with everything that was raised. I also thank those Members who are not present, but spoke on Second Reading, for their support. I express my gratitude to the Clerks in the Bill Office for all the technical and logistical support that they have offered me; to the team in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for their support to me; and to the Government Whips Office.

Sadly, in October 2021, our dear late colleague Sir David Amess was murdered. This is an issue that he campaigned on in the last week of his life, and I dedicate this Committee sitting to his memory and fine legacy. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 to 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill to be reported, without amendment.

2.29 pm

Committee rose.

