Welcome to the summer edition of my animal welfare newsletter

Animal welfare matters. I’ve been privileged to have worked with people who are making a real difference and delighted to be made Honorary Vice President of the Scottish SPCA and an Honorary Associate of the British Veterinary Association. These organisations do fantastic work and it’s great to be able to play a small role in helping them.

From domestic pets to the farmyard and into the wilds of our lands, our animals have legal protection – except in bullrings, apparently. The different rules can be complex and wide-ranging. Protecting cats and dogs from neglect and abandonment differs from ensuring that sow stalls or hen cages are the correct standard but simple compassion is at the heart of animal welfare. We’ll get to the bulls as soon as we can.

Through my work with the Scottish SPCA and the BVA and as an MEP who sits on the Agriculture Committee, I consider the promotion of animal welfare, and speaking for animals who can’t speak for themselves to be a vital part of my role. The EU is committed to animal welfare and, with much of our agricultural legislation now coming from Brussels, we must ensure that the rules are followed and animal rights remain at the centre of legislation – new and amended.

I hope you find this newsletter useful; it’s to help keep you updated on what I’m doing in Scotland and Brussels to improve conditions for animals across Europe and to build on the high standards we already have here in Scotland. I’m keen to do all I can to fight for animal welfare and, as always, will need your help to do that.

Please get in touch if there’s anything I can help with or if you would like to discuss any particular aspects of my work on animal welfare further. My contact details are at the end of this newsletter.

And don’t forget you can register for regular updates at alynsmith.eu

Yours

Alyn Smith MEP
Victory on Shark Protection

Shark finning involves catching sharks, cutting off their fins and throwing them back into the water to die. The fins are sold on, principally to Asia, for use in gourmet soup.

The European Parliament voted overwhelmingly in favour of closing loopholes which allow shark finning to take place in EU waters. It was a personal success for Alyn who has been a passionate campaigner against this barbarism.

The EU attempted to ban the practice in 2003, but loopholes in that legislation allowed for special fishing permits which have become the rule rather than the exception. The permits were almost exclusively exploited by Spain and Portugal.

Alyn swam with the sharks at Deep Sea World in North Queensferry to raise awareness, getting the 12 feet fish onto prime-time news reports and encouraging people to action. As a result, Alyn was able to deliver a petition to the European Parliament and contact every MEP to urge them to vote in favour of the Commission’s proposals to close the loopholes.

Rules Relaxed on Cross-Border Animal Travel

Adopted in 2001, the European Pet Passport law has allowed people some freedom to travel with their animals without fear of spreading diseases such as rabies.

The European Parliament approved new rules on the non-commercial movement of pets in May and the 27 EU Member States approved the change on 10th June. That sounds a bit confusing but it means that it will be easier to take pets on holiday by ensuring that clearer information is available to pet owners and that, in future, there will be less administrative hassle when travelling with pets.

It also means that owners of sled dog teams will be able to take their packs abroad to take part in competition. Scotland has some pedigree in the sport but Scottish dog teams have had to pull out of the world championships in the past because of the travel rules.

The revised regulations will allow teams to travel to take part in a competition, exhibition, sporting or other recreational event. Good news for Scottish dog sled teams.

* image: ilovegreenland via flickr under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/
The full EU ban on animal-tested cosmetic products and ingredients came into force on the 11th of March which means that companies can no longer sell cosmetics that have been tested on animals or have any ingredients that have been tested on animals in the EU – no matter where in the world the testing took place.

Alyn has campaigned for this ban for years and teamed up with Lush cosmetics back in March to highlight its full implementation. It took a long time to get here but it’s a great victory for animals and for people who don’t want to wear the pain of animals on their skin.

Europe is the world’s biggest market for beauty products and companies will want to produce items for sale that are free from cruelty. The ban sends a strong message to the rest of the world that beauty doesn’t need torture and Alyn believes that where Europe leads the world can follow.

The European Commission has confirmed the commitment to cruelty-free testing. This is what we’ve been campaigning for, it’s a vision Alyn shares; the EU as the world’s first cruelty-free zone.

Alyn campaigning with Lush in Glasgow

Europe to Become First ‘Cruelty-Free Zone’?

How dangerous is crossing a road? How dangerous is it if you can’t see what’s coming? Alyn set out to find out by putting his life in the hands of a guide dog at the start of the year.

With a sturdy blindfold on his eyes and a guide-dog harness in his hand Alyn stepped out into a busy road to sample a few minutes of blindness and highlight a vote in the European Parliament which will make it compulsory for artificial engine noises to be fitted to vehicles too quiet for the average person to hear. The growth in the number of hybrid and electric cars means traffic is getting quieter which poses danger for blind and partially sighted people who can’t rely on hearing them coming.

Preston the guide dog was unfazed but the experience was quite frightening for first-timer Alyn. It gave him a tiny glimpse into everyday life for blind people, however, made him appreciate how important guide dogs are and showed him how useful it is to be able to hear traffic noise.

Electric and hybrid vehicles are great for the environment, but their silence means danger for other road users. These vehicles are more likely to collide with a pedestrian than a conventional vehicle is.

Alyn Gets a Guiding Paw

Preston leads the way
Songbirds in Cyprus

Alyn has pressed the European Commission on the illegal hunting of migratory birds in Cyprus. It is estimated that up to 3 million rare birds are killed each year. Hunting often involves the use of nets and sticks which is a particularly non-selective method and is banned under the EU Birds Directive. This illegal hunting is threatening the survival of several species of bird and Alyn will continue to put pressure on the Commission to bring an end to it.

Rabbits

After a visit to Buddies Bunny Rescue sanctuary in Midlothian last year, Alyn welcomed the Rabbits Require Rights (Scotland) campaign group to the European Parliament Information Office earlier this year to hear more about their campaign to see increased welfare standards for rabbits. He’s now looking at ways to tighten regulations on rabbits as pets.

European money is being used to subsidise bullfighting; money that is meant to be used to support farmers. Alyn is bringing the issue to the public’s attention and telling the European Commission it must stop this inappropriate use of funds.

The EU subsidises bullfighting in Spain by at least €129.6 million, mainly through Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) programmes which are supposed to support farmers producing food. Instead it’s being used to breed bulls for fighting.

In an article for an online magazine Alyn said “The animal welfare issues surrounding bullfighting and other cruel fiesta events are well-known. Whether it’s a bullfight in Plaza de Toros de Las Ventas, the Toro de la Vega or the Pamplona Bull Run, the barbarity of this mistreatment of animals cannot be justified and we should not be subsidising them. These blood sports have no place in the 21st century.”

It’s unacceptable that public money is boosting the coffers of people who rear 40,000 bulls a year just so they can be tortured to death.

Agricultural subsidies should be used to help farmers produce food, not to satisfy an outdated and abhorrent animal sacrifice. The EU is supposed to have a commitment to animal welfare and it’s time to stop supporting this cruelty and end subsidies for farms rearing fighting bulls.

Alyn’s got a petition up on his website to give him extra oomph when he’s challenging the Commission to take action.

If you’ve not signed up yet, please visit: www.allynsmith.eu/bullfighting and add your support. If you’ve already signed your support is very much appreciated. Either way, if you know other people who care, please ask them to add their names too.

In Brief

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